

The Free Thinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.

VICTOR HUGO.

IN *Scribner's* for last month there was a delightful article entitled "Conversations and Opinions of Victor Hugo," culled from an hitherto unpublished journal kept by his son, François Victor Hugo, during the poet's exile.

These conversations range over a variety of topics, but the impression conveyed of Hugo is that of the poet all over—the dreamer of strange and fantastic and often beautiful dreams, but still dreams. Probably most poets are dreamers—it is their nature. For poetry, after all, has its fountain-head in the emotions rather than in the reason; in the heart rather than the head.

But some of these chats and opinions are so interesting that they will bear repetition in this journal. As an example of unbounded extravagance we give the following. He is speaking of Job, and he says: "Know that Job is one of the greatest masterpieces of the human mind; it is, perhaps, the greatest masterpiece. And to-morrow, if all literature was to be destroyed, and it was left to me to retain one work only, I should save Job." Now, whatever one may think of the value of Job from an eclectic standpoint, most rational people will agree that this is carrying laudation to the point of absurdity.

We have often held that, with a belief in hell and salvation by faith, persecution not alone ceases to be reprehensible, but becomes a positive virtue. For surely, it is highly admirable to administer finite torture here if, by so doing, you prevent infinite torture hereafterwards. Victor Hugo puts the same idea with great force in the following: "I heard it said the other day that Torquemada was a greater wretch than Montalembert. That is an error. Torquemada burned people alive, and in that way killed four hundred thousand persons. . . . But Torquemada mistakenly sought to save humanity from hell by burning it in this world. . . . If in reality this man had, as he believed, saved humanity from eternal perdition by a few hours torture, then Torquemada would evidently be one of the benefactors of humanity." Quite so. But of course that is only saving Torquemada's character at the expense of Torquemada's belief. But we must confess that we cannot even assent off-hand to the proposition that the Inquisitor General was as sincere as Victor Hugo suggests. We can thoroughly understand, say, a man enter on a war in a fit of passion. We can understand a man, otherwise humane, directing the slaughter of hundreds on a battle-field. We can even understand a man, carried away by fanaticism, having people executed wholesale, without trial. We can believe that, for instance, Washington might hurl a thousand men into destruction, and yet not lose any moral status in our estimation by so doing. All that we can conceive. But then, the slow and studied torture carried on for days; the absurd subterfuges to give the thing a legal aspect; the revolting

duplicity of pretending to try people when the result was a foregone conclusion; the expulsion of the Jews under circumstances of peculiar persecution; the practical extermination of the Moors—all this, we must say, we find hard to believe was dictated by sincere and honest motives:

Of course, if we grant that Torquemada was sincere, it only shows us the terrible evil such beliefs as he held work. It shows us that a man acting with the best intentions may commit the most frightful crimes. Let us get rid, then, of the terrible belief, and we will avoid the terrible danger.

We have here specimens of Victor Hugo's wild fancy, so extravagant that one need not dwell on them. As just one sample we may take this: "Man suffers because he expiates. He expiates in this world a fault he has committed in an anterior world. He does not know what that fault is—that original sin; but the feeling of it remains. This sentiment of former sin is found in all religions. Upon his good or bad conduct will depend his re-entry into the primitive and happy existence. . . ." This sounds very like the Theosophical doctrine of Karma—with a slight variation. But what we wish to know is—Does a feeling of previous sin remain with us? We do not believe for a moment it does. Take a healthy child, rear it without the artificial belief that man is the fallen, degraded wretch the priests represent, and see, when the child reaches manhood, whether he will have any innate feeling of human depravity. This monstrous libel against the race has been the direct incentive to immorality of every kind. What is the use of a man striving after higher and better things if he is told that his whole nature is so radically corrupt that effort on his part is well-nigh useless, and that redemption can only come through the "grace of God"?

But whatever the poet's particular views he evidently did not entertain a very complimentary opinion of conventional religion. He says, "The world is still in its infancy. It does require ruts and religions. It is doubtful if the average human being has arrived at even a modest degree of reason. Yes, I believe that at some time, in thousands of millions of years, perhaps, every man will have no other religion than his own philosophy. At the present hour man still has need of religion and of written revelation." That of course is a matter of opinion, though some religionists, more zealous than discreet, have grabbed at this kind of argument in support of their creed. But evidently, at best, this argument places religion on the very lowest ground, that of a mere temporary necessity, to be dispensed with when man has further developed his mental powers. By comparison it likens religions to swaddling clothes, and the mass of religionists to babies. Not assuredly a very flattering comparison.

Victor Hugo expresses himself in favor of the abolition of the death penalty. He has also the following, which is the last quotation we shall make, on the value of quiet evolution as opposed to war:—"Hannibal civilises; Alexander and Cæsar civilise;

Charlemagne civilises; Napoleon civilises. They bring ideas of progress into the lands of shadows. They violently incubate by war the germs of progress, but they do not incubate them gently by thought, as did Virgil, Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare. The men of the sword are inferior to the men of the pen."

We have given enough. Those who wish can turn to the pages of the magazine, which, by the way, are embellished by several excellent portraits of the author of *Les Misérables*.
FREDERICK RYAN.

A FREETHOUGHT MARTYR. THOMAS AITKENHEAD.

As the *Dictionary of National Biography* gives no particulars of the latest martyr put to death for blasphemy in the British isles, I have thought it well to bring together somewhat more at length than I have already done in my *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers* such particulars of Aitkenhead and his case as I could cull from various quarters. These have comprised chiefly Hugo Arnot's *Collection of Celebrated Criminal Trials in Scotland* and Howell's *Collection of State Trials*, vol. xiii., No. 401.

Thomas Aitkenhead was the son of an Edinburgh chemist, and was himself a student at Edinburgh University. He had in some manner, probably through reading the works of Hobbes and Spinoza, become impregnated with Freethought views, and in controversy with some of his fellow-students gave free utterance to some ideas which, in 1696, led to a prosecution for blasphemy by the Privy Council.

The indictment charged him with venting "wicked blasphemies against God and our Savior Jesus Christ and against the Holy Scriptures and all revealed religion"; with having specifically said that theology "was a rapsodie of fained and ill-invented nonsense, patched up partly of the morall doctrine of philosophers, and pairtly of poetical fictions and extravagant chimeras, or words to this effect." "Lykeas you scoffed at and endeavored to ridicule the Holy Scriptures, calling the Old Testament Ezra's fables, by a profane allusion to Æsop's fables," and "in your scoffing did most blasphemously rail upon our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, calling the said New Testament the History of the Impostor Christ." "Lykeas you reject the mystery of the blessed Trinity, and say it is not worth any man's refutation, and you also scoff at the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, affirming blasphemously that Theantropos is as great a contradiction as Hircus Cervus, or a quadratum to be a rotundum; and as to the doctrine of redemption by Jesus, you say it is a proud and presumptuous device, and that the inventars thereof are damned, if after this life there be either reward or punishment; you also deny spirits, saying that the notion of a spirit is a contradiction, and you have maintained that God, the world, and nature are but one thing, and that the world was from eternity."

Aitkenhead was prosecuted by Sir James Stewart, his Majesty's Advocate. He had no counsel; nor does it seem that one word was urged in his behalf during the course of the trial, in which the counts of the indictment were proved to the satisfaction of the jury by the witness of several of his fellow-students, all minors. Yet the most important charge, that of railing against Christ, was not proved. Aitkenhead was but eighteen years of age, and had sent in a petition and retraction in order that some mercy might be shown him. The only circumstance that can be construed into sympathy with the poor youth is that five persons summoned on the jury refused to attend, and were fined 100 merk each. In accordance with the verdict he was, on Christmas Eve, 1696, ordered to be taken to the Gallowee, betwixt Leith and Edin-

burgh, upon Friday, the eighth day of January, and there hanged till dead, his body to be buried at the foot of the gallows, and all his goods to be forfeit to his Majesty. Before execution he sent in another supplication for mercy, which was unheeded, and after his execution a "dying speech," in which he put forward some views similar to those of Hobbes, appears to have been circulated.

In the *Memoirs of Francis Horner, M.P.* (vol. i., p. 487) a letter is given from Horner to Malcolm Laing, author of a History of Scotland, in which he says:

"All that we know of Aitkenhead's case, from the reports hitherto printed, is the melancholy fact of his judicial murder, and the violent construction of the statutes upon which he was prosecuted. From the minute description contained in the authority which I am about to quote, his story acquires a more powerful claim to interest, becomes more conspicuous in the general picture of the age, and adds another deep shade to those colors which you have touched so forcibly."

The authority he quotes is a letter from Lord Anstruther, dated Jan. 26, 1697. The passage relating to Aitkenhead ran as follows:

"We had lately an anomaly and monster of nature I may call him, who was execut for cursing and reviling the persons of the Trinity; he was eighteen years of age, not vicious, and extremely studious. Fountainhall and I went to him in prison, and I found a work on his spirit, and wept that ever he should maintained such tenets, and desired a short reprieve, for his eternal state depended upon it. I plead for him in Council, and brought it to the Chan: vote; it was told it could not be granted, unless the ministers would interced. I am not for consulting the church in state affairs. I doe think he would have proven an eminent Christian had he lived, but the ministers out of a pious tho' I think ignorant zeal, spoke and preached for cutting him off."

So it appears this poor rash youth was put to a violent death because the sky-pilots, like the silver-smiths of Ephesus, feared their craft was in danger. And now ministers, even in godly Scotland itself, are making admissions which are tantamount to the confession that Aitkenhead was right in calling the Old Testament "Ezra's fables."

Arnot says he discovered but three cases of blasphemy in Scotland. One of a woman fined for drinking the devil's health.* The second of one Francis Borthwick, who in 1631 was charged with having, though brought up a Christian, turned Jew, become circumcised; and railed against Jesus Christ, denying him to be God. Arnot says, "If the accused was truly mad enough to undergo circumcision, he was at least not so mad as to appear before the Court of Justiciary, and sentence of outlawry was therefore pronounced against him."

J. M. WHEELER.

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

* It was an old Pagan custom to drink the health of the gods or departed spirits, and the early Christian missionaries used to permit our Scandinavian forefathers to drink to the health of Christ and the apostles.

