

The Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

[Sub-Editor, J. M. WHEELER.

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SPECIAL.

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ARE ATHEISTS WICKED?

ONE of the most effective arts of priestcraft has been the misrepresentation and slander of heretics. To give the unbeliever a bad name is to prejudice believers against all communication with him. By this means a twofold object is achieved; first, the faithful are protected from the contagion of scepticism; secondly, the notion is propagated that there is something essentially immoral involved in, or attendant upon, unorthodox opinions: and thus the prevalent religious ideas of the age become associated with the very preservation and stability of the moral order of human society.

This piece of trickery cannot, of course, be played upon the students of civilisation, who, as Mill remarked, are aware that many of the most valuable contributions to human improvement have been the work of men who knew, and rejected, the Christian faith. But it easily imposes on the multitude, and it will never be abandoned until it ceases to be profitable.

Sometimes it takes the form of idle stories about the death-beds of Freethinkers, who are represented as deploring their ill-spent lives, and bewailing the impossibility of recalling the wicked opinions they have put into circulation. At other times it takes the form of exhibiting their failings, without the slightest reference to their virtues, as the sum and substance of their characters. When these methods are not sufficient, recourse is had to insinuation. Particular sceptics are spared, perhaps, but Freethinkers are depicted—like the poor in Tennyson's "Northern Farmer"—as bad in the lump. It is broadly hinted that it is a moral defect which prevents them from embracing the popular creed; that they reject what they do not wish to believe; that they hate the restraints of religion, and therefore reject its principles; that their unbelief, in short, is only a cloak for sensual indulgence or an excuse for evading irksome obligations.

We are so accustomed to this monstrous theory of scepticism in religious circles, that it did not astonish us, or give us the least surprise, to read the following paragraph in the *Christian Commonwealth*:

"Free Life, and No Compulsory Virtue, was the title of a placard borne by a pamphlet-seller on the public highway a few days ago. What the contents of the pamphlet were we do not know, but the title is a suggestive sign of the times, and a rather more than usually plain statement of what a good deal of modern doubt amounts to. Lord Tennyson was severely taken to task a few years ago for making the Atheist a villain in his 'Promise of May,' but he was about right. Much of the doubt of the day is only an outcome of the desire to discredit and throw off the restraints of religion and moral law in the name of freedom, wrongly used. Free love,

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free life, free divorce, free Sundays, in the majority of cases, are but synonyms for licence. Those who hold the Darwinian doctrine of descent from a kind of ape may yet see it proved by a reversion to the beast, if men succeed in getting all the false and pernicious freedom they want."

Now, in reply to this paragraph, we have first to observe that our contemporary takes Lord Tennyson's name in vain. The villain of the "Promise of May" is certainly an Agnostic, but are not the villains of many other plays Christians? Lord Tennyson does not make the rascal's wickedness the logical result of his principles; indeed, although our contemporary seems ignorant of the fact, he disclaimed any such intention. A press announcement was circulated by his eldest son, on his behalf, that the rascal was meant to be a sentimentalist and ne'er-do-well, who, whatever his opinions, would have come to a bad end. When the *Commonwealth*, therefore, talks of Lord Tennyson as "about right," it shows, in a rather vulgar way, the danger of incomplete information. Were we to copy its manners we might use a swifter phrase.

That Atheists, in the name of freedom, throw off the restraints of moral law, is a statement which we defy the *Commonwealth* to prove, or in the slightest degree to support; and we will even go to the length of suggesting how it might undertake the task.

Turpitude of character must betray itself. Moral corruption can no more be hidden than physical corruption. Wickedness "will out," like murder or small-pox. A man's wife discovers it; his children shun him instead of clinging about his knees; his neighbors and acquaintances eye him with suspicion or dislike; his evil nature pulsates through an ever-widening circle of detection; and in time his bad passions are written upon his features, in the infallible lines of mouth and eyes and face. How easy, then, it should be to pick out these Atheists. The most evil-looking men should belong to that persuasion. But do they? We invite our contemporary to a trial. Let it inquire the religious opinions of a dozen or two, and see if there is an Atheist among them.

Again, a certain amount of evil disposition must produce a certain percentage of criminal conduct. Accordingly the gaols should contain a large proportion of Atheists. But do they? Statistics prove they do not. When the present writer was imprisoned for "blasphemy," and was asked his religion, he answered "None," to the wide-eyed astonishment of the official who put the question. Atheists were scarce in the establishment. Catholics were there, and red tickets were on their cell-doors; Protestants were there, and white tickets marked their apartments; Jews were there, and provision was made for their special observances; but the Atheist was the *rara avis*, the very phoenix of Holloway Gaol.

Let us turn to another method of investigation. During the last ten years four members have been expelled from the House of Commons. One of them was not expelled in the full sense of the word; he was, however, thrust by brute force from the precincts

of the House. His name was Charles Bradlaugh, and he was an Atheist. But what was his crime? Simply this: he differed from his fellow members as to his competence to take the parliamentary oath, and the ultimate event proved that he was right and they were wrong. Now what were the crimes of the three other members, who were completely and absolutely expelled. Captain Verney was found guilty of procreation for seduction; Mr. Hastings was found guilty of embezzlement; and Mr. De Cobain was pronounced guilty of evading justice, while charged with unnatural offences. Mr. Jabez Spencer Balfour might also have been expelled, if he had not accepted the Chiltern Hundreds. Now all these *real* delinquents were Christians, and even ostentatious Christians. Compare them with Charles Bradlaugh, the Atheist, and say which side has the greatest cause for shame and humiliation.

Are Atheists conspicuous in the Divorce Court? Is it not Christian reputations that are smirched in that Inquisition? Do Atheists, or any species of unbelievers, appear frequently before the public as promoters of bubble companies, and systematic robbers of orphans and widows? Is it not generally found, in the case of great business collapses, that the responsible persons are Christians? Is it not a fact that their profession of Christianity is usually in proportion to the depth of their rascality?

Not long since the Bishop of Chester, backed up by Mr. Waugh, of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, publicly declared that the worst ill-users of little ones were artisan Secularists. He was challenged to give evidence of the assertion, but he preferred to maintain what is called "a dignified silence." Mr. Waugh was challenged to produce proofs from the Society's archives, and he also declined. It is enough to affirm infamy against Freethinkers; proof is unnecessary; or, rather, it is unobtainable. Singularly, there have been several striking cases of brutal treatment of children since Mr. Waugh and Bishop Jayne committed themselves to this indefensible assertion, and in no instance was the culprit a Secularist, though some of them, including Mrs. Montagu, were devout Christians.

There are other methods of inquiry into the wickedness of Atheists, but we have indicated enough to set the *Commonwealth* at work, and we invite it to begin forthwith. And while it is getting ready we beg to observe that theologians have always described "freedom" as "license," whereas it is nothing of the kind. Freedom is the golden mean between license and slavery. The breaking of arbitrary fetters, forged by ignorance and intolerance, does not mean a fall into loose living. The heretic in religion, while resenting outside control, by his very perception of the vast and far-reaching consequences of human action, is often chained to "the most timid sanctities of life."

With respect to "the Darwinian theory of descent from a kind of ape," we have a word for our contemporary. The annual meeting of the British Association was held at Oxford in 1860. Darwin's *Descent of Man* had recently been published, and the air was full of controversy. Bishop Wilberforce, in the course of a derisive speech, turned to Professor Huxley and asked whether it was on the mother's or father's side that his grandfather had been an ape. Huxley replied that man had no reason to be ashamed of having an ape for a grandfather. "If there is an ancestor," he continued, "whom I should feel shame in recalling it would be a *man*"—one who meddled with scientific questions he did not understand, only to obscure them by aimless rhetoric, and indulgence in "eloquent digressions and appeals to religious prejudice." This rebuke was administered thirty-three years ago, but it is still worth remembering; and perhaps the *Commonwealth* may find in it something applicable to itself. G. W. FOOTE.

PRAYER.

PRAYER is founded on the belief that God can be influenced by supplication. This is the view distinctly announced in the parable of the importunate widow (Luke xviii.) Its basis is in the conception of God as a human chieftain. It implies that the Omniscient needs an occasional, or indeed constant, reminder of human wants, and that the Immutable may change its purposes at man's entreaty. The man of prayer is indeed a true infidel, for instead of reposing in perfect trust, he deems it necessary to more or less delicately intimate to Omnipotence the manner in which the universe should be managed. Paine well said, "A man does not serve God when he prays, for it is himself that he is trying to serve; and as to hiring or paying men to pray, as if the Deity needed instruction, it is in my opinion an abomination."* Thomas Bradburn, when a young man, prayed for divine direction in a love affair, and ended with the appeal, "But O Lord, let it be Betsy." This is the meaning of most prayers—"Do as thou wilt, O Lord, but O Lord, let it be Betsy." What a queer notion they must have of their God who fancy that his plans can be changed by the pleadings of a little creature on one of the satellites of one of the myriad suns that make up the galaxy of heaven.