PROFESSION *VERSUS* CONDUCT.

ORTHODOX believers boast that England is a Christian nation, although the fact has been repeatedly pointed out to them that no serious attempts are ever made to practice the principal teachings ascribed to Christ. The conduct of Christians in their various avocations is the very antithesis of their profession. The religious circles in this country are honeycombed with hollow pretensions upon the part of persons who, with a sanctimonious air, seek to pose as defenders of unsullied honor and unstained purity. They thus ever and anon "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." This pharisaical method, so prevalent among church-goers, was forcibly illustrated by an incident that occurred at the recent conference of the Free Churches held in Manchester. The Nonconformists on that occasion professed to be much concerned about the member of Parliament for Forest of Dean, in consequence of his connection some time ago with a well-known divorce case. An Englishman, it has been said, can break all the commandments with impunity, except the eleventh which reads: "Thou shalt not be found out." There is no doubt in our mind that crimes of different degrees are being frequently committed secretly by members of the clerical profession who manage to avoid public censure and punishment, because they are not found out. When, however, a layman is discovered exhibiting any "weakness of the flesh," he is looked upon with pious horror, and vehemently condemned by the pharisees of the church, who assume a virtue if they have it not.

It is not for us here to express any opinion as to the wisdom or otherwise of returning candidates to Parliament who have been charged with misconduct. That is a question for the constituents to decide. Our object is to point out the inconsistent and hypocritical policy of orthodox Christians when they "sit in judgment" upon alleged evildoers. The profession of the popular faith in Christendom is made the cloak for one of the greatest shams that ever disgraced our national character. Under the pretence of piety fidelity to principle is sacrificed, and the cant of profession is made to do duty for genuine conduct. Have these self-appointed "guardians of public honor" forgotten that in their scriptures it is said, "He that is without sin among you let him first cast a stone." If this injunction were obeyed we should rarely, if ever, hear of stones being cast. Besides, if an "erring brother" do wrong, is it not possible that he may repent? And if he should do so, will there not be more joy in heaven over him than over the 400 Manchester saints who would have us believe they "need no repentance"? Moreover, if the Bible be correct in saying he that is guilty of one offence is guilty of all, will these pious censors be able to pose as perfect beings when they have failed to obey their Master's advice to first pull the mote out of their own eyes? Christ is reported also to have said: "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." What forgiveness, therefore, do Christians expect, considering that they seldom forgive those who give them offence? "Judge not, that ye be not judged," may be out of date, but it is one of the commandments which Christ is supposed to have given nevertheless. "Love your enemies" is, of course, a fine sentiment to preach from the pulpit, but it is evident such love disappears when the enemy appears. "The beautiful truths of the Gospel" are ignored by their most zealous professors in their every-day conduct. The poet has said that—

To err is human—
To forgive divine;

but is it not human also to forgive?

We read in the Bible that David and Solomon exhibited "weakness of the flesh" on more than one

occasion; that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were guilty of very questionable conduct; that Peter denied his own Master; but when are those Bible worthies condemned by modern Christians? Jehovah, it appears, did not deem them deserving of being excluded from certain privileges on account of their moral frailties. The first two were made kings, three others are to occupy prominent places in heaven, and Peter is the rock upon which the Christian Church is built, and to him is entrusted the keeping of the keys of heaven. If the purification of character be really the object of modern saints, they will find plenty of work to do among their own people. Scarcely a week passes without reports appearing in our newspapers of ministers of the gospel being convicted of the worst crimes. Not long since the *Pall Mall Gazette* published figures showing that during the period between October 1, 1891, and October 10, 1892, 629 clergymen were convicted of various offences. This suddenly inaugurated moral censorship upon the part of orthodox professors is mean and hypocritical in the extreme. It directs its attention to isolated cases unconnected with the popular faith, while the numerous instances of impurity associated with the Church are kept in the background. Purity of life is always desirable, but to be continually prating about it savors too much of hypocrisy. A man is not any the more virtuous because he successfully hides his faults, as, judging from the frequent revelations of crime among the clergy, there are reasons for believing that many within the Christian fold endeavor to do.

Granting that Society, in its political and social spheres, is morally impure, Why is it? Simply because its members have been the recipients of the narrow and imperfect training provided by the Church—a mode of training that from its very inception has proved impotent to secure among its most vehement advocates pure lives and honest conduct. Something would be done towards altering this state of things if, as the *Birmingham Argus* aptly said, "The preaching of to-day were a little more practical—if ministers would but aim at the salvation of this world, if they dealt more with the tangible things of this life and less with the intangible things of the life to come, if they gave themselves to the promotion of every-day goodness and propagated a gospel for the workshop, the street, and the home." Let this course be adopted, and a healthier ethical tone will speedily be created throughout society, conduct will then be deemed as being higher than faith, and moral invalids will be less numerous than they are at present.

CHARLES WATTS.

DOUBT.

The little bark drew near; now on the top
Of some dark wave it tremulously hung;
Now in the trough of the fierce sea it sank
To reappear at length, unbroken, unengulfed.
"What may the vision mean?" I, pitying, cried.
On me the Wizard bent his kindly eyes,
And answered then in accents soft and mild:
"This goodly land is Science; yonder sea
Is that of Doubt; the boat, a Human Mind
Launched on the boiling flood from the bleak shore
And vasty deserts of Religion old."

RON MAHON.

There is a little girl in Cambridge who at one time thought God must be deaf because he didn't answer her prayer to make her grandmamma well. The beloved grandmamma continues ill, and the child continues her prayers; and the other night she uttered another cry of the heart regarding the matter. "Mamma," she said, "I know God is always slow, but isn't he very, very slow?"

WILL CHRIST SAVE US?

(Continued from page 788.)

CHRISTIANS who have rebelled against tyranny have violated the teaching of the New Testament. They have acted on the impulses of their own nature. Oliver Cromwell disobeyed the injunctions of Peter, Paul, and Jesus. John Hampden was more of a Jew than a Christian, and more of a Roman than either, when he drew his sword against his king. Mazzini, Garibaldi, Victor Hugo, and Kossuth, if the Christian scriptures be true, were guilty of insurrection against the ordinance of God.

George Fox and the Quakers were consistent Christians. They obeyed the order of Jesus to "resist not evil." If they were smitten on one cheek they turned the other to the smiter. Count Tolstoi preaches, and as far as possible practises, the same doctrine. Every form of violence, he says, is inconsistent with the teaching of Christ. Not only the soldier, but the policeman, is in opposition to the Sermon on the Mount. Count Tolstoi believes it would be an unchristian act to kill or injure the wretch he might find ravishing his wife or slaying his child. Active resistance to evil must never be offered; passive resistance is all that is permitted; and the rest must be left to Providence.

To certain minds of a soft, peaceful, and humane disposition this doctrine is attractive. But it would never quell the world's tyrannies. Wolves do not care for the pious bleating of sheep.

Inquiry shows us that political freedom has been systematically opposed by the Christian Church, and always won in spite of it. The English bishop who once declared in the House of Lords that "all the people had to do with the laws was to obey them," voiced the real spirit of Christianity.

Political freedom is, indeed, a very recent phenomenon in modern society. A hundred years ago it was as unknown in other parts of Europe as it is today in Russia. Czars, emperors, kings, and aristocracies held the multitude in subjection. The people were outside the pale of such constitutions as existed. Prussia and Austria were sheer autocracies. Spain and Italy had less civil freedom than a province of the Roman Empire. France had no constitution before 1789. England had a parliament, but the House of Commons was filled with nominees of the House of Lords. The suffrage was confined to a handful of citizens. For this reason Shelley described the House of Commons as a place

Where thieves are sent
Similar thieves to represent.

"Infidels" won political liberty for France. Rousseau was a Deist; Mirabeau, Danton, and many other leading spirits of the Revolution were Atheists. Christianity is still on the side of reaction in the land of Voltaire, while Republican and Freethinker are almost convertible terms.

"Infidels" were the chief fighters for political freedom in England. Thomas Paine, who wrote the *Age of Reason*, was found guilty of treason for penning the *Rights of Man*. Bentham was a Freethinker, and probably an Atheist. James and John Mill were Freethinkers. Shelley, Byron, Leigh Hunt, Landor, and most of the Chartist leaders were all tainted with "infidelity." Christian leaders were generally on the side of wealth and privilege. Freethought leaders were always on the side of the people.

Ebenezer Elliot, the Corn-Law rhymer, exclaimed—

When wilt thou save the People,
O God of mercies, when?
Not thrones, O Lord, but peoples,
Not kings, O God, but men!

This exclamation was uttered eighteen hundred years after the death of Jesus Christ, in a land which

boasted of being the most Christian on earth. This is itself a proof that Christ had not saved the people. Their salvation since has been due to other causes; chiefly, it must be said, to the progress of science, which is the great equaliser. Was it not Buckle who declared that "the hall of science is the temple of democracy"?

One of the most significant facts in recent history was the attempt of the German Emperor to strengthen his power over his subjects. Feeling that the democratic movement was threatening his throne, he introduced a Bill in the Reichstag by his ministers, providing that Christian instruction should be given in the public schools, even when the scholars were the children of Freethinkers. Happily the Bill was defeated. "King-deluded" as Germany is, she has outgrown such illiberalism. Yet the very fact that the Emperor sought to Christianise the young more completely, in order that they might grow up his very obedient slaves, is a striking proof of the essential antagonism between Christian and political freedom.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued.)

"THE PRAYER OF FAITH."

SMOKING his pipe at the twilight hour
The widower sat in his cosy bower,
And the speechless thoughts that his heart outpoured
Were a song of praise as they heavenward soared.
"When my Mary left me a year ago,
I had surely died of my grief and woe
If it had not been for the frail and fair
Wee flower that she left to my tender care."

"Yes, God is exceedingly good," thought he,
"For an aim in life he has given to me—
To cherish and nourish and tend and rear
My Mary's Mary with love sincere.
And, because of my daily and hourly prayer,
I am sure—I am sure—that my God will spare
My darling to lighten and cheer my way
Through this vale of tears till my dying day."

From the widower's heart rose the silent psalm;
On the widower's heart fell the sacred calm
That is born of faith. Then he heard, dismayed,
From the quiet street where his infant played,
A chorus of shrieks; and the startled man
To the window, then wild from his chamber, ran:
Past his cottage a runaway horse had sped;
And, before him, disfigured and crushed and dead,
Lay that child of his loving and tender care
Whose young life he'd been sure that his God would spare.

FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

We first infer the goodness of God from that which we see, and then infer that this is not worthy of the goodness of that being whose existence we deduced from it.—*William Godwin*.

The writers of the New Testament had no conception of man's right to freedom, no detestation of slavery. They believed that God had made all nations of one blood, yet in man's fallen condition, slavery, as well as the subordination of woman to man, and the submission of nations to despots, was right, and resistance thereto was rebellion against God.—*B. F. Underwood*.

Our Christian-commercial civilisation still inculcates the efficacy of prayer in averting the evils of life—with one important exception. The appeal to the aid of preternatural agencies is supposed to obviate hailstorms and locust-swarms, wars and diseases, but we fully recognise its failure to prevent famine, and in the education of our children our tithe-gathering moralists waive the orthodox anathemas against the sinfulness of providing for the needs of the morrow.—*Prison Problems*.

CONVERSATIONS WITH CHRISTIANS.

BY CHARLES C. CATTELL.

[CONTINUED.]

F.—Responsible for what?

C.—Trying to upset the teachings of his holy word, which has been the solace and comfort of men for ages, as it is to me.

F.—Then you think that “the solace and comfort of men” depend on believing in a palpable and manifest falsehood—that man was created 6,000 years ago?

C.—I believe in the Bible, which says “the fool hath said in his heart there is no God.”

F.—But suppose “the fool” did so; what has that to do with the date of creation?

C.—Everything. The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

F.—But that is no answer to my question. If the fool did so in his *heart*, he did not use his *head*; and if he had it would perhaps have been guided by his heart. You seem to make more use of *heart* than I do. But tell me, how can the “solace” from a belief in “do justice and love mercy” be banished by man being discovered to be 10,000 instead of 6,000 years old?

C.—Once give up a single truth of the blessed Bible, and all is lost, as it is written at the end of the Revelation.

F.—Show me how “love one another” ceases to “comfort” you because the human race is more ancient than once believed to be.

C.—I take my stand on the word of God, and not on your geology and “science falsely so called,” as Paul properly calls it.

F.—There is one thing I should like to point out to you, and that is the undesirable use of the word “fool” in case of reference to Atheists.

C.—But it has been observed that the undevout astronomer is a fool.

F.—It has also been observed that “the spiritual man is mad,” and as the Bible says it, of course you believe it?

C.—You must not put your freethinking interpretation on a verse.

F.—I can only use the powers given me, such as they are.

C.—I only wish you would use them in *another* direction, instead of trying to upset what is built on a rock.

F.—I know your wishes are sincere, but you do not seem to distinguish my standpoint in judging.

C.—Yes I do; but I am very much surprised that a man who could write the first book I read on Shakespeare should be a Bradlaughite!

F.—You are clearly mistaken, as I was a Freethinker years before I knew him; and your *rock* is nothing but *sand*, which the seas of doubt will wash away. It is only a question of time.

C.—It stands now as firm as ever, as Dr. D. told us last Sunday.

F.—If you did your own reading, as you do your customers’ letters at the office, you would be amazed at the tales your Dr. D. retails out to you every Sunday as facts.

C.—But he’s a scholar—a learned man.

F.—Yes, he has that reputation. I once heard him discourse to the Y.M.C.A. on the authenticity of the Gospels.

C.—He’s well up in all that.

F.—And this was how he *proved* (!) it. He mentioned the names of several historical characters till he reached the second century, and then he named one old man who knew another old man who had met a person who had heard St. John! “Now then,” he said, “you have the evidence carried right up to the apostle’s own time.”

C.—I have heard him preach like that, but can’t understand how you can doubt the New Testament after such conclusive facts as he sets forth.

F.—If I could supply you with a list of names of persons up to the time of Julius Cæsar, would that be evidence to you that Brutus stabbed him?

C.—That’s a different thing altogether.

F.—I will try again. What has the existence of some man who is reported to have heard John got to do with the authenticity of the four gospels?

C.—Why it shows that that great apostle lived at the very time when the gospels were written.

F.—Granting that Cæsar could not have been stabbed if not living, what proof is that that he wrote the works bearing the name?

C.—I never heard of any doubt about Cæsar’s writings.

F.—Be it so; how does someone hearing an apostle prove that the four gospels were written by the men whose names are at the head of them?

C.—That matter has been investigated, and Paine and other infidels have been replied to.

F.—I believe I am not understating the case when I say that the names of the authors and the dates of their first appearance are only made out by conjecture and inference. If certainty prevailed, endless controversy would be impossible.

C.—We don’t take any notice of infidels; they object to everything, and try to find out flaws in our great work, the Bible.

F.—I do not think they have much trouble in doing that, for the whole question is in doubt, and can never be settled. And if it could be placed beyond doubt who wrote the gospels, and when, I should still disbelieve that the end of the world came in “this generation,” meaning the generation spoken of by Jesus as reported in the gospels.

C.—That’s just like you unbelievers. You construe words in a literal sense, and then sneer at them.

F.—I beg your pardon. The words “this generation” and “we that are alive shall be caught up in the air to meet him” can only mean what they say, or nothing at all.

C.—It is written that the coming of the Lord shall be as a thief in the night; the day and the hour no man knoweth.

F.—I did not say the “day” or “hour” was known. I confined myself to the Bible “*this generation*,” which by no hocus-pocus can be made to mean some *other* generation. As Jesus did not come in that generation which he named, was he mistaken, or is the Bible a—*what it says is incorrect*?

C.—I can’t stop to hear the Bible slightly spoken of.

F.—Send your parson along then, and I’ll try him.

(To be continued.)

JAY GOULD AND THE MINISTER.

Mr. Labouchere in last week’s *Truth* says:—“I remember hearing, years ago, a good story about Jay Gould.” He had a quantity of stock of some particular railroad which, being worthless, he was anxious to sell. His minister came to him one morning, and said to him: “Mr. Gould, I am a poor man, and I have a large family. I have managed to put by ten thousand dollars, and if only I could double it, I should not be anxious about the future of my family if I were called away.” “Minister,” said Mr. Gould, “I will tell you how to do so, provided that you will tell no one else,” and he advised him to purchase largely of this particular stock for a rise. The minister did so and the stock was in great demand. But a month or two afterwards the market price fell heavily. Again the minister called on Mr. Gould. “I am ruined,” he said; “you have deceived your pastor.” “Pastor,” replied Mr. Gould, “I told you to keep my advice a secret. Did you do so?” “Well,” said the minister, “I did mention it to a few of our elders.” “So I thought you would,” said Gould, “and I have got off the whole of the stock that I held on them and their friends; here are your ten thousand dollars back, and here are ten thousand more for your trouble in the matter.”

Young man (who thinks of marrying): “Father, I—er—presume you know—er—the Bible says it is not good for man to be alone.” Rich Old Gentleman (a widower): “Yes, I’ve been thinking of that. Besides, a boy like you ought to have a mother over him, anyhow, as I told the Widow Dash only yesterday.”

ACID DROPS.

A Christian paper deplors that Christmas is the season of hard drinking. Men and women celebrate the birth of their Savior by gluttonous eating and copious swilling. The eating may pass for the present, but why should the swilling be denounced? Jesus Christ was anything but a teetotaler. He actually turned water into wine to keep a spree going. And does not the Bible say that wine cheereth God as well as man? It is blasphemous impudence for a Christian paper to set itself above Jehovah. No doubt he will teach the editor a lesson when he gets hold of him; perhaps boil him in whiskey.

Müller, the head of the famous Orphanage, has been interviewed by a representative of the *Christian Commonwealth*. He gives a number of instances of divine assistance. Just when his need has been greatest remittances have come in answer to prayer. Müller tells the Lord, the Lord tells somebody else, and the postman brings the registered letter. It seems a remarkably easy way of carrying on a business.

There is one thing that Müller forgets. He receives a large number of remittances; they arrive frequently, but not regularly; it is therefore certain that they must *sometimes* arrive very *opportunistically*. Müller puts these coincidences together and presents them as miracles.

Müller's interviewer prints a letter sent last month to the old gentleman, with a cheque for £100. The merchant who sent it stated that as he was lying in bed thinking, the words rang in his ears, "Send him £100 to-day, I will repay." When the merchant got up he forwarded the £100, on the advice of "my heavenly partner in business." Surely there is something very naive in this gentleman's commercialism. "I will repay" was good enough. The £100 was an excellent investment. It secured the Lord as a sleeping partner in the merchant's business.

Mr. W. T. Stead is great on "the Christianity of Christ." So is a very different man, the Rev. S. D. Headlam. But the Christianity of Christ often takes them in opposite directions. Mr. Headlam refers to "Sir Charles Dilke, whom that most immoral Mr. Stead is still trying to keep from serving his country." Evidently the Christianity of Christ is not a sure guide in matters that allow of any difference of opinion.

By the way, Mr. Headlam speaks of "that Mr. Balfour, the Atheist coercionist." No, thank you, Mr. Headlam! We decline the present. Mr. Balfour is one of *your* men. He is a Christian, and two or three years ago he read a paper at the Church Congress.

Gadlof, the Welsh *War Cry*, is dead. This is a poor Christmas present for "General" Booth. It is one of the many signs that "the Army," as a religious body, has seen its best days.

Jay Gould has left nothing to philanthropic or religious bodies. During his lifetime he gave £20,000 a year to churches. It was evidently a mere investment. He could get nothing out of such investments after his death; hence the absence of pious legacies in his will. The churches he subscribed to will now have to draw from some other blood-sucker.

Rochdale has a "Brotherhood of Clean Lips." Why not also a "Brotherhood of Clean Noses"? It would be better for the cotton trade.

Three Ashby magistrates have given a servant girl three months for filching some of her master's cigars and some perfumery. It was a first offence, and a caution would have sufficed. Two of the three magistrates are clergymen. We hear they are both writing sermons on the text "Blessed are the merciful."

"Yes," said an impassioned Christian Evidence man, "these freethinking votaries of science, falsely so called, wish us to believe that we are all descended from Darwin."