The more barbarous people are the more they rely on agencies external to themselves. The savage African never omits paying his worship to his fetish. In most backward lands the observances of religion come before all other duties. When the hour of prayer sounds from the minaret, the Mohammedan suspends all other business and prostrates himself in humble adoration. The Catholic is less devout than the Mohammedan, and the Protestant less than the Catholic; and just in proportion as they are less devout they are more self-reliant and enterprising.

In Thibet, the land of the Mahatmas, they mount their prayers on wind or watermills, that they may continually be presented to heaven. Who can say the praying machine is not as efficacious as the praying parson? Under the reign of Law, the prayerless saint and praying saint are on a common level. Moody thinks his prayers saved "The Spree," but most people would rather be on a tight pleasure-craft where the crew were all Atheists than on board a leaky ship freighted with the whole house of Convocation. Not all the prayers of the saints would keep her afloat when her seams gave way. Said the Highland boatman, when out on the loch with two sky-pilots one stormy day, "The little 'un may pray, but the big 'un will have to pull."

Semi-rational religionists like the Unitarians, whose position on this question is stated in T. F. Clarke's *Christian Doctrine of Prayer*,† say prayer should not be for temporal benefits—that is, they would withdraw it from any region where its merits could be tested into a realm of vague nebulousness where anything may be asserted and nothing contradicted. But this attitude is in blank contrast to the preaching and practice recorded in the Bible. Temporal blessings were just what the old Jewish saints did pray for. The Bible affirms that, in answer to prayer, a part of Palestine was visited by a long drought, and afterwards copious rain; that God's purpose to destroy a stiff-necked people was changed; that the sun and moon stopped in their course, and that a king's life was lengthened, the shadow on a dial being actually turned backward as a token. Christ said, "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." If you are perfectly sure of crumpets and best butter, you may safely pray "Give us this day our daily bread." James

* Letter to Samuel Adams in *Theological Works*, p. 73.

† Boston American Association.

says, "The prayer of faith shall save the sick." The only people who show they credit this by dispensing with the services of doctors and calling in the elders to pray, as prescribed by the apostle, are known as "Peculiar People"; and peculiar they must be to fancy such doctrines suited for the present age.

It is a favorite saying that "God helps those who help themselves"—which means he has the credit of other people's labors. This is finely satirised by James Thomson (B.V.):

God helpeth him who helps himself,
They preach to us as a fact,
Which seems to lay up God on the shelf,
And leave the man to act.

Which seems to mean—You do the work,
Have all the trouble and pains,
While God, that indolent grand Old Turk,
Gets credit for the gains.

Carlyle was reluctantly constrained to say of God, "He does nothing." We say so too; and we add that to maintain myriads of ministers to a being who does nothing is too expensive a luxury; at any rate, for those whose lives are a struggle for existence from day to day.

J. M. WHEELER.

"A PENDING CATASTROPHE."

It is perfectly true that superstition dies hard, and this perhaps is not surprising when we consider its delusive nature and the fostering it has had during ages of intellectual darkness. Theological superstition is based on fear, ignorance, and the desire for selfish gratification. It ignores reason, pays no heed to knowledge, and thrives amidst misdirected wonder and perverted imagination. Fortunately, when the Church ceased to have absolute control of general instruction, and when secular education received a national impulse, a heavy blow was given to superstition, but it will be the work of time before its fatal consequences entirely disappear.

The city of Birmingham is at the present time placarded with flaming bills headed "Christ in the earth again," announcing four lectures by Mr. Robert Roberts, of Christadelphian fame, which he is giving in the Town Hall on four successive Sunday evenings. His object is to prove that very shortly Christ will be "in the earth again," and then the greatest catastrophe that the world has ever seen is to take place. Why "in" the earth instead of on it, we do not quite understand. It appears that this "coming" cry is an old one with Mr. Roberts, for we are informed that he issued a similar proclamation twenty years ago in Birmingham. Tourists in Switzerland are constantly being surprised by the grandeur of fresh scenery of wonderful beauty when crossing mountains of snow or climbing rugged rocks. Knowing the effect that such sudden changes of scene produce upon some people, the guides, before the travellers encounter the various transformations, exclaim, "Beware of sublime emotion." Mr. Roberts very considerably holds out a warning to his benighted followers who are weak enough to accept him as a guide over mountains of prophetic delusions, and he exclaims, "Beware! You are about to behold a scene that will eclipse all that has hitherto been witnessed." Like the late Mr. Barnum's show, the coming catastrophe will be unparalleled.

Now apart from the utter folly of this palpable superstition, we may ask: What, in the name of common sense, is Christ's purpose in coming again? If at his previous visit he was the cause of the fall of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews, it is possible he has some further mischief in view. But where is the evidence that Mary's son, late of Judea, now of the kingdom of heaven, is going to remove to new apartments "in the earth?" In the syllabus announcing Mr. Roberts's lectures, we read:

"The first appearing of Christ, a page that cannot be blotted from history." Probably there is truth in this, inasmuch as it would be difficult to blot out from history what was never there. He adds: "The second coming of Christ, a certainty arising out of the first: the time for its occurrence at the door." Until Mr. Roberts, or someone else, proves the certainty "of the first advent of the orthodox Christ, we need not concern ourselves about his second appearance. When the term history is used, unless the phrase, "sacred history" is mentioned, it is understood that some record outside the Bible which is called "profane history," is referred to. Now, if there is a page of such history that proves the "certainty" that Christ was on this earth about eighteen hundred years ago, it should be produced. Up to the present we have not seen it. It is possible that two thousand years ago, a man by the name of Jesus lived, but it does not, therefore, follow that he was the fancied Christ talked of to-day in the churches.

Mr. Roberts tells us that the object of "Christ's second coming" is to "overthrow the present social and political system and the establishment of a new order of things." This is a similar announcement to the one issued when Christ is alleged to have made his "first appearance," which ended in a fiasco. Is it not a piece of theological audacity to attempt to foster upon the world a second hallucination? The present condition of society is the result of the growth of ages, and no doubt it needs improvement. That, however, is not to be effected by the overthrowing process, but rather by the wise application of the power of the people based on increased knowledge. Evolution lends no sanction to the mistaken idea that all things can be transformed in a moment, either by Jesus or by any other person. Such a sudden change is foreign to the scientific mind, and is absurd in the light of political or social forces, as may be seen in the revolutions of England, America, and France. As Jesus did not effect the promised revolution in society the first time he is supposed to have made the effort, why should we be expected to trust him again? No proof is adduced that since that period he has acquired additional revolutionary power. In fact, we have no information that during the last two thousand years he has even given the subject any thought, much less that he has prepared himself for the great event. Besides, if Jesus is the controlling power in the world that his followers represent him to be, he need not trouble to come to the earth to carry out any reform. It is only necessary that he should exercise that power from his present "exalted position," and appoint Mr. Roberts as his prime minister, giving him adequate support, and then, as a matter of course, the thing would be done. Certainly it will be requisite that Mr. Roberts should believe in the ability of his Master, and also in the genuineness of the mission undertaken. If this is done, all that can be accomplished under such circumstances will probably be achieved, for we read in "God's Word," "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do."

Amongst the "signs" that this catastrophe is really "at the door" are the "threatening demands of the international democracy, backed up with dynamite outrage and labor riots, the disappearance of the temporal power of the Pope, the exhausted state of Turkey, and the terrible sufferings of the Jews in Russia." Now what can these events possibly have to do with Christ any more than with Mahommed or Buddha? Where in the New Testament is there any reference made to an international democracy, dynamite outrage, the condition of Turkey, or the doings of the Emperor of Russia? There are other important events that have recently taken place that could have been mentioned with equal, if not with greater force, as requiring a change in "the order of

things." Such, for instance, as the floods in Australia, the failure of the Panama Canal, the recent terrible, heart-rending earthquakes, and the collapse of building societies, which have produced untold misery and starvation among a large portion of the population of the world. If the "second coming" of Jesus would prevent a repetition of these and of similar calamities, the sooner he appears the better.

It is indeed a "sorry sight" to behold people so stupid and ignorant or apathetic, as to not only tolerate the Pope, the Sultan, and the Czar of Russia, but to bow down before them with feelings of abject obedience and even adoration. That is indeed bad enough, but is it not also sad and humiliating to know that in England, surrounded by modern high-class literature, the work of our greatest thinkers, by the marvellous results of science, and by progressive institutions, men are to be found impervious to the influence of such elevating agencies? Here is a man like Mr. Roberts, to whom all these opportunities for training his mind are accessible, occupying his time in trying to persuade credulous people to believe in the reappearance of a young man who is said to have suffered an ignominious death two thousand years ago as a blasphemer, and as a disturber of the public tranquillity. Is it consistent for us to condemn the superstitions of the Romans, the Turks, and the Russians, and at the same time to regard this man as a shining light of unadulterated intelligence? His delusion is not a new one, for, slightly altered, it dates back prior to the Christian era. Then as now, men had great expectations of a "coming," but they were doomed to disappointment. Now arises another John the Baptist, the self-appointed herald of one who is to cast all the empires into oblivion with one sweep of his celestial broom. Mrs. Partington stemming the tide of the Atlantic with her mop, was child's play compared with this predicted transformation of the institutions of the world.