Ex-Lord Chancellor Halsbury signs a begging circular sent out by the Christian Evidence Society, headed "Infidelity and how to meet it"—in which an urgent appeal is made for "larger liberality." Their funds have fallen below £1,100 a year, which is very little to be divided among the reverend secretaries. Perhaps if the C.E.S. would fight "infidelity" a little more straightforwardly, good Christians would rally to its support.

Lord Halsbury and Sir G. G. Stokes, in their begging letter to the press, speak of the "pernicious literature" which Secularists scatter "broadcast." If they mean by *pernicious* nothing but anti-Christian, we don't object to the epithet. If they mean, or wish to convey, anything worse, we should call them a brace of cowardly scoundrels.

The ex-Lord Chancellor and the Professor don't do much for Christian Evidences themselves. Perhaps they know their own incapacity. They seem to pin their faith on "Celestine Edwards." After all the missionary enterprise in converting the heathen, the Christian Evidence Society relies on a black man to turn England to Christianity.

Said the Bishop of Newcastle, at a meeting of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, "There was a great amount of cruelty in the homes of England, which must and should, please God, be put a stop to." His lordship forgets that, on his own theory, nothing whatever can take place without God's pleasure or permission, and that, therefore, the present cruelty may please God as much as the opposition to it. Moreover, much of it is carried on in the belief that the use of the rod in enforcing obedience has the authority of the word of God.

T. L. Howarth, who has been sentenced to three years' imprisonment for frauds in connexion with a building society in Durham, is the son of a well known Methodist preacher in the district.

The missing word competitions have drawn down many denunciations of gambling from our well-paid guardians of morals. But still less opposition to gambling than to drunkenness can be found in the pages of the Bible. On the contrary, we find that casting lots was the divinely-appointed method for dividing Palestine among the tribes and for filling up the blank among the twelve apostles caused by the suicide of Judas. Solomon, or the compiler of the Proverbs, puts all games of chance under divine providence, saying, "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Many of those who cry out against word competition wink the other eye at church raffles and lotteries at bazaars. Here the end justifies the means.

In a book written by Mgr. Segur and published in Boston by T. B. Noonan and Co., entitled "Plain Talk about the Protestantism of To-day," we find these pen pictures of two of the great Protestant leaders:—"Luther died forlorn of God, blaspheming to the very end. His last word was an attestation of impenitence. His eldest son, who had doubts both about the reformation and the reform, asked him for a last time whether he persevered in the doctrine he preached. 'Yes,' replied a gurgling sound from the old sinner's throat—and Luther was before his God."—p. 225

Calvin (continues this Christian priest) died of scarlet fever, devoured by vermin, and eaten up by an ulcerous abscess, the stench whereof drove away every person. In great misery he gave up his rascally ghost, despairing of salvation, evoking the devils from the abyss, and uttering oaths most horrible and blasphemies most frightful.—p. 225.

The awful sinner's death-bed is a very ancient dodge of the priests. The kings who would not obey Jahveh, that is, his priests, all came to a bed end. The story of Herod's awful death is probably a similar concoction.

The Presbytery of Inverness are making an inquiry into the circumstances attending the death of the Rev. John Gray, which is attributed by his brother to the gross ill-treatment and utter neglect he received during his illness at the hands of the Rev. Donald Simpson, of Moy, Inverness, with whom he served as assistant. This man of God, it is alleged, was

so afraid of catching the fever of his subordinate that he proposed his removal to a wool-shed and left the house, locking up every room, and leaving the poor man to die without the common necessities of a sick chamber.

Many will learn with regret of the incarceration in an asylum of Mr. J. William Watson, author of *Lachrymæ Musarum*; for Mr. Watson has shown himself a true if not a great poet. He seems to have some form of the Theosophic delusion, since he is said to have declared himself a reincarnation of Milton. We trust Mr. Watson will speedily recover.

The recently discovered fragments of a Gospel according to Peter support the theory that the earlier forms of Christian belief did not deny Christ's divinity, but his humanity. The gospel is said to favor the Docetic heresy which made Christ a purely spiritual being. It makes him utter the exclamation, "My strength, my strength, why hast thou forsaken me?"

He dropped a penny in the plate
And meekly raised his eyes,
Glad the week's rent was fairly paid
For mansions in the skies.

An old lady who had been a regular attendant at church was taken ill, and could not attend. When visited by the vicar, who came to make the usual inquiries on her absence, he asked her if she did not miss going to church, when, to his great astonishment, the old lady answered, "Oh no, sir, for I alwis make Jane sit at the winder and tell me who goes by, and if they have got anything new on."

While the black champion was at South Shields he was thrice invited by public advertisement in the local press to enter into a set debate with a representative of the local Branch of the N.S.S. Mr. S. M. Peacock, who inserted the advertisement, is President of the North Eastern Secular Federation, and he gave his address for any answer. No answer was received; indeed, the black champion told a *Free Press* interviewer that he did not care for such debates. Since he has left South Shields, however, the local Branch of the Christian Evidence has replied to a letter from the N.S.S. Branch, and declined to arrange for a debate on the ground that "you would not have a discussion while Mr. Edwards was at South Shields." Could the force of impudence go farther?

As the time approaches for the fulfilment of Baxter's prophecies, his disciples are beginning to hedge and put later dates for the second coming of J. C. In his work published in 1888, Baxter made a ten kingdomed confederacy by great wars and revolutions between 1889—1891, and the rise of Napoleon as King of Syria, 1892. But at that time he said Boulanger had the number of the Beast, and twenty years before published *Louis Napoleon, the Destined Monarch of the World*.

The notorious thief and bank-robber, George Bidwell, who defrauded the Bank of England of 5,000,000 dols., is travelling over this country lecturing on the influence of Christianity on honesty in business. His lectures are given under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association. Comment is unnecessary.—*Truthseeker*.

Mary Ann Smith, a pedlar from Norfolk, was sentenced by the Rev. J. Russell Jackson, chairman of the Spalding Bench of Justices of Peace, to a months' imprisonment. The rev. magistrate severely censured the folly and stupidity of fortune telling, yet virtually gets his own living by telling people's fortunes in another world.

The Bible-sanctioned belief in witchcraft still lingers. An old man in Lurgan, Ulster, who was suffering from erysipelas, called in a noted "charmer" in the district, with the result that he died of blood-poisoning.

A Genoese watchmaker has constructed a centennial clock for the World's Fair, a timepiece that will run for a month and show the progress of Columbus from Port Palos to San Salvador, the landing of the Spaniards, the dances of the natives, and the return of the triumphant discoverers. The motions of the figures are said to be wonderfully life-like, but

unless those dances can be stopped on Sunday, the Chicago Sabbath Association will probably confiscate the whole apparatus.

Canon Ivens has been lecturing on the Bible, the writers of which, of course, he believes to be inspired, but, says he, "When I say that they were inspired I do not mean that they were rendered infallible as to verbal accuracy, as to history, or as to science. As to these matters, they knew neither more nor less than other men who lived at the same time." So it seems that God went to the trouble of giving a divine revelation without making sure that it was even verbally accurate.

The Rev. Peter Mackenzie is an amusing old peripatetic Methodist preacher, who goes about lecturing on such subjects as Johah and the Whale and Balaam and his Beast. We should say, from the report of a lecture on the last-mentioned subject, that he contrived unwittingly to draw a deal of ridicule upon the stories. As a sample of his wit take this: "Balaam was the son of Beor or Bosor. Beer and boozor, mind you, often come together. (Renewed laughter.)"

James Granville is a youth who fancies a profession of Christianity may cover a multitude of sins. Accused of stealing a waistcoat, he declared he was a Christian young man and never missed going to church. He will continue to go regular for at least three months in prison.

"A Yorkshire Vicar," writing to the *Leeds Mercury* in opposition to Bishop Jayne's public-house schemes, contends that the wine of the Lord's supper was non-alcoholic, because the New Testament speaks, not of "wine," but of "the fruit of the vine." He forgets that the supper was partaken at Passover time, in the spring, and that the only way the fruit of the vine could be kept till that season was by fermentation, and the consequent production of alcohol. The word used in John ii. 10 is the same as elsewhere rendered "drunken."

St. George Mivart, the Jesuit pupil, writing in the heretical *Nineteenth Century*, says hell is a place of happiness. The Catholic authorities who issue, by Papal permission, the *Garden of the Soul* as a manual of Christian doctrine, say: "Represent to yourself a dark city, all burning and stinking with pitch and brimstone, and full of inhabitants who cannot get out. The damned are in the depth of Hell as within this woful city, where they suffer unspeakable torments in all their senses and members." And these torments it proceeds to dilate upon.

There are about 13,000 members of the Society of Jesus. Their influence, however, depends rather on their discipline than their numbers. With anything like their cohesion Free-thinkers would be far more powerful.

The Chinese have formed a committee of prominent men and got up a big subscription for a grand joss-pidgin to all the gods in the Buddhist directory, in order to avert typhoons from the Colony of Macao. They are estimating 20,000 dols. as the cost of the show, which will come off before Christmas. If they would put the money into some storm-insurance concern it would do more good. The affair will, however, attract large crowds of Chinese to Macao, and all the *weising, fantan, pak-kap-piao* and other lotteries, even the House of Holy Mercy, will do big business.—*Hong-Kong Telegraph*.

One of the "dime" museums of Chicago exhibits a snake's skin bearing this legend:—"Skin of the serpent that tempted Eve in the Garden of Paradise. It was killed by Adam the following day after the treason. Adam hit it with a club, of which traces are still left. This skin was part of the inheritance of Adam, and was preserved in his family in Asia. The genuineness is attested by the doctors of divinity whose seals are attached."

A correspondent in China writes: "Almost all the Christian missionaries are very insolent and troublesome. They have bought large and valuable properties in China and are always trying to squeeze as much money as they can from the Chinese government and from the ignorant natives. They are always carrying on intrigues, and do far more harm than good. They come to China to make money."

This seems to be the opinion also of the *Hong-Kong Telegraph*, which, reciting Dr. Griffith John's hope that the governor of the district where Christianity is reviled will take the matter in hand and put a final stop to their proceedings, says: "To the foregoing the *Hong-Kong Telegraph* would like to add that it hopes somebody will shortly take the matter in hand and put a final stop to the insane proceedings of Dr. Griffith John and the crowd of raving fanatics whose views he claims to represent."

Saint Thomas Aquinas, "the angelic doctor," is referred to by the present Pope as the doctor of the church whose mind and principles are to be followed as a safe guide on its teaching. He says (Supplementum, Q. 97, art. 4): "The disposition of hell is so ordered as to contribute to the misery of the damned in the greatest possible manner, and so there is both light and darkness—sufficient light to see their own and others' misery, but without the pleasure of light." So far from allowing there is any happiness in hell, he argues that it would be far preferable to be annihilated. His words are (Supplementum, Q. 98, art. 3): "The misery of the damned exceeds all the misery of this world. But in order to avoid the misery of this world it is preferable to some to die, according to Ecclus. xl. Therefore, much more is it preferable to the damned not to be." It would be interesting to see how Mr. Mivart reconciles these passages with his new Catholic theology.

The Catholic Church only ceased burning because heretics got too numerous to stand being burnt, and just so it is ready to relax the fire of hell for those who will not believe it. But Father Furnisa's red-hot furnace for naughty children is still circulated among the young and ignorant.

"Happiness in hell," said Lucianus. "Why some people would never be happy anywhere. I doubt if I should feel comfortable myself in the company of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David."

Last week we referred to a Deptford Christian Defence Association which "challenged" (*sic*) the President of the National Secular Society to come and reply to some anonymous lecturer on Sunday, December 11. The lecturer turns out to be a fellow called Taylor, who lately suffered imprisonment for stealing teapots. This fellow had the impudence to print on his handbill "Mr. G. W. Foote, editor of the *Freethinker*, is expected." Such a lie on the bill, and such a lecturer, are enough to make Christianity stink in the nostrils of decent people at Deptford.

John Eagle, who sells papers at Willesden Junction, is a blind man. Mr. Marsh, the relieving officer of the Hendon Union, interested himself in the poor fellow's behalf, and raised a subscription to provide him with a shelter. Some of the religious folk refused to subscribe unless they had a guarantee that Eagle would not sell any of the Sunday papers.

The latest fad of London Society, with a big S, is palmistry, and according to a paragraph which is going the rounds of the papers (is it an advertisement?) the rooms of a young and handsome man, who expounds the science and tells fortunes, are crowded with visitors. Theosophy, apparently, has had its day as a "sensation."

A young lady who lately gave an order to her milliner for a bonnet, said, "You are to make it plain, but at the same time smart, as I sit in a conspicuous place in church."

One does not expect to find an adverse criticism of Divine Providence issued by the Religious Tract Society, but in a recent little penny illustrated Life of Columbus the following passage occurs: "The ways of Divine Providence are deeply mysterious; what may have been designed by permitting the inhabitants of these islands and countries to be brought under the dominion of Romanism, we, with our limited knowledge, cannot tell; but, with our light, we cannot but regret that they were not at once made acquainted with the true faith, and a simpler and purer worship." Of course all kinds of regret amounts to a censure of the divine government.

"Well, Mr. Snedicker, how did you like my sermon?" asked a young preacher. "Ye see, parson," was the reply,

"I'm an old man now, and have to set pretty well back by the stove; and there's old Miss Smith, Widder Taff, 'n Mrs. Rylan's darters, 'n Nabby Birt, 'n all the rest, setting in front of me with their mouths wide open, a swallerin' down all the best of the sermon; n' what gtes down to me is pretty poor stuff, parson, pretty poor stuff."

A subscriber who has been studying Webster's new "Unabridged" expresses a regret that the lexicographer's definition of the word "boil" had not met the eyes of the new version people before they translated the book of Job, as it would have been so beautiful to say, instead of boils, "And Satan smote Job with circumscribed subcutaneous inflammations, characterised by pointed pustular tumors, and suppurating with central cores."

"December, January, and February," says Talmage, "are harvest months for the Devil." These are the months of the long evenings, when people go to theatres and dancing parties. In such things Talmage smells brimstone. A playbill, to him, is a sign of the Devil. What a strong passion is trade jealousy!

"God told me to do it," was the cry of Rebecca Oakey, who was found in her bedroom with her nightdress in flames. She died of shock to the system.

The Jewish festival of Chanuka, which comes like Christmas about the end of the natural year, seems like it to represent the return and increase of light. A principal feature is the lighting up of candles, one being lit on the first night, two on the second, and so on until there are eight.

Mr. Gladstone tells a curate that the Church of England "receives no assistance from public funds." This is one of the Grand Old Man's round-the-corner statements—true in the letter but false in the spirit. He knows very well that the property of all State Churches is public property, and he acted on the knowledge when he disestablished the Irish Church.

Church bells used to be rung to frighten away devils, and sometimes comets. At Kopylak, in Russia, the sacristan rang the church bells to frighten away burglars.

Ring happy bells across the snow;
The burglar's burgling, make him go.

"Clifton," says the *Christian Commonwealth*, "has been called the 'Paradise of Preachers.'" And no wonder, our contemporary exclaims; for on account of its scenery, fine air, and social attractions, it is "one of the most desirable places of residence for preachers whether in or out of harness, as well as of persons of every intellectual taste and respectable social grade." Heavens! To think we have had eighteen centuries of Christianity to produce this sickening snobbary!

Gabriel had blown a blast on the last trump, and Cholly crawled from under a tombstone. "Deuced wacket!" he exclaimed. "It's the resurrection," exclaimed Gabriel. "You've been dead, you know." "Have I, weally? Thanks, awfully, I assure you. Nevah should have noticed it."

CONTRIBUTIONS TO N.S.S.

SPECIAL FUND.—W. Clarkson, £1; Mrs. B. E. Marks, 10s; S. A., 10s.

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E. M. VANCE, assistant-sec.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

The brute despair of twenty centuries
Leaped up with one hoarse yell and snapped its bands,
Groped for its rights with horny, callous hands,
And stared around for God with bloodshot eyes;
What wonder that those palms were all too hard
For nice distinctions,

—Mrs. Browning.

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, Dec. 18, Hall of Science, 142 Old-street, E.C.; at 11.15, "General Booth as a Social Savior"; at 7, "The Birth-day of God."

January 1, Birmingham; 8, Leicester; 15 and 22, Hall of Science; 29, Bristol.

February 5, Hull; 12 and 19, Hall of Science.

March 5, Liverpool.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

- MR. CHARLES WATTS' ENGAGEMENTS.**—Dec. 18, Birmingham. All communications for Mr. Watts should be sent direct to him (with stamped envelope for reply) at Baskerville Hall, The Crescent, Birmingham.
- A. BAXTER.**—We wrote a few weeks ago on the alleged case of "infidel intolerance" in France. It must have escaped your attention. By the way, as the Catholic Church in France is supported by the State, it can hardly expect the "freedom" it would enjoy if it supported itself.
- C. DOEG.**—We note what you report as to the projected debate with the Rev. W. W. Howard at Liverpool. The negotiations for a debate at Spennymoor do not seem to be making much progress. We hope you will be more successful.
- JOSEPHUS.**—We really cannot waste time over such exegesis. You are entitled to your own opinion. You asked for ours and we gave it.
- J. G. DOBSON.**—You need be under no apprehension. Mr. Foote will offer Huddersfield a date as soon as possible.
- "FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND:**—J. Edmonds (2nd sub.), 3s.
- C. WYLDE.**—Mr. Forder will supply you with the back numbers of this journal you require. Apply to him direct at 28 Stonecutter-street, E.C.
- ROSS.**—It is of no use discussing Hebrew in a paper for ordinary English readers. Besides, the question of the inspiration of the Old Testament can be discussed, and settled, on broader lines of science, humanity, and common sense.
- E. POWNCEBY,** secretary, London Secular Federation, desires all who have collecting-cards to send them in (with remittance) immediately, in order that the annual balance-sheet may be made up.
- R. CHAPMAN.**—See "Acid Drops." You will be very clever to hook the black champion into a public debate.
- CAMBERWELL** Freethinkers will be able to obtain Secular publications at the hall, 61 New Church-road, on Christmas Day.
- J. EDMONDS.**—Sorry to hear you cannot get a room for a Branch at Ashford. Bigotry dies very hard.
- G. CAMPION.**—We do not print Christian verses. Try a Christian paper.
- J. M. HEADLEY.**—Glad to hear you tackled Mason the "former infidel lecturer" at Yarmouth. He certainly did not "lecture at the Hall of Science with G. J. Holyoake and Ernest Jones forty years ago." The Hall of Science did not then exist, and Ernest Jones never lectured on the Freethought platform. Mason is evidently trading with a very romantic prospectus.
- 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.
- 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—Fur Unsere Jugend—Freethinker's Magazine—Truthseeker—Western Figaro—Clarion—Church Reformer—Ironclad Age—Independent Pulpit—La Vérité Philosophique—Echo—Watts's Literary Guide—Freedom—Cosmopolitan—Star—Glasgow Evening Citizen—Staffordshire Sentinel—Leeds Mercury—Manchester Evening News—Newcastle Daily Leader—Sowerby Bridge Chronicle—Northern Light—Castleford Bridge—Dunoon Herald—Shields Daily Gazette—Hong Kong Daily Telegraph—Moralist.
- LITERARY** communications to be addressed to the Editor, 14 Clerkenwell-green, London, E.C. All business communications to Mr. R. Forder, 28 Stonecutter-street, London, E.C.
- SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS.**—Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements:*—One inch, 3s.; Half Column, 15s.; Column, £1 10s. Special terms for repetitions.
- IT** being contrary to Post-office regulations to announce on the wrapper when the subscription is due, subscribers will receive the number in a colored wrapper when their subscription expires.
- The Freethinker* will be forwarded, direct from the office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One Year, 6s. 6d.; Half Year, 3s. 3d.; Three Months, 1s. 7d.

SPECIAL.