Is this sort of delusion to go on for ever? It is not very complimentary to our boasted intellectual progress to find "educated" persons spending hundreds of pounds in the endeavor to make other people as fanatical as they are themselves on such a superstition as the "second coming of Christ in the earth." Is it, after all, true that credulity is not only human, but that it is to be eternal? It may be said that this is a harmless form of lunacy, which serves as a sort of amusement for a certain class of the community. But if we concede this to Mr. Roberts and to his deluded followers, how can we reasonably condemn all the other fanatical fads that only differ from his in the amount of misery they inflict on humanity?

CHARLES WATTS.

JOSEPH SYMES ON FREETHOUGHT METHOD3.

The world to us is mostly bush or forest, a world filled with rankest growth of superstition. The forests of Brazil are not more luxuriant and entangled. Wooden saws and polished tin-axes will never remove all this. Vigorous, rough, pioneer work is required; and the people who have to do it cannot always, if ever, appear in ballroom toggerly and holiday outfit. The life of a Secularist is a battle, and must so continue for many years. I should like to drop axe and saw and do a little kidgloving. Battling for its own sake was never one of my pursuits. I would rather use a plane or a paint-brush than a woodman's axe; but then, who is to fell the overgrown, gnarled, old fungus of superstition? They have to be hewn down and burned; and if I take to the dilettante style of advocacy, there will be one less pioneer in the field.

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E. M. VANCE, Asst.-Sec.

RELIGION IN THE WEST.

DURING a recent trip to British Columbia and Washington I kept on the alert for signs of progress in Liberal thought. At Winnipeg on a Sunday I found that God reigned supreme and the usual stagnation prevailed. No cars run in the streets, and though I hired a hack, as it was engaged by the hour the driver's conscience would not allow the horses to break the Sabbath on a trot. My next stopping-place was Revelstoke, the irreligion of which may be guessed from a reference to it that I saw in the journal of a rival boom-town. A man in Revelstoke died. He was a tough character and found himself speedily consigned to Hades. He had no hopes of a happy hereafter, and when he looked about the place he exclaimed with surprise, "Why, this is heaven!" "No," he was told, "this is hell." "Well," he replied, "I came from Revelstoke, and this place is so much better, I thought it must be heaven."

All through the mining regions there was no church and no Sabbath. Work went on every day alike; the prospectors explored, the miners dug and blasted, and the stamp-mills rattled. I came one day to a town of five hundred people, and seeing one fine large building towering above all the rest, I thought at first, with my Quebec impressions uppermost, "There is the priest's house and the convent." I asked, "What building is that?" "The schoolhouse," was the reply. "Where is the church?" "We have none." "Oh," I exclaimed, "what a delightful place, where the best house is for the children and there is none whatever for God!" I travelled several hundred miles and never saw or heard of church or parson until one day I saw a large log-house abandoned when about half built. "What is that?" I asked of the driver. "Oh!" said he, "a minister came along one day and coaxed some of us into building a church for him. We started it, but we got discontented about it and left off. I worked two days on the damned thing!" The tone in which this was uttered expressed, more fully than a written volume could have done, the indifference and contempt that is generally felt toward religion by the working men of the West.

When I came to the large towns where the comforts of life were more abundant, there I found the parson rearing his church by the help of the ladies in concerts, and begging of the large-hearted and unreligious men who believed that the "gospel sharp" was entitled to a living and were willing to chip in something for his support, though saying "We don't want none of your damned religion."

In the large cities I inquired for Secular societies or avowed Freethinkers, but never could hear of them. At Salt Lake City, however, the clerk of the hotel responded to the question by saying, "While no one makes himself prominent in declaring his opinions, it is a fact that outside of the Mormons nearly all the men are Freethinkers. In the whole circle of my acquaintance I don't know of more than one or two men who are religious." With the exception of a few keen real estate dealers, who were Methodists on Sunday, I met with no sign of religious thought among all the men that I conversed with during a tour of nearly three months. Religion is dropping away from the practical men so insensibly that its disappearance excites no thought, and they are too indifferent to care to tear away its remaining rags.

The only truly religious people that I met were the Mormons. I could discover no particular difference between them and the Eastern Christians except that they were more thrifty and built better cities. After the law forbade polygamy and a few men were imprisoned, their God graciously gave a revelation forbidding polygamy, and now the chief difference is that they accept one more revelation than do the Christians. But it does not appear any more rational to despise one who believes in the revelation of Joseph Smith than one who accepts the revelation of St. John the Divine. The story is as credible that the angel Maroni showed the golden plates to Joseph as that another angel gave a little book to John to eat, which made his belly bitter; and yet the bitter belly believers persecute the golden plate saints. The appearance of the young people of the place speaks well for the system of plural marriage, which was based, professedly at least, not upon lust, but upon respect for maternity and consideration for the mother. A young man, six feet in height, in whose presence someone said, "Mormonism debases the race," replied, "I am the smallest of twenty-six brothers." After

seeing the works of these Mormons, I exclaimed to the caretaker of the Tabernacle, "A people who can build a city like this deserve to have their opinions respected."

One day while travelling on a mountain trail I overtook a train of pack-horses. The driver, mounted upon the hind horse, urged him along with leather thongs hanging from a broad strip of leather. When he dismounted he placed this strip over the horse's eyes as a blind to prevent his straying. What an emblem of religion is this blind, I thought. The priest uses it to scourge his victim as long as he can force him to do his will and when he has no use for him he uses it as a blind to prevent the dupe from making any researches on his own account. But the Western man, in the wild regions that are too uncomfortable for the men of God, too sparsely settled for the minions of the law, and too unceremonious for social leaders—free from the tyranny of the three big G's—God, Government, and Grundy—is brought by nearness to nature into harmony with the three L's—Liberty, Learning, and Love, the all-sufficient saviors. The spirit of the age, the spread of knowledge, the absorbing practicality of new pursuits, are all foes of superstition, and although hierarchies appear to gain material power individuals are outgrowing their sway and ere long will dethrone them.

—*Truthseeker.*

ROBERT C. ADAMS.

A LAY SERMON.

"Put your trust in God," the preacher said—

The while the people listened all intent.

"Since in his Holy Book ye all have read,

That from the highest heaven his Son he sent

To die for human kind. I say, Repent,

And put your trust in God?" Then up did start

A wild-eyed peasant from the listening throng,

Who did a newer, stranger Word impart—

Telling of years of trust and eke of wrong,

Of weaklings ever robbed and wrecked by he strong.

"Keep trustin' him, my brethren," said this man,

"As dogs and senseless cattle trust in us,

And never think past years for to scan

That poorer people ever get the wus

Of bed and board, and how the lawyer does

Ever and ever sell his laws to rich,

While we are forced to sell our toil low price:

To dig and delve, sow, reap, to hedge and ditch,

To spin and weave, to forge and make things nice,

And fetch from distant lands (for rich ones) scent and spice.

"See how the sportsman shooteth down the hawk,

That while ago was killing little birds.

Then listen to this soft-tongued preacher's talk

That speaks with such nice, easy, likely words—

Telling us that his God is not for lords,

But forceth down the mighty from their throne

And setteth up the humble in their place;

But mark ye 'tis when we are dead and gone—

Meanwhile we toil and starve. Aye, let us face

Our fate, and meekly put our trust in Heaven's grace.

"There is no subtleness in preacher's tale;

A plain unvarnished speech it is, I think.

Love ye your enemies, and ne'er assail

The hand that holds you down, but ever drink

The potion that God gives you; do not think

But he'll repay you with eternal light

After that ye have ended this short day.

If so ye never 'gainst your betters fight.

And now that I have soothly said my say,

I leave it to your counsel, serve me as ye may."

RON MAHON.

A Methodist church at Nankin has been sacked by the heathen Chinese, who cannot appreciate the beauties of the Bible and Christianity.

It appears that at the Missionary Conference in India 108 members voted in favor of not interfering with the Contagious Diseases Act, at which the *British Weekly* is highly indignant.

Respecting some intolerable twaddle which appears in the *Chester Diocesan Gazette*, the *Journalist* remarks that the reverend gentleman who wrote it "would stand a very poor chance of passing any practical examination arranged by the Institute of Journalists."

A PRAYER.

For the second coming of Christ, to be said by the faithful every night before retiring, to be followed by the Lord's Prayer, etc.

ALMIGHTY God, maker and creator of all things, including Western Australia; we miserable sinners beseech thee to send once more thy only son (who is of the same age as thyself) to die for us once more; for, O Lord, his first mission has been a failure, and there is not one upon earth who knows thee—(barring myself). They all pretend to know thee, good Lord, and have thy holy spirit; but, dear Lord, one calls the other a liar, and says he is possessed of an evil spirit; therefore, O merciful father and mother, send thy son again, we beseech thee, but do not send him to Nazareth as of yore, but send him to Perth, Western Australia. Thou knowest the place O God (at least I hope so). Thine handmaiden, O Lord, liveth in Murray-street, and is full of the Holy Ghost; and, O God, I verily believe the Holy Ghost is full of her too. Thine handmaiden she belongeth to thy chosen few, the Salvation Army; and, O God, thy ways are wonderful indeed. She is also betrothed to a carpenter called Joseph, than whom his other name is Muldoon. We now humbly beseech thee, O God, to send thy holy pigeon once more to thine handmaiden in Murray-street, but, O Lord, send it when Joseph is out, for he of his evil spirit and jealous, and if he caught the ghost fooling about his Mary, he might knock the stuffing out of thy Holy Ghost (providing there is any stuffing to knock out); therefore, O God, send Gabriel first to see if the coast is clear, and let him enter "over the garden wall," for, dear Lord, thine handmaiden liveth amongst the daughters of Moab and sons of Belial, and if they saw Gabriel come in by the front door they would give thy handmaiden an evil name; therefore, O God, do as directed, do it for thy name's sake, do it O God, and her soul will rejoice in the Lord her maker.

And now, O God, hear this our prayer we beseech thee, for verily if thou do not we will be all damned, therefore hear us good Lord, and send thy son (address as given above), and save us all from eternal damnation.—Amen.

—*Liberator.*

ONE OF THE FAITHFUL.

FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

If men were governed by reason, they would never worship. But reason plays an extremely limited part in human experience; therefore, priests, parsons, and other quacks are quite safe for some time to come.—*J. Symes.*

THE MISTAKES OF JESUS.—It is easy to show, if we have the exact words of Jesus, that he always was mistaken in some points of the greatest magnitude—in the character of God, the existence of the Devil, the eternal damnation of men, in the interpretation of the Old Testament, in the doctrine of demons, in the celebrated prediction of his second coming, and the end of the world within a few years. If religion or Christianity rest on his authority, and that alone, it falls when the foundation falls, and that stands at the mercy of a schoolboy.—*Theodore Parker.*

The universality of the god idea is one of the favorite points made use of by the Church in support of this notion. But if the Christian insists (as he does) that the Hindoo, Chinese, Mohammedan, Indian, and Hottentot gods are all false gods, and his alone the only true god, how can the false belief of the heathen tend to prove the existence of his god? And if Beecher's, Savage's, Swing's god does not prove the existence of the heathen's god, how can the latter's god prove the existence of the former's? And if the belief of each does not tend to prove the truth of that of the other, how, in the name of reason, can their several opposing beliefs prove their general belief?—*Otto Wettstein.*

Three things will ever strike the reflecting mind as unaccountable in the contemplation of the sacred writings. The first is, that a religion, emphatically known as the Roman Catholic, should have originated in Judea; the second, that a New Testament, as emphatically known as the Greek, should have been the work of persons not only Hebrews, but by their own admission "unlearned and ignorant men"—a qualification which, with all due submission be it said, men possessed of a foreign tongue could scarcely with propriety lay claim to; and the third is, that of the Old Testament, the oldest portion known, the Septuagint, is also found in the Greek tongue.—*A. Vance, "Vox Clamantis,"* p. 25.

ON TRACTS.

THERE are many Christian methods of warfare which I heartily despise, but none, I think, more so than that of the issue of those abominable conglomerations of falsehood and cowardice which go by the name of "Tracts." Piles upon piles, thousand after thousand of these ideals of pernicious literature are issued yearly, none of them being worthy of the common paper upon which they are printed, and many of them containing lies that would have caused Ananias to blush, or the Devil himself to take a back seat in point of deceit. Those who write them never sign their names, for if they did, the lies they tell would soon be found out and they themselves would be ostracised as disreputable blackguards. In their tracts they give accounts of imaginary arguments with infidels—arguments in which the infidel is invariably confounded by queries and statements which could be met by a mere babe of Freethought. I had one given me the other day which is a fair specimen of its kind. It is entitled "Left in the Mire"; and I should very much like to know what miserable coward so misused a pen as to write it. He meets with an infidel—a young man as usual—and when the infidel expresses his unbelief and says he is a Manchester warehouseman, the writer says, "Will you be good enough to tell me what is wrong with my watch just now?" and he replies, "I am really not competent to do so." Thereupon the writer says: "I should think a Manchester warehouseman quite as competent to decide on watch-making as philosophers to decide on theology. Surely if special study is needed in the lesser case, it must be in the greater?" And then the Atheist is made to quietly admit the force of the argument, although he has previously alluded to the effect which Tyndall's and Huxley's opinions have had upon him. What reasonable being can imagine such twaddle as confounding an infidel? It could be answered in an infinity of ways. He could have replied that no working man, then, should have a vote because politics need special study; that the writer himself was not qualified to hold opinions on theology for the same reason; or again, that the very fact of special study being required showed that the Bible was not a revelation to every man from God.

Following this, the writer goes on to say, "I have known something of infidelity in London for the last twenty years. Unbelievers there just now have one hall and three lecturers." To use the mildest possible term, the one who made that statement is an unmitigated liar or an ignorant donkey. He goes on to add to his rascality by saying that before the present lecturers occupied the platform there were four others, and that they are all preaching the gospel they formerly rejected and opposed. Of course the tract does not show the infidel to ask their names as one would naturally do. He merely says that he was not aware of it, so the writer says that it is not only true of those four, but also of another four who helped them; and he says, "I do not choose to tell their names, but I will indicate them by numbers." He then speaks of them all as No. 1, 2, 3, etc. Of No. 2 he says, that when he went back upon infidelity his fellow infidels, that were, hissed him off the platform when he spoke, but he does not say what town contains such a mass of professing infidels as to be able to do this if they would. Besides, only Christians do that. No. 3 was "a provincial lecturer and paid orator of the unbelievers in the Midlands"; No. 4 had been "the editor of an infidel paper"; No. 5 was "one of the most eloquent and able contributors to the infidel print which is still in existence, and for years his articles therein were triumphantly quoted"; Nos. 6 and 7 do not seem to have been quite such shining lights; but No. 8 was "engaged as a paid lecturer in the provinces." After telling all this abominable rubbish to the infidel he left him, and well he might.

ASHLEY SLADE.

According to the *Western Mail*, Unitarians are received with more warmth than cordiality in Wales. One of their lecturers had to obtain police protection, and is still howled down at public meetings. "Some years ago," the *Mail* says, "a Llanelly journalist, who courageously rose to defend a Unitarian lecturer in an uproarious public meeting, was chased all over his native town. In his wild flight he left pieces of his clothes on the tops of walls, and various portions of his outdoor outfit were found scattered all over the poor-law district." Gallant little Wales!

ACID DROPS.

Dr. Clifford, the Congregationalist preacher, has been discoursing on the question, "Was Jesus Christ a Communist?" His answer was that Jesus Christ was a Divine Communist—which is a very convenient adjective. Dr. Clifford expressed himself a little more clearly in the following passage:—"If the Christian churches to-day were entirely possessed with Christ's spirit, and wishful of following his habits, they would certainly adopt a collective ownership of property." This appears to us, however, a remarkably cheap form of virtue; a mere sentimentalism that will never involve any troublesome consequences. If the "Christ-like" ministers of Christ are sincere, let them make a beginning in this Divine Communism; let them share their incomes with the poorest members of the community. It is so easy to preach communism to other people. Make a start yourselves!

The *Christian World* speaks of Solomon's "1,700 wives and concubines," but is not this excessive? The wisest of men had 1,000 ladies altogether, we believe; or rather, we don't believe, but that is what the Bible says. That number must have been purgatory enough, without piling on 700 more

Joshua's sun-and-moon miracle has exercised the wits of many Bibliolators, the latest of whom is the Rev. J. M. Gibbon, of Stamford-hill Congregational Church. This gentleman, after wrestling with the text, perhaps with the aid of the Holy Ghost, has come to the conclusion that there was no miracle in the case. A great black cloud almost blotted out the day, and threatened to prevent the Jews from chasing and slaughtering their enemies. Joshua prayed, and his prayer was answered, for the cloud fell in great hailstones upon the Amorites. The sun standing still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, is only a piece of poetry—or, as some would call it, tall talk.

Sceptics will ask why Mr. Gibbon explains away this miracle. Is it because miracles are no longer credible? If so, all the Bible miracles must be dealt with in the same manner. Mr. Gibbon's interpretation seems to corroborate Matthew Arnold's dictum that "the reign of the Bible miracles is doomed."

A week's preaching by the Rev. John M'Neill in an Aberdeen church only moved the beadle to remark, in reference to his newly-painted church, "I'll hae to put on seven women to wash her out." Another beadle, however, was better pleased. As he looked round the old barn-like kirk, he was heard to say, "Man, she's a bonny sicht when she's fu'."

The Rev. Mr. Macaskill, of Dingwall heresy-hunting fame, does not think much of the Scottish Spurgeon who has been revivalling up north. He declares M'Neill is made up of "equal parts of impudence, mountebankism, and vulgarity, flavored with a Cheap Jack form of religion." How they love one another!

Discussions on catching topics are becoming quite fashionable. The *Christian World* has started one on the question, "Is Woman Cruel?" It is a curious controversy in a Christian paper after eighteen hundred years of the religion which boasts of having "elevated woman." Our contemporary should open another discussion on "Are Men Fools?"