I HAVE arranged to meet the committee of the Portsmouth Branch on Friday evening (Dec. 16) and discuss the matter with them personally. It would be very imprudent to disclose our plan of campaign to the enemy. The struggle cannot be entered upon with any prospect of success unless the Freethought party places full confidence in me as its elected President. My intention is, if the Portsmouth committee accepts my advice, to go down and lecture in Wellington Hall myself, charging for admission in the usual way, and leaving the bigots to begin the fight if they choose. I have every confidence in the result being beneficial to our cause. If the fighting begins, it will not end in a day or two, and it will not be confined to Portsmouth. We are bound to resist the bigots. There is no point of morality or public order involved in charging for admission to lectures on Sunday. My legal adviser corroborates my view that taking a collection is equally in contravention of the Act of George III. Personally I shall enter the struggle (if it must be entered) with a well-considered policy, and a determination to fight to the end. Such a contest may oblige me to appeal to the Freethought party for its strongest support.

G. W. FOOTE.

SUGAR PLUMS.

Mr. Foote lectured to a capital audience at the London Hall of Science on Sunday evening. His reply to Professor Bruce's *Apologetics* was listened to with close attention, and at the finish very enthusiastically applauded. Mr. J. Brumage was in the chair. Prior to the lecture Mr. Foote made a statement with respect to the Portsmouth incident. His statement that he had a plan of campaign, and meant fighting himself if the police carried out their threat, was greeted with tremendous cheers.

Mr. Foote did not conclude the London Secular Federation's course of Free Lectures at Islington. He felt it advisable to take a longer rest from public speaking. His place was filled by Mr. Touzeau Parris, who delivered a stirring discourse to a very large meeting. On Sunday morning Mr. Foote's place at the Hall of Science was kindly taken by Mr. Forder.

The London Secular Federation's annual dinner is to take place at the Hall of Science on Wednesday evening, Jan. 4. The tickets, as before, are half-a-crown. A first-rate caterer has been engaged, and the hall will be tastefully decorated. Friends who come may be sure of a pleasant evening. Mr. Foote will preside, and among the speakers toasts will be J. M. Wheeler, Charles Watts, Touzeau Parris, G. Standing, A. B. Moss, W. Heaford, H. Snell, J. Rowney, Miss Vance, and Mrs. Samson. Tickets can be obtained at the Hall, at 28 Stonecutter-street, and from any Branch secretary.

The double number of the *Freethinker* we referred to in our last issue will not be published during the Christmas week. It will be issued as a new year's number—dated January 1, 1893. Besides a large quantity of special reading matter, it will contain finely-executed portraits of our contributors, including the editor and sub-editor. The list comprises G. W. Foote, J. M. Wheeler, Charles Watts, Touzeau Parris, A. B. Moss, R. Forder, G. Standing, and W. Heaford. We may also find space for a good cartoon.

On Monday evening Mr. Foote visited Ipswich and delivered the first Freethought lecture there during the present generation. Mr. Robert Forder accompanied him and took the chair. Nearly three hundred people assembled in the Co-operative Hall, most of whom were apparently in sympathy with the lecturer's views as to the relative merits of Christianity and Secularism. The meeting was really enthusiastic from beginning to end. Some very poor opposi-

tion was offered. One of the speakers told a number of "experience" anecdotes. For instance, he was once short of food, and the Lord sent him five loaves and a piece of bacon. The Rev. Mr. Bloomfield, a popular Independent minister, came in after the lecture, and expressed his regret that an engagement had prevented him from hearing it. At the same time he expected to read a report in one of the local papers, and he would reply to the lecture in his chapel on Sunday evening. Mr. Foote said that he *also* regretted that he could not cross swords with the reverend gentleman. But why not have a set debate? He would be happy to meet Mr. Bloomfield or any other representative Christian. Whereat the meeting cheered, but Mr. Bloomfield gave no response.

After the lecture a meeting of Freethinkers willing to join an Ipswich Branch of the N.S.S. was held in the afternoon. Mr. Scopes, who is acting as secretary *pro tem*, has the names and addresses of thirty-five such persons. This will make an excellent start. As soon as the new Branch is in working order, as it will be in a week or two, arrangements will be made for an active propaganda. We believe it will be a *very* active one. The thirty-five Ipswich "saints" seem to be of a first-rate type. We expect good things from them in the immediate future.

Mr. J. Rowney and Mr. Boyce debated "The Resurrection" at the London Hall of Science on Wednesday, December 7. There was a large audience, the discussion was carried out courteously, and Mr. Rowney appears to have ably sustained the Freethought side of the question.

Christian Evidence lecturers sometimes debate with Freethinkers, but the Christian Evidence Society will never put one of them forward as its representative in such an encounter. Is the C.E.S. afraid of debate, or does it know its lecturers' incompetence?

The South Shields Branch has arranged a debate on "Is there a Future Life?" between Mr. Stanley Jones and a prominent local Spiritualist, Mr. Robert Grice. The debate takes place to-day (Dec. 18), afternoon and evening, at Thornton's Theatre. The South Shields annual social gathering takes place on Monday, Jan. 2, at the Baring-street Schools. Tickets can be obtained from any member of the Branch.

The Wolverhampton Branch has secured a regular Sunday meeting place at the Athenæum Assembly Room, Queen-street. Local Freethinkers are earnestly invited to attend.

On Boxing Day there will be a musical and dramatic entertainment at the Battersea Secular Hall. Tickets 3d. and 6d., proceeds to go to the Branch, which is in need of funds. There will be dancing after the entertainment.

The Liverpool and Bootle Secular Tontine, the oldest tontine in connexion with the Secular party, has this year afforded relief in sickness to several of its members. The subscription is 6d. per week, with 1s. per quarter for management. After meeting all expenses and adding to the reserve fund, the society is in a position to give a dividend of 16s. 6d. to each member, so that the members have had the assurance of 10s. per week and medical attendance at a cost of a little over 3d. per week. The committee are desirous of enrolling additional members; all particulars can be had at the Oddfellows' Hall on Sundays.

Mr. Bradlaugh had largely the fortune to be vilified during his life and praised after his death. The *Northern Light* notices that it was recently remarked in Union Chapel, Islington, that "no man was more conscientious, or added more dignity to his position as a Parliamentary representative, than Charles Bradlaugh."

William Simpson, the artist and archaeologist, known widely as Crimean Simpson, was somewhat of a Freethinker, and once wrote a skit in a Freethought paper to prove that Myles McSweeney was neither a man nor a god, but a myth. He used to tell a good story of Sir Richard Burton, who travelled through Afghanistan in the guise of a Mahomedan fakir. Burton soon drew upon himself a reputation for great sanctity, of which he was rather proud, until an Afghan friend whispered to him that the people were beginning to wish they could exhibit the tomb of so great a saint. Then he thought

it time to depart, for he knew that when they wanted the tomb the corpse would soon be ready.

The *Bulletin* of the French Freethought Federation publishes an extract from a letter by Mdlle. Maria Deraismes, who was delegated to the Congress at Madrid, in which she states it was her intention to have protested expressly against the theological doctrine of the fall through woman, and the consequent subjection of her sex.

The French Freethinkers are subscribing to pay the heavy fine imposed on M. Vernouillet for refusing to take the oath as jurymen at Rheims.

MARRIAGE WITH A DECEASED WIFE'S SISTER.

HUGO ARNOT, in his *Collection of Criminal Trials in Scotland*, 1785, mentions the case of William Drysdale and Barbara Tannahill, who in 1705 were charged with incest. Drysdale was a widower, and Barbara Tannahill, the sister of his wife, who had been dead two years, confessed before the kirk session to having lain with him. The court adjudged Tannahill to be hanged, and Drysdale to be banished for life, founding its judgment upon the 18th chapter of Leviticus, and of course giving the severest sentence to the woman.

Commenting on this case, Hugo Arnot has the following observations: "A rancorous detestation of irregular commerce between the sexes has distinguished those religious sects which pretend to an uncommon degree of spiritual purity, and in a peculiar degree the rigid disciples of Calvin. Indeed, the apostle to whose mysterious doctrines they are peculiarly attached has barely tolerated the giving obedience to that impulse with which nature has directed every animal to the propagation of its species. . . . The Presbyterian clergy, in matters of scandal and of witchcraft, arrogated to themselves the office of public prosecutors, of inquisitors-general; and so late as the year 1720, the ministers, in behalf of themselves and their kirk sessions, publicly exercised this office in our courts of justice. Their busy zeal in hunting out young women whom they suspected of being with child, and after old women who lay under the imputation of witchcraft, was productive of the most dismal consequences. In the one case, their persecution was aimed at unhappy women who had obeyed the impulse of nature; in the other, at those who incurred the imputation of doing what nature rendered it impossible for them to do. In both the pains and the piety of the clergy were productive of the same issue, the driving miserable creatures to the gallows."

KINGS AND GODS.

"Religion and government were originally identical. In those primitive times, the 'ruling powers,' though invisible, inaudible, and intangible—though actually mere creatures of the imagination, were generally believed to be real personalities; real gods, possessing intelligence, appetites and passions similar to those of men. These mythical beings—usually monsters in the forms, the appetites and the passions ascribed to them by their inventors, the priests—were held to be the sources whence was derived all the authority by which man ruled over his fellow-man—as the sources whence the priests—the rulers in civil as well as religious matters—derived the *right* to rule, to rob, and to enslave their fellow-men. By the people generally, these mythical monsters were regarded only with feelings of unmixed and intense fear, never with feelings of love and admiration. And yet, from these purely ideal, these hideous monsters, and from them alone, was derived the so-called 'divine right of kings,' even of the present day. Of necessity, then, this pretended 'right' is just as mythical in its existence, just as monstrous in its character, as was the source whence, according to its own advocates, it was derived."—J. R. Kelso, "*Government Analysed*."

A little tot, saying her prayers, was asked by her mother why she had not asked forgiveness for some special act of disobedience. "Why, mamma, I didn't s'pose you wanted it mentioned outside the family."

FACTS.

THERE is a certain funny story that cannot be told too often. "Oh," cried the visitor to a jail when his friend behind the bars told him what he was imprisoned for, "oh, they can't put you in jail for that." "The devil they can't," exclaimed the man, "I'm here!" To turn like this man from theories as to whether a thing can be or is probable to be so, to the actual hard fact whether it is so—this is a method of thinking that all should endeavor to adopt as habitual. In every case, where the practical facts can be obtained—and there are few where they can not—the application of this way of getting at the truth should be the very first thing done.