Archdeacon Farrar has been called "a painfully good man." He is certainly very fond of lecturing other people on their moral shortcomings. In a recent sermon at St. Margaret's he said that "millions who were not conscious of wrongdoing did no good." But how does he know that? It seems to us a sweeping and foolish indictment. Those "millions" may help a friend in distress, and put a flush of pleasure on the cheeks of little children. It may be, after all, that they do as much good, in their own way, as the over-righteous Archdeacon.

The spectacle of religious professors of one type robbing thousands of trusting people by the agency of rotten companies, and of others making sanctimoniousness a cloak under which to indulge unbridled lust or malignant brutality, makes it imperatively necessary for the churches to put more moral tone and definiteness into their moral teaching.—*Christian World*.

Devout ladies have been having a controversy as to the proper color to wear during the fishy season of Lent. Violet is allowed to be properly penitential, but then the question comes as to whether bright mauve, lavender, and heliotrope are not permissible. Good, rich, old purple is generally allowed to be quite the correct thing.

Why do Christians fast in Lent? Oh, say they, in remembrance of Christ's temptation. That's it; but they don't go to the root of the mystery. The fasting was to help Christ to conquer Satan; in other words, to induce vegetation to rise again from the dead underworld and spring to overcome winter. Hence Pagan nations had a fast at this season before a feast when spring announced the resurrection of renewed life. Christianity only preserves the old fast in a fishy form.

Two Hull ministers, the Rev. H. W. Perris and the Rev. J. Bell, have incurred the displeasure of the local pressmen, who have resolved "neither to report their public utterances, nor in any way to mention their names," until they offer a full apology. The reverend gentlemen have been speaking too freely about pressmen. Perhaps the boycott will bring them to their senses, and abate their God-Almighty airs.

The Church Missionary Society publish *Missionary Facts and Figures* by the Rev. J. D. Mullins. It is of course a plea for more cash. Some of the facts are interesting, and the figures suggestive. It begins by declaring "There are at least a thousand millions of people in the world who do not profess the name of Christ—heathen and Mohammedans—the greater number of whom have not so much as heard his name."

The next statement has an air of exaggeration. There are said to be 2,700 languages into which no part of the Bible has been translated. Many of these must be dialects, in danger of speedy extinction.

It then tells us that if the whole of the yearly issue of the British and Foreign Bible Society were in Chinese, and could be distributed in China alone, it would be, at that rate, *ninety-five years* before every inhabitant could be provided with even one part of the Word of God.

In India, alas, the last census shows that there are 19,500,000 more Hindus, and 7,000,000 more Mohammedans in India than there were ten years ago. That is to say they are increasing at an overwhelmingly larger rate than Christian conversions.

There are 40,000,000 people in Japan, and not 40,000 Protestant Christians. There are 10,000 more head-priests of Buddhism than there are Protestant Christians; and for every single Christian of every denomination, at least two Buddhist priests (not head-priests).

Rum, gin, and other spirits are imported into Africa year by year at the rate of tens of thousands of gallons for every missionary sent there. Yes, and the same people send the spirits who send the missionaries.

Then we have appalling statements as to the evils of heathenism. Mr. Mullins, for instance, says: "The millions of gods in the Hindu pantheon are for the most part incarnations of evil deeds, evil thoughts, and unspeakable wickedness." A Hindu might reply that they represent the various phases of Nature, and not one of them worse than Jehovah. Again he says: "Every large Hindu temple is, so far as its means allow, a den of vice." The same might about as truthfully be said of Christian convents.

The Rev. Mr. Foster, of Belvedere, near Erith, Kent, has been preaching against godless education. A distinctively Church teaching, he declared, was the only way by which God's favor could be obtained. Poor God! According to his ministers, he can only bestow his favor where it meets with their approval.

Dr. McGlynn, who has been reinstated in the Roman Catholic Church, must have eaten a good deal of leek before his Holy Mother took him back. The *Boston Investigator* gives a lot of extracts from his fighting speeches after his excommunication. Dr. McGlynn called Pope Leo a "poor old beg of bones," and exclaimed, "I defy the malignity of

Rome." He loudly praised the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution. But all that is dead and buried now. Dr. McGlynn will die in the Church, and the Holy Mother will give him the viaticum with an ironical smile.

The Rev. Isaac Shimmin, a Manx missionary in Mashonaland, says: "The religious notions of the Mashonas in these parts are very vague. When a person dies he is interred just outside the kraal, and over his grave a low hut is built, and this becomes the place of prayer for the friends and relatives of the deceased. At certain seasons of the year they bring beer and meal as an offering to the spirit of the departed, and hope by this means to gain his favor and help in their daily life." The Manx missionary dilates on how far short this is of the glorious truths of the blessed gospel; but we fancy the discerning reader may notice the whole groundwork of religion in the Mashona superstitions.

William Pearce, who shot himself at Willesden Junction, left a letter, saying, "God forgive me for this rash act." Evidently not an Atheist.

A statement is made by a correspondent of the *Glasgow Weekly Herald*, that when fanners were first introduced into Scotland, the clergy denied Church privileges to such farmers as used them in cleaning their grain, because they made use of "enchanted wind."

When in 1736 an Act of Parliament was passed repealing the penal statutes against witches, etc., the clergy, assembled in Presbytery declared, "This act, in plain terms, contradicts and opposes the law of God in the very letter." They were quite right, and so was the Rev. John Wesley, when he declared that giving up witchcraft was in effect giving up the Bible.

The hoardings of London just now are placarded with a bill announcing that "Ishi shall come and make an end of all speculations with confusion and dismay," signed with the seal of King Solomon-Jesus. In the centre is a hieroglyphic, of which the only intelligible portion is "Crisis come A.D. 1892." So, perhaps, the crisis is over. Evidently there are wealthy cranks about, or is it a new trick of our old friend Prophet Baxter?

A certain professor in the Divinity Hall, Glasgow University, when giving references, habitually omits to mention the words "chapter and verse," and for the sake of brevity merely gives the numbers, e.g., "Luke vii. 25." The other day he astonished his class by saying that in Acts, Peter disappears at 8.15, and doesn't turn up till 12.30! "Even Apostles do the same"! What would Peter's wife's mother say?

The Bishops of London, Rochester, and St. Albans want more cash for the spiritual needs of the metropolis. London, says its well-salaried bishop, has outgrown its church and spiritual accommodation. The one thing needful is cash. All the rest the bishops will supply. While our spiritual pastors and masters are crying for cash for churches, London hospitals are barely adequate for the physical needs of the metropolis.

"Urbanus," in the *Echo*, asks how many of the starveling benefices which Convocation has been lamenting are like the following:—Dulas £130, population 82; Fishley £145, population 26; Haydon £135, population 80; Helmsley £114, population 71; Hardmead £150, population 92; Caukwell £43, population 45; Lemington £50, population 54; Pudding Norton (no church) £10, population 32; Radbourne (no church) £40, population 27. In these cases, if there is not much pay, there is certainly very little work.

Hoffman's *Catholic Directory*, an official organ, states the total Catholic population of the United States as 8,806,095. This includes all christened babies. The total number of priests is 9,388; children attending parochial schools 738,269, and children in orphan asylums 26,533. There are 127 Catholic colleges, 656 academies, 3,587 parochial schools, 463 charitable institutions, and 8,477 churches. Evidently Uncle Sam has some trouble to look forward to. What he should do at once is to publish statistics showing the proportion of Catholics in gaols, penitentiaries, and workhouses. The supremacy of the Church would then be undisputed.

The *National Observer* has one of its contemptuous, contemptible, sneering articles on James Thomson, whom it damns with faint praise. It makes the mistake of saying some of his contributions appeared in the *Freethinker*.

There is a row in connection with a Free Church some thirty miles from Glasgow. It appears that a bazaar realised £18, and it was proposed that the sum should be devoted to the relief of the poor; but the minister demanded the money to pay for a new drawing-room grate in his residence. Rumor saith there is going to be an exodus of the reverend gentleman's congregation.

The Pope has had a pompous celebration of his episcopal jubilee and a lot of presents in hard cash. Thousands of good Catholics have made their pilgrimage to the holy father and kissed his ring. Nowadays the pilgrim can save his soul without blistering his feet with peas.

Poor Pope Pecci still holds out his two hands for "gifts." As he is the successor of Peter, he is in the fishing business, and he drags with a big net, for the haul is gathered from every part of Christendom. Perhaps the most valuable of his recent catches is a present from Prince Luitpold, Regent of Bavaria. It is a statue of the Virgin Mary, with figures of angels, all in massive gold, and embellished with sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and diamonds. The Pope has graciously accepted this gift. Of course! What do *you* think? It is to stand in his ante-chamber, and show how much he is the servant of the poor carpenter of Nazareth.

The clerical majority of the London School Board are bent on re-opening the religious question, that their absurd dogma of the Trinity may be thrust into the minds of children before they have sense to note its discrepancy with their multiplication tables. Evidently these gentlemen know the story of Talleyrand, who, when asked by a Protestant however Catholics were induced to believe in transubstantiation, made answer, "Well, you see, we first get them to swallow the Trinity. All is easy after that."

Apropos of Dr. Gentle's severe condemnation of the lack of knowledge of the average congregation regarding the lesser books of the Bible, a story, which is said to have had its origin in Paisley, may be opportunely repeated. At the kirking of the magistrates the minister announced his text from one of the Epistles of St. Peter. A worthy magnate was diligently hunting around the Kings and Chronicles for the apostle, when a friend tapped him on the shoulder and inquired "if he thocht Peter had flitted?"

Renewed floods have occurred both in Queensland and the northern districts of New South Wales. Communication both by rail and telegraph has been suspended between Brisbane and Sydney. Enormous damage has been done to the crops, and several lives have been lost. Jehovah may be paying special attention to the prayers of umbrella makers, but he has little regard for the wants of many of his creatures.

A French crank walked from the Department of the Gard to Paris to ask M. Carnot for the cross of the Legion of Honor, which he claimed for working miracles. The only miracle mentioned is his having done the journey at a cost of seventeen francs. He was sent to an infirmary, and by the President's orders is the object of kind and special care. Such events lead us to surmise that when J. C. reappears he will prefer eastern lands.

We have the honor, for a wonder, of agreeing, to some extent, with the *Church Times*. Anent the controversy, "Is Christianity Played Out?" it professes to answer the question, What is Christianity? and contends, that instead of the vague and contradictory views of Christianity recently put forward, the word must be treated as having an historical meaning. So far we are in agreement with the *C. T.*, which goes on to give its primary meaning as that of the Catholic Church militant, and its second as the Sacrament of Holy Baptism or Christening. No doubt Christianity includes this last. The *C. T.* even contends that no unbaptised person—say a Quaker—can be considered a Christian. But then the Quaker may reply that Baptism is a Pagan ceremony at bottom, and that he holds other items of early Christianity which the modern churchman entirely omits.

The Rev. H. A. Thorne, curate of St. Michael's, Swanmore, Isle of Wight, says the confessional is an "infallible relief to sin-laden souls." Yes, and a fine opportunity for fresh sinning.

At Chesterfield, Sunday sacred concerts took place in the Stephenson Memorial Hall. The men of God finding fewer threepenny bits in their own collection plates, petitioned against the rival show, and the clergy-cowed Town Council have refused to renew the lease of the Hall. Thus the general body of ratepayers lose what has been a source of revenue, because monopolising sky-pilots cannot keep their congregations in face of opposition.

Prophet Baxter has spoken on Home Rule. It is the beginning of the end. It was, he says, prophesied that the separation of Ireland from England should take place seven years before the end of the age. In that case it must be effected next year, as Christ begins his personal reign on earth in 1901. Baxter thinks the separation will come about through a great war, which, by the way, ought to have turned up in 1889.

Baxter finds also that modern Spiritualism is spoken of by the prophets. It too is a sign that we are on the brink of tremendous events. "There is no doubt on my mind," says the prophet, "that spiritualism is the work of the Devil." We should like to hear a discussion on the point between Baxter and Mr. W. T. Stead.

The Rev. C. A. Berry, the popular Wolverhampton preacher, had a lunatic in his pulpit last Sunday. The poor man was evidently crazed by religion, and mounted the pulpit. Mr. Berry, however, was able to keep him in order while he gave out a hymn, and got him removed and taken away in a cab.

There are some funny people taking part in a correspondence in the *Yarmouth Independent*—all on the Christian side. One of them refers to the *Freethinker* as an organ of the Socialist party! Another "has yet to learn" that Charles Bradlaugh was treated with any "unkindness." Yarmouth is evidently able to show some prize ignoramuses.

Richard Le Gallienne, the pleasant young poet, who was printed in big type in the *Daily Chronicle* discussion, is a diffuse sentimentalist when he argues about religion. He appears to think that bad reasoning becomes quite convincing when done up in verse. His little poem, "The Animalcule on Man," which has just appeared in the *St. James's Gazette*, fancies an animalcule in Mr. Le Gallienne's blood thumping the table, and exclaiming "There is no Man." So man, the animalcule in the universe, cries "There is no God!" *Argal*—well what? Mr. Le Gallienne doesn't say; he only suggests; in fact, he is in a state of confusion. His analogy is utterly faulty, even if we admit his foolish fancy. If the man triumphs over the sceptical animalcule, it is God who should triumph over the sceptical man. But he doesn't. Mr. Le Gallienne acts for both man and God. Then again, if the animalcule in the poet's blood couldn't understand the whole organism, how can little man understand the mighty universe? Which is Agnosticism, Mr. Le Gallienne, or Atheism, as you please to call it. The fact is, sir, when you talk of seeing the "Master nod," you are nodding yourself. Your rhymes are all right, perhaps, but your reason is damnable.

A bookseller's catalogue once announced for sale a "Life of Christ in Morocco." It meant bound in morocco. Last week a collector came into Mr. Forder's shop and inquired "Is there a God bound in cloth?"

Madame Blavatsky placed the Mahatmas in Thibet, which happened to be one of the most unexplored parts of the world, and therefore a safe place to put things you didn't want discovered. Recent travellers, however, have told us that Thibet is dirty, ignorant, and vicious. Captain Bower stated the other evening, before the Royal Geographical Society, that the Buddhism of Thibet is nothing like the pure morality preached by Guatama Buddha, while the gross superstition of the multitude is "little better than African fetishism." Such is the land of the Mahatmas, the "Great Souls" who are to purify the West through the medium of Theosophy!

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, Feb. 26, Hall of Science, Freeman-street, Grimsby: at 11, "How to Read the Bible"; at 3, "Happiness in Hell"; at 7, "Is Christianity Played Out?"

Tuesday, Feb. 28, Chatham Hall (adjoining Battersea Park Station), at 8, "Can we Follow Christ?"

March 5, Liverpool; 12, Leeds; 16, Hammersmith; 19, Hall of Science; 26, Manchester.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MR. CHARLES WATTS' ENGAGEMENTS.—February 26, Birmingham; 28, Sheffield. March 1, 2, 3, Sheffield; 5, Birmingham; 12, Hall of Science, London; 19, Bristol; 26, 27 and 28, Glasgow. April 2 and 9, Birmingham; 16 and 23, Hall of Science, London; 30, Sheffield. May 7 and 14, Birmingham; 28, Hall of Science, London. —All communications for Mr. Watts should be sent direct to him (with stamped envelope for reply) at Baskerville Hall, The Crescent, Birmingham.

VERITAS.—"The child is father of the man" is not in the Bible; it is the line of an English poet.

G. JACOB.—Charging three-halfpence for the *Freethinker* has already been suggested, but it is a very awkward price. Newsagents naturally like as little trouble as possible, but they will get used to our monthly special in time. We note your hope that we shall have a Shilling Week every six months. Other correspondents have expressed the same wish.

J. H. WISEMAN.—Our opinion of Brewin Grant's conduct towards Mr. Holyoake is derived chiefly from the printed reports of the debates between them. We are only responsible for our own views, and do not undertake to reconcile them with other people's.

W. S. GRAYSON.—What you state is by no means unlikely. If the Hull Dock Company ordered Mr. Foote's bills to be posted over, it only shows that Christianity is not played out.

A. SLADE.—There are other Freethought journals published at twopence, but you should take into account our far greater circulation. Of course, as you say, the *Freethinker* is a "speciality," and there is force in your remark that "you cannot expect, with reason, to obtain a speciality at the price of an ordinary paper." It may also be true that an increased price would only slightly diminish our present circulation. On the other hand, we are loth to cut off even a small percentage of poor readers; and it is easier to push forward the circulation of a penny paper. Anyhow, we shall be glad to hear what other readers have to say.

J. BINEHAM, Wye House, Pier-street, Cubitt-town, Poplar, E., will be glad to hear from any Freethinkers in the neighborhood. This correspondent also invites local Freethinkers to go to the Town Hall to-day (Feb. 26) and join in a discussion on "Christ's Teaching of Liberty," originated by Father Maturin.

A. B. TAYLOR.—See "Sugar Plums." "In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired" is Isaiah vii. 20.

C. HARDINGHAM.—We do not intend to advertise the paper in question; besides, Spiritualists and Unitarians have their own journals in which to defend themselves against misrepresentation.

W. PRULIERE.—Sorry we cannot inform you.

STANLEY JONES will be in London from April 3 to 23, and will be glad to obtain some London engagements during that period. Branch secretaries will perhaps communicate with him.

CAN any London reader inform A. B. D. where the *Freethinker* can be obtained in the neighborhood of Grosvenor-square?

E. H.—The "religious faculty" is an easy phrase to utter, but what does it mean? There is no such faculty known to the psychologist. "Religion" and "religious" are used very loosely. Tyndall and Huxley mean one thing by them, and Christian writers quite another. Comte worked out a Religion of Humanity, without a god, in fact involving the negation of God. Evidently there is a need of definition. We advise you to read Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, and if possible Tylor's *Primitive Culture*. You will see that "religion" covered man's worship of the supernatural beings he supposed to preside over nature and decide his destiny. From fetishism it grew into polytheism, and from polytheism into monotheism; at every step the belief in personal supernatural beings giving way to a more abstract conception, until at length God becomes a mere personification of universal necessity.