Says one: "Freethought must produce immorality, Freethinkers having no foundation, no ultimate sanction, for the moral command; while Christians have a foundation for it, and they are moreover incited to virtue by promise of a heaven and deterred from sin by threat of a hell." This sounds very well. But how about the actual facts to be observed, which testify to the precise opposite? Which nations are the most criminal, those the most or those the least religious? Is it Germany and England that are notorious for gambling, brawling, assassination, criminality generally, or is it Spain and Mexico? Are France and America bywords for tyranny and extortion, cruelty and injustice, while Russia and Ireland receive the praises of every tongue for equity and peace? Which of the nationalities among us are the immoral ones? Never mind theory; let us go out to the nearest public place and see whether the first couple we find drunk and quarrelling there belong to those nationalities which we know believe least in Christianity, or to those that believe in it most.

Sometimes the argument takes the form—Freethinkers may perhaps be as moral as Christians, but that is because they are more intellectual. A few superior, thoughtful minds may be capable of continuing a just course of conduct without belief in God, but for the great masses of the people such a belief is absolutely necessary. This is a favorite position with some who are Freethinkers at heart, but from fear of Christian ostracism are anxious to find some excuse for withholding themselves from propagandist work. "Can they not perceive," says one of our late correspondents—though we are by no means to be understood as including him in the faint-hearted class mentioned—"that a godless race, unless at the summit of intelligence, must inevitably be sinful?" No, we cannot perceive anything of the kind. For here we have only to fall back upon the same method used before, the referring to actual facts, and we find the plainest evidence that such is not the case. The facts are right at hand—nothing could be more convenient and more conclusive; it is strange that it did not occur to our correspondent to turn to them. We will not compare intellectual with unintellectual men. We will consider the masses of the people, and them only. And considering them, taking the masses of any European nation at all, looking into any history at all, do we not find that the rise of strong Christian belief coincided with the downfall of order and morals, that the height of the power of that belief coincided with the midnight of barbaric ferocity and criminality, and that the decline of its influence has coincided with the sunrise of public order, justice, and goodness?

Freethinkers are unhappy. All Freethinkers that disbelieve in a future life have lost what constitutes the greatest happiness of mankind. Freethinkers, in spreading their doctrines, take from Christians the only thing that makes life worth living; the only thing that enables them to endure it and that supports them under its troubles. The foregoing is another of those propositions that look well. But by looking around one will see Freethinkers everywhere going about very jolly, quite absurdly oblivious of the duty they are under to invest themselves with the degree of dolefulness requisite to corroboration of their pious friends' theory. What Freethinker has felt a loss of happiness upon discarding the Christian belief? How many Freethinkers cannot testify to increased cheerfulness and appreciation of life?

Freethinkers are also expected to be unhappy from another cause. There is alleged to be in the world of science into which we would usher mankind a lack of human feeling. There is in it a lack of material for emotion. It contains nothing congeneric, congenial to man. In

its inconceivable spaces, inexorable laws, unassimilable minerals, is found nothing capable of raising or filling man's heart. The scientific beliefs are "unsatisfying," "innutritive." Sometimes they are "cold," "frigid." What needs to be said to all this? Simply what we said before. Look about and see. Look about and see whether scientists and Freethinkers are less happy or more happy than Christians. Nothing further in disproof is required.

Surely it is well sometimes in making statements to construct them so that they will have some connection, some faint relation, with facts. Artemus Ward said that a comic paper is the better for having a few jokes in it; perhaps theories about facts are the better for having some distant correspondence to the facts.—*Truthseeker*.

THE PEOPLE.

BRING me to life necessitous and hard
To manhood pressed by squalor and disease—
At odds with fortune. Let me be the hard
Of struggling beggars. I would sing to these;
For if such bold hearts held me in regard
How should I love the drowsy halls of ease?

O! not for me the smooth melodious strain,
The polished phrase, the sweet and fainting close,
Luxurious chimes, nor dreamy idle pain,
Nor thought that from the cultured soul o'erflows.
Ah! well I know such themes would be in vain;
The wild heart feels but as the wild heart knows.

Bring me to life—mock me no more with shams—
The empty show of things sans blood and motion,
And save me from the sin that slays and damns—
Content in mine own ease, that poisoned potion
Give to aspirants for the heavenly palms
To help them in their slavish, sleek, devotion.

Let me be free of fashion's paltry sway
To sing of hunger, nakedness and storm,
Of toil that wastes the human heart away,
Hollows the eyes, and bends the slender form.
But he who battens on it day by day
Should feel my curse where he lies smug and warm.

The people!—life-blood of the nation's heart;
Whom the priest passes with averted eye
And bids them—standing daintily apart—
To starve and be content, to starve and die,
For Heaven hath thus allotted them their part,
And so upon the further side goes by.

The people! Who shall tell them of my love?
Or how my heart beats evermore with theirs?
My song shall tell and these professions proof.
But could my heart express the thought it bears,
My magic song the heavens and earth should move,
To grant them surer answer to their prayers.

T. E. M.

HUXLEY ON THE GOSPEL MIRACLES.

We are told that the gospels contain a true revelation of the spiritual world—a proposition which, in one sense of the word "spiritual," I should not think it necessary to dispute. But, when it is taken to signify that everything we are told about the world of spirits in these books is infallibly true; that we are bound to accept the demonology which constitutes an inseparable part of their teaching; and to profess belief in a supernaturalism as gross as that of any primitive people—it is at any rate permissible to ask why? Science may be unable to define the limits of possibility, but it cannot escape from the moral obligation to weigh the evidence in favor of any alleged wonderful occurrence; and I have endeavored to show that the evidence for the Gadarene miracle is altogether worthless. We have simply three, partially discrepant, versions of a story, about the primitive form, the origin, and the authority for which we know absolutely nothing. But the evidence in favor of the Gadarene miracle is as good as that for any other.

BOOK CHAT.

Mr. J. J. Brown, of 300 Cathcart-road, Glasgow, has sent us a brochure of eighty pages, which he calls the *Eternal News*. Some indication of the author's peculiarity appears on the title-page, which announces that the *Eternal News* is for January 1, 1901. ("Look out for the next in the year 2001.") This shows a screw loose somewhere. But, if a "crank," the author is a thinking one, or we should not have read his production, which indeed displays his agility in those mental gymnastics in which metaphysical Scotsmen delight. The reader who tries to follow the author's thought will confess to having taken some vigorous exercise even though he laments he "hasn't got much forrader."

* * *

Mr. Brown reminds us of the late William Honeyman Gillespie, author of the *Necessary Existence of Deity*. He desires to demonstrate that which, if actually existent, ought to need no demonstration. The *Eternal News* concerns time, space, substance, motion, and shapes, which are affirmed to be "the Entire Total of All Being or Existence." Perhaps the simple reader will ask where then is room for God and Satan, in both of whom the author believes? Well, they come in under "Substance," which is affirmed to be "conscious spirit." Poor old Matter is jockeyed out of court and treated as a bogie ghost, which spirit or spirits by "will-pressure" play any game they like with.

* * *

Mr. Brown is bent on constructing a scheme of the universe, a compendium of the system of things. Undaunted by the failure of predecessors, he too will build a tower whose top reaches heaven, though the result be, as with most system-building, but confusion of tongues. He advances a series of thirty-four propositions—"Truths" he calls them—which, like Jacob's ladder, lead up to the clouds. The first rung is very simple. "Time is neither space, nor substance, nor shapes, but simple time." This getting upstairs is a good deal like climbing a squirrel's cage. The next fourteen "truths" may also be admitted with little suspicion that Jacob's ladder is circular and founded on a dream. But "Truth 16" announces that "spirit is substance, because it must occupy or fill a space"; and further comments that spirit "can throw itself into any shape it chooses." Now Mr. Brown himself defines "spirit" as that which is "conscious." The definition refutes the idea that spirit is infinite and eternal; for to be conscious is a relative term, implying there is something external to be conscious of.

* * *

Mr. Brown, perhaps to meet this, identifies matter and spirit. "Matter is spirit and spirit is matter; much matter lies in the spirit of this truth, which to a true spirit matters much." Then when we take our meals we convert spirit, God, or Devil—manifesting under the guise of beefsteak or porter—into the appearance of chyme or chyle. Part of the Eternal Infinite Spirit becomes a part of ourselves, and another part may serve for purposes of manure. Such is the result of Mr. Brown's philosophy.

* * *

But how does the appearance of matter arise? Mr. Brown answers, "The Ultimate particles begin to be by Will pressure." Will is the creator of motions and of shapes. Mr. Brown almost flies in a frenzy at the notion of inherent gravity. He says, "the idea of 'attraction' as a cause, or as having even any existence at all is one of the most odious and idiotic that has ever blasted the brains of men." Strong words do not make a strong argument. Attraction is a name for a fact. What fact is represented by will pressure? Mr. Brown will demonstrate the force of attraction by lying flat in his sleep long before he creates anything by will pressure.

* * *

The maddest part of Mr. Brown's production is at the end, where he cites "the scriptures upon the subject," and picks out texts which seem to support the Brownian interpretation of things in general. Had he looked at his scriptures critically he might have found that they identified "spirit" with "breath," and that the notion of a spirit-god grew out of an anthropomorphic ghost.

* * *

Particulus: His Religious Progress is a rhymed argument for Deism. The author dismisses all dogmatic theology, and declares "God's highest service lies in serving man." It is published by Williams and Norgate.

The Professor, and Other Poems (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co.) exhibits thought and culture. The second poem in the volume, "Doubts and Duty," is the apology of a clergyman, whose inmost thought of his creed is

Whoso believes it holds what cannot be,
And desecrates his sacred temple, Thought,
By harboring in its shrine a paltry lie.

But who finds many reasons for maintaining his position in the Church, the principal being that he has no substitute for the crutch which he thinks helps others, though he himself perceives it to be worm-eaten and rotten; and then

This parsonage has a pleasant, pretty site.

Another poem, "Sunday," begins brusquely—

I don't believe in Sunday, or the cant
Which makes a seventh day sacred to a God,
Which takes delight in mankind's misery,
And calls that holy which ascetic is.

The author pleads for playing tennis in the face of the church goers.

A man is bound to protest 'gainst a lie,
And not stand cap in hand to let it pass
Because his neighbor's earnest in the lie.