As we go to press early next week with our Special Number, secretaries should send in Lecture Notices by first post on Monday.

F. WILKES.—If there are, as you believe, so many Freethinkers in Redditch, it should be easy to form a Branch of the National Secular Society. Why not call a preliminary meeting at your own house? We shall be happy to insert an announcement of such meeting, and it would meet the eyes of our readers in the town, who would probably attend.

Seven members are requisite to start a Branch. Any advice or assistance will be rendered by the Executive.

J. DE YOUNG (Mrs.)—No wonder the little ones at your children's party elected to have a comic song in preference to a chapter from the Bible. As a rule they don't get a choice. They are too often given the Bible, the whole Bible (including the nasty parts), and nothing but the Bible.

JARROW Secularists, and others who wish to purchase the *Freethinker*, are informed that it can be obtained at McCann's, newsagent, Grange-road. He is a member of the Jarrow Branch and means to push the sale of Freethought literature.

HALL OF SCIENCE CHILDREN'S PARTY.—We have received: S. R. Stephenson 4s., J. Chamberlain 2s. 6d., Mrs. Pearce 1s., George Anderson £2 2s., C. Deane 1s., A. W. Marks 5s., J. Swaagman £1 1s.

J. R. ROBSON.—Announced as desired. Mr. Foote hopes to lecture at Jarrow when he comes north again.

J. PRINGLE.—See "Acid Drops." Pleased to hear that Mr. Foote's *Comic Sermons* was your effectual introduction to Freethought. If it raised your spirits when you were dull, and led you to the study of more serious works, it has certainly done some good. The longer cutting you send we shall try to find room for.

E. H. J.—Such letters are helpful to the good old cause.

W. H. MORRISH.—We don't read the paper you mention. It was a breach of honor to print your private letter without asking your permission.

HULL FIGHTING FUND.—E. G. Lees 2s. 6d., E. H. J. 2s.

J. K.—We defer to your superior knowledge of Ireland, but we adhere to our opinion that, in the very nature of things, the power of the Catholic Church will be weakened under Home Rule through purely internal causes; causes that have operated in every other Catholic country. Ulster will be able to protect itself against any Catholic aggression; and if not, British troops would very soon come to its aid. It is monstrous to suppose that the Protestant population of Great Britain would connive at a Catholic tyranny over Protestants in Ireland. By the way, what do you make of the Parnellite vote? It does not diminish, and it is a direct protest against "the priest in politics."

WOLVERHAMPTON and Birmingham Branches are informed that Mr. Foote's movements are a little uncertain in consequence of the Hull negotiations. It is impossible to make week-night engagements at the moment.

D. HUGHES.—Enclosure returned. Your well-written letters must have done good.

S. A. GIMSON.—Thanks. Paragraph already set up.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—J. Dunlop 2s., W. B. Jevons 2s. 8d., A. W. Marks 4s.

H. M. RIDGWAY.—Thanks for papers. Mr. Hithersay, who "challenges" Mr. Foote to debate on Spiritualism is no doubt a well-meaning gentleman, but Mr. Foote neither gives nor accepts "challenges." Spiritualism must establish its facts before discussing their explanation. Mr. Foote is quite willing to sit on a committee of investigation.

J. W. GOTT.—The Bradford members should not be impatient. Mr. Foote is not capable of being in several places at the same time. You will probably remember that Mr. Foote was coming to Bradford some time ago, and the engagement had to be cancelled because the hall was refused at the last moment, and, owing to the action of the police, no other could be obtained. As soon as adequate arrangements can be made he will offer you a date.

W. C. (Dorking).—Mr. Forder only held over to acknowledge this week.

J. D. LEGGETT.—May find room.

D. M. (Manchester).—It was a printer's error.

A. DEMPSTER.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Der Lichtfreund—Boston Investigator—Open Court—Freidenker—Two Worlds—Dor Arme Teufel—Western Figaro—Liberator—Liberty—Clarion—Flaming Sword—Echo—Truthseeker—Fritankaren—La Raison—Glasgow Evening News—Glasgow Weekly Mail—Bexley Heath and Erith Observer—Maux Herald—Grimsby Independent—Yarmouth Mercury—Derbyshire Times—Oldham Standard—Grimsby News—Wolverhampton Express and Star—Devizes and Wilts Advertiser—Derbyshire Courier—Printer's Ink—Lucifer—Midland Evening News—Morning Leader.

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. 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* (including the twopenny special number for the first week in each month) will be forwarded, direct from the office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One Year, 7s. 6d.; Half Year, 3s. 9d.; Three Months, 1s. 10½d.

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.

OUR SPECIAL NUMBER.

NEXT week's *Freethinker* will be a special number, price twopence. It will contain portraits of Mr. Daniel Baker, of Birmingham, and Mr. George Anderson, of London. Both are veteran Freethinkers and generous friends of the Secular movement. They have been heard of in all parts of the country, and thousands will be glad to see their "counterfeit presentments." But the novelty of this special number will be a striking CARTOON, illustrating the burning question of the moment, "Is Christianity Played Out?" It is well conceived and well drawn, and will doubtless be well executed by the engraver. We expect a run on this number, and shall prepare for it. Those who desire to secure extra copies should order of their newsagents as early as possible to prevent disappointment.

THE HULL FIGHT.

EVERYTHING is practically settled, and I shall soon be at Hull to champion the Freethought party's right to charge for admission to its Sunday lectures. I presume the police will fight; at any rate they shall have the choice. Down at Portsmouth the police only gave "a warning," but at Hull they made a precise and positive threat. If they back down, they will be checkmated, and that is indispensable; for a threat is in one way as bad as a successful prosecution, as it terrorises the lessees of halls and emboldens the bigots. For prudential reasons I refrain from giving full particulars until next week. Meanwhile I remind the Freethought party that I shall probably want its full support in the struggle.

G. W. FOOTE.
President, N.S.S.

SUGAR PLUMS.

A large audience, including many ladies, assembled at the London Hall of Science on Sunday evening, when Mr. Foote lectured on "Freethought and the Marriage Question," with special reference to certain points raised in the Marquis of Queensberry's pamphlet. Mr. Foote first dealt with Christian teaching, and argued that Christianity was hopelessly out of court as an authority on sexual relations. Then he dealt with the ethnology of marriage, and showed that monogamy had emerged in every civilisation, ancient and modern, as the highest state of development. Finally, he dealt with the objections to a rigid law of monogamy raised by Lord Queensberry, and criticised his proposal as to "plural marriage," which was condemned as based upon a misunderstanding of woman's nature, of true family life, and of the highest welfare of children, whose rights are superior to those of their parents, and far more peremptory. The lecture was listened to throughout with profound attention, and very heartily applauded. Several ladies afterwards thanked the lecturer personally for his discourse.

Mr. Robert Forder, who presided, then invited discussion, and Lord Queensberry mounted the platform amidst great cheering. His lordship defended his views against Mr. Foote's criticism, and spoke with unexpected fluency, though he was obviously nervous. His arguments did not seem convincing, but no one could help being struck by his sincerity. He is evidently moved by no spirit of wantonness or levity, but by a strong desire to remedy the evils of our imperfect society. Mr. Foote answered the Marquis, and Mr. Forder expressed a hope, which the audience endorsed, that the lecture would be published in pamphlet form.

So far the discussion had been courteous and edifying. Mr. Foote and Lord Queensberry differed widely from each other, but they expressed their difference with the utmost friendliness and good humor. The discussion, however, did not end

there. After the serious drama came the pantomime. A Christian Evidence lecturer demanded a hearing and obtained it. For ten minutes he read out the C.E. lecturer's stock budget of extracts in a manner which provoked laughter. This he seemed to regard as a kind of compliment; in fact, he boasted that he was used to being laughed at; and it was well he was, for there was greater laughter, like the piling of Pelion upon Ossa, when his speech was answered.

The Sunday morning audience at the Hall of Science was the largest that has been seen there for some years. Mr. Foote's explanation and criticism of Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule Bill was apparently much enjoyed. After the lecture an Irishman thanked Mr. Foote for his friendly words during many years on behalf of a misgoverned and misrepresented nation.

Mr. Charles Watts had a most enthusiastic reception at Leicester by two of the largest audiences he has ever met there. The hall in the afternoon was nearly full, and in the evening it was crowded in every part. Mr. Watts lectures to-day (Sunday, February 26), morning and evening, at Baskerville Hall, Birmingham.

The London Secular Federation's course of Free Lectures in the hall of the Hammersmith Club, 1 Broadway, will be delivered on Thursday evenings in March. Mr. Moss opens on March 9, his subject being "Why Christianity has Failed." He will be followed by Messrs. Foote, Cohen, and Jones.

The Camberwell course of Free Lectures, under the auspices of the London Secular Federation, opened on Friday, Feb. 17. Mr. A. B. Moss took the chair, and Mr. Foote told the audience why he could not be a Christian. Mr. Moss pressed for discussion, but could not get any; he also pressed for a good collection, and that he did get. We hope the succeeding lectures of the course will be well attended, and that the result will be a profit rather than a loss to the Federation. Profit there must be in the spread of our principles, whatever be the issue financially.