* * *

M. Ranc looks on Renan as a reactionary in the direction of mysticism. He says: "He left the Church. It is true, but he gave fresh life to the religious sentiment. He has been to Auguste Comte, to Littré, to Proudhon, what Jean Jacques Rousseau was to Voltaire, to Diderot, to the Encyclopædists—a reactionary. He resuscitated a new Jesus, appropriate to the time; the first was enough. He is the creator of a delicate but insipid religiosity. From this point of view Renan's influence has been great, but deplorable."

* * *

Shelley's poems had a terribly small circulation during his lifetime. His *Prometheus Unbound*, as he himself says in one of his letters, he did not expect to see twenty copies disposed of. We believe that a less number than this was sold. One of his critics said it was well called "*Prometheus Unbound*," for whoever would think of binding it. Now, however, an original edition would fetch a very large sum of money. Nor is this all. Shelley has apparently an ever-extending circle of readers—or at least of purchasers. Edition after edition of his poems is put into the book market, and a sixpenny edition has actually been published by the Messrs. Dicks.

* * *

Colonel Ingersoll has a brilliant article on Renan in the *North American Review*. We have issued it in pamphlet form.

DEEDS AND CREEDS.

THIS is what the sages teach,
Better far to work than preach,
This is what they always say,
Better far to work than pray.

Better a kind and loving deed
Than wordy cant, or wordy creed,
Better a loaf to a hungry one,
Than mumbled prayers or organ's tone.

Better for cold, a good warm fire,
Than all the prayers beneath church spire,
Better by far to dry the tear
Than cause its flow through slavish fear.

You better thus a heart can draw,
Than drive by fear of broken law;
And all the bolts of wrathful Jove
Will fail to win like deeds of love.

H. M. RICHARDS.

Science has nothing to do with Christianity except so far as the habit of scientific thought makes a man cautious in admitting evidence. For myself I do not believe there ever has been any revelation.—*Charles Darwin*.

If we are told a man is religious we still ask what are his morals? But if we hear at first that he has honest morals, and is a man of natural justice and good temper, we seldom think of the other question, whether he is religious and devout?—*Shafesbury*.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.

President, G. W. FOOTE.

PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTS.

SECULARISM teaches that conduct should be based on reason and knowledge. It knows nothing of divine guidance of interference; it excludes supernatural hopes and fears; it regards happiness as man's proper aim, and utility as his moral guide.

Secularism affirms that Progress is only possible through Liberty, which is at once a right and a duty; and therefore seeks to remove every barrier to the fullest equal freedom of thought, action and speech.

Secularism declares that theology is condemned by reason as superstitious and by experience as mischievous, and assails it as the historic enemy of progress.

Secularism accordingly seeks to dispel superstition; to spread education; to disestablish religion; to rationalise morality; to promote peace; to dignify labor; to extend material well-being; and to realise the self-government of the people.

MEMBERSHIP.

Any person is eligible as a member on signing the following declaration:—

"I desire to join the National Secular Society, and I pledge myself, if admitted as a member, to co-operate in promoting its objects."

Name

Address

Occupation

Active or Passive

Dated this.....day of.....18

This Declaration should be transmitted to the Secretary with a subscription; and, on admission of the member, a certificate will be issued by the Executive.

The minimum subscription for individual members is one shilling per year; all beyond that amount is optional, every member being left to fix his subscription according to his means and interest in the cause.

Members are classed as *active* or *passive*. Passive members are those who cannot allow their names to be published. Active members are those who do not object to the publication of their names, and are ready to co-operate openly in the Society's work.

Fill up the above form and forward it, with subscription (as much, or as little, as you think just to yourself and the cause), to Mr. Robert Forder, sec., 28 Stonecutter Street, London, E.C.; or to a local Branch Secretary.

PROFANE JOKES.

A hairdresser hopes to flourish in this world, and in that world that is to comb.

"Is your husband addicted to the use of alcoholic stimulants?" asked the new parson of Mrs. Jerker. "Not he," was the response. "In fact, he's only got one failing, and that is drinking."

Rev. Spouter's Little Boy: "Oh, ma, what is in that pretty box pa brought home last night?" Mrs. Spouter: "That is his new microscope, dear." Rev. S. L. B.: "And will he be able to magnify the Lord with it?"

He—"Did it ever occur to you how difficult it must have been for Solomon to propose to a thousand maidens?" She—"Yes; but not half so difficult as some of the men of the present day find it to propose to one."

It would seem that they who lead
 Christian lives should win the meed
 Of all Christians' approbation; but one shivers
 To reflect that, after all,
 'Tis the heathen cannibal
 Who appreciates most keenly Christian livers.

SUNDAY MEETINGS.

[Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday, and be marked "Lecture Notices," 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): 7.30, C. James, "Christianity the Foe of Liberty and Progress" (2d. and 4d.); 9.15, social gathering. Tuesday at 8, dancing. Wednesday at 8, dramatic class. Thursday at 8 committee meeting.

Bethnal Green—Libra Hall, 78 Libra-road, Roman-road: 11.30, debating class; 7.30, H. Snell will lecture (free). Monday at 9, C. Cohen's science class (physical geography). Wednesday at 9, C. Cohen's class on "Spencer's Ethics." Thursday at 8.30, debate, "Revolution or Reform—which?" opened by Dr. Creaghe (free). Saturday at 8.30, free concert and dance.

Camberwell—61 New Church-road, S.E.: 11, debating class, R. N. McDougall (L.P.D.L.), "Laissez Faire Vindicated"; 7.30, B. Hyatt, "The Holy Ghost and the Blessed Trinity"; preceded by a dramatic study of "Gabriel Grub."

East London Ethical Society, Assembly Rooms, Cottage-grove (near Grove-road), Mile End-road: 7, Corrie Grant, "Morality in Politics" (free).

Edmonton—North Middlesex Hall, Fore-street: 6.30, music; 7, a lecture.

Hall of Science, 142 Old-street, E.C.: 11.15, G. W. Foote, "General Booth as a Social Savior" (free); 6.30, musical selections; 7, G. W. Foote, "The Birthday of God" (3d., 6d., and 1s) Wednesday at 8.15, A. B. Moss, "The Dark Side of Christianity" (free).

Hammersmith—Hammersmith Club, 1 The Grove: Thursday at 8, C. Cohen, "Evolution v. Special Creation."

Islington—Wellington Hall (minor), Almeida-street, Upper-street: 7, J. Rowney, "The Resurrection of Jesus" (free). A business meeting at Milner Lodge, Waterloo-terrace, Upper-street, at 3.30.

Milton Hall, Hawley-crescent, Kentish Town-road, N.W.: 7.30, Joseph Hyder (I.N.L.), "Land as a National Trust." Monday at 8.30, social meeting for members and friends in the lower hall.

Notting Hill Gate—"Duke of York," Kensington-place, Silver-street: 7.30, adjourned meeting of West London Branch.

Progressive Association, Penton Hall, 81 Pentonville-road: 7, W. S. Manning, "Fruits and Nuts, the Perfect diet" (free); preceded by vocal and instrumental music.

Walthamstow—Workmen's Hall, High-street: Thursday at 8, C. J. Hunt, "Christ: God, Man, or Myth?" (free).

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Battersea Park-gates: 11.15, G. Easton, "What must I do to be Saved?"

Hyde Park (near Marble-arch): 11.30, Mr. St. John, "Free Will and Necessity."

COUNTRY.

Aberdeen—Oddfellows' Hall Buildings (Hall No. 4, upstairs): 6.30, W. N. Allan, "The Rise and Progress of Rationalism" (free).

Birmingham—Baskerville Hall, Crescent, Cambridge-street: Charles Watts, 11, "Thoughts on Christmas"; 7, "The Doom of Christian England—a Reply to the Bishop of Worcester and the Rev. H. F. Pegg."

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

Bristol—Shepherd's Hall, Old Market-street: 2.30, debate, "The Irish Problem," opened by J. White.

Chatham—Secular Hall, Queen's-road, New Brompton: A. B. Moss, 11, "Here and Hereafter"; 7, "The Doom of the Gods"; Sunday-school for children at 2.45.

Glasgow—Ex-Mission Hall, 110 Brunswick-street: James Pre-looker, 11.30, "The Comparative Position of Women in Christianity"; 2.30, "Sects and Nonconformity in Russia"; 6.30, "Russia in the Clutches of Autocracy."

Hanley—Temperance Hall, New-street: Dr. T. R. Allinson, 11, "Health and How to Keep it"; 7, "Temperance: from a Doctor's Standpoint."

Hull—St. George's Hall, 8 Albion-street: 7, W. Anyan, "Defensio non Provocatio."

Leeds—Crampton's Temperance Hotel, Briggate: 7, Mr. Fisher, "Theosophy—a Reply to Mrs. Besant."

Liverpool—Oddfellows' Hall, St. Anne-street: 11 Tontine Society; 7, Mr. Small, B.Sc., "Has Man a Soul?—a Reply to the Rev. Mr. Howard." Dec. 20, Tontine divide.

Manchester N.S.S., Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints: James Hooper, 3, "God's Favorites, Past and Present"; 6.30, "The Story of the Life, Birth, and Death of Christ." Dec. 20, T. Griffiths will recite *The Merchant of Venice*.

Newcastle-on-Tyne—Eldon Hall, 2 Clayton-street: 3, monthly meeting of members; 7, G. Selkirk, "Morality and the Supernatural."

Nottingham—Secular Hall, Beck-street: 7, A. R. Atkey, "Fallacies of Socialism."

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

Portsmouth—Wellington Hall, Wellington-street, Southsea: 3, mutual improvement class; 6, committee meeting; 7, Mr. Freake, "Religious Intolerance."

Sheffield—Hall of Science, Rockingham-street: J. M. Robertson, 11, "The Meaning of Atheism"; 3, "What Connection has Christ with Christmas?"; 7, "What has Christianity Done?"

South Shields—Thornton's Variety Theatre: 11, Stanley Jones, "The Cooling of Hell"; 3 and 7, debate between Stanley Jones and Robert Grice on "Is there a Future Life?"

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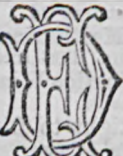
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