At the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Proclamation of the Spanish Republic, one of the speakers declared that religion was as useless and out of date as monarchy. He was much applauded by the audience, who were chiefly students.

Hugh O. Pentecost spoke at the Paine anniversary in Boston, Jan. 29. The *Investigator* says: "In the able and polished orator, in the finished gentleman and speaker who held his audience spell-bound for an hour and a half, while in finished speech he told the ever-new story of Thomas Paine, we found our expectations more than realised, and we saw that we had made no mistake in inviting Mr. Pentecost to be the orator of the occasion. That he was highly pleased with his enthusiastic reception in Paine Hall was evident from his opening remarks, and that he will be invited again to stand upon our platform we confidently predict."

We are pleased to see the announcement in *Modern Thought*, of Bombay, that a new Freethought Society has been started at Delhi. There is a vast work to do in India among Mohammedans, as well as Hindus and Europeans.

The Lord Mayor has granted the use of the Mansion House for a public meeting, in favor of opening public museums on Sunday. The meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 8, and we hope strong resolutions upon the subject will be carried.

Mr. A. B. Taylor, a Freethinker, heads the poll in the School Board elections for South Wigston, despite the cry of "Atheist!" raised against him and the open hostility of the Liberal Caucus. We congratulate Mr. Taylor on his splendid victory.

The Battersea Branch has carried on indoor and outdoor work right through the winter, and deserves the support of all Freethinkers in the district. As its funds are now rather low, it is to be hoped there will be a bumping audience at the lecture which Mr. Foote is giving in aid of its exchequer. Time—Tuesday, Feb. 28, at 8; place—Chatham Hall, adjoining Battersea Park Station. Tickets at door, 1s., 6d., and 3d.

Last Sunday, at the North Kensington Branch of the Social Democratic Federation, Mr. St. John lectured on "Is Christianity Played Out?" At the close of a vigorous anti-Christian lecture several members of the Branch spoke in support of the position taken up by the lecturer, and declared that it was time the Socialist ranks were cleared of the priests, who were not to be trusted, and whose only desire was to "boss the show" in their own interests. Each speaker declared himself an Atheist.

The Leyton and Walthamstow Branch's quarterly meeting will be held next Tuesday evening (Feb. 28), at 8.30, at 112 Queen's-road-west, Walthamstow. Members and friends are earnestly invited to attend. Arrangements are to be made for an active outdoor propaganda during the summer. Unfortunately it has been impossible to obtain a hall for Sunday evening lectures this winter.

Mr. Foote's Wednesday evening lecture on "Freethought in Modern English Poets" received a half-column report in the *Morning Leader*. The reporter was perfectly fair, admitting that Tennyson's "Rizpah" was read "very finely," and giving some of the lecturer's strongest points against the popular theology; indeed, the *Leader* man thought it necessary to say that the task of reporting Mr. Foote was not of his own choosing, and to express a hope that he had "given no offence."

Mr. Wallace Nelson has returned to Sydney, exchanging with Mr. W. W. Collins, who has gone again to New Zealand. Mr. Nelson has a good "send off" on quitting Christchurch.

Mr. Allan, the Liberal candidate for Gateshead, was asked during the election if he would vote for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. His reply was that he "wished all men equal irrespective of their religion." This is not very pointed, but it shows a good intention.

The long-projected friendly discussion between the Rev. J. Fleming Williams, alderman of the London County Council, and Mr. G. W. Foote, has been finally arranged through Mr. G. Standing. It will take place at the London Hall of Science on Friday, March 10. "Christian Views of Man and Methods of Progress" is the subject, and as the admission is free those who want seats will have to come early.

CHILDREN'S PARTY, 1893.

THIS annual entertainment to the youngsters will take place on Wednesday next. The revels will commence with a substantial tea at six o'clock, to be followed by games, racing, sack-jumping; and we hope, if the generosity of our friends will permit, to give each a memento of the evening. Donations, either of money or of things useful for the evening, will be thankfully received by any member of the committee. We also invite our London friends to see the fun from the galleries, the admission to which will be threepence. The following subscriptions have been received: Mrs. Bussie, 10s.; W. Cowell, 1s.; W. C. (Dorking), 2s. 6d.; W. T. Leekey, 2s.; per Mr. Leekey, 2s. (name mislaid); H. S., 10s.; collected at Mr. Foote's lecture at Hall of Science, Feb. 12, £2 13s.; ditto, Feb. 19, £1 11s. 2d.; collected on cards by members of the committee, £3. The printing has been done gratuitously by Mr. W. Bell. Friends having collecting cards are requested to return them at committee meeting on Sunday next, at 9 p.m. R. FORDER, Treasurer.

PROPOSED CYCLE CLUB.

I AM desired to make known that a number of cyclists in London are willing to form a club at the Hall of Science. The value of a numerous and active body of athletes in the metropolis during the summer to visit outlying districts and to distribute our literature, can hardly be estimated. The attendance of a troop of light cavalry at our open-air meetings when order is threatened, would be of considerable advantage. Who will join? For particulars write Miss Vance, 28 Stonecutter-street, E.C.

Mamma—"Edith, can you tell me what faith is?" Edith (aged six years)—"Oh, yes; it is believing what you know isn't true."

CHATS WITH A JEW.

"WHAT do you make of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah?" I asked, the next time I encountered Mr. Kohn.

"Vot you make of it?" was his cautious reply.

"I take it to be part of a poem in which the poet bewails the afflictions of Israel, the servant of the Lord," I responded.

"Very goot. You read mit judgment."

"And Israel, stricken and afflicted, who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, but who shall see his seed and prolong his days, is not a person but a people."

"You know a leetle. But Israel is not a people; but I will tell you, since you know a leetle—it is a caste—a special order of people, for it is ze people, who say: 'He was wounded for our transgressions.'"

"Well, Mr. Kohn, I should like your view of another famous prophecy in Isaiah. 'Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.'"

"That refers to Hezekiah. He was the Wonderful Counsellor, the Prince of Peace. Jesus never had the government upon his shoulder."

"But these other terms, a mighty God, the everlasting Father?"

"Those are oriental ways of addressing rulers. Abram is called a prince of God (Gen. xxiii. 6), Moses is called God (Exod. vii. 1), Samuel is called God (1 Sam. xxviii. 13, 14), Solomon is called God (Ps. xlv. 6)."

"That passage is applied to Christ by Paul, (Heb. i. 8.)"

"Most absurdly, for it is a song of loves, on the marriage of Solomon with the Egyptian princess. That was the secret design of Christianity, to set up a universal dominion in the place of the former great monarchies, and to apply to Christ all that was said of the old kings, that the vicegerents of Christ might claim their power. Dat vas ze Christian plot, which even you Freethinkers do not understand."

"I know that oriental monarchs were addressed in this fashion, and indeed it would be absurd to call Christ the everlasting Father, unless there are two Fathers in the Godhead, which might make it into a large family. I agree indeed to a large extent with Herbert Spencer, that the old gods were human chieftains."

"Then you have found a leetle key that will open many doors, but you must not expect it to take you to the back of everything. If you were a Jew I might tell you something."

It was Mr. Kohn's way to excite curiosity which he never intended to gratify; so I took no notice of this, but proceeded with my questions.

"What do you make of the passage in Micah saying a ruler in Israel should come out of Bethlehem?"

"This is the first really Messianic passage you have mentioned. But Jesus was no ruler. The meaning of the passage was that a ruler should trace back his descent to David, who in 1 Sam. xvii. 12 is termed the son of an Ephrathite from Bethlehem. Of course you made your Jesus descend from David by inventing false and contradictory genealogies for him. I have told you the design, that those who inherited the power of your Jesus should inherit the kingdom of David, which was not such a small kingdom as you fancy. But if you will come to my home, I will lend you a book that will explain these matters."

I willingly accompanied Mr. Kohn to his home, which was situated in a very dirty part of the city. He occupied lodgings over a fried fish shop. Judge, then, my astonishment when the door was opened by a splendidly-dressed, dark-haired, and dark-eyed beauty of about sixteen, who had evidently ran downstairs to embrace her father, but to whom he said, "Retire, Rachael, I have business with this gentleman."

When I entered Mr. Kohn's apartment, further surprises were in store. Though apparently poor, and living in a low locality, his room was neatly, even nicely, furnished. He had a good library, among the books I noticed being Bartolucci's *Bibliotheca Magna Rabbinnica*, Rome, 1675; Brugsch's *History of Egypt*; Wagenseil's *Tela Ignea Satanae*; Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala Denudata*; the Mantua 1558 edition of the *Zohar*; a more modern copy of the *Sepher Yetzirah*. "A Kabbalist?" I mentally queried, catching sight of these rare and expensive volumes as he pulled out one of a far more common character to lend to myself. It was an English translation of the *Chizuk Emuna* or *Shield of Faith*, written by Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham, of Troki, Lithuania, in 1688, and had been "printed but not published" in 1851. He gave

it me, recommending it as one of the best works against the Christian view of the prophecies. I really had no excuse for staying. But I was anxious to derive further information from the old man. Besides, I heard the sound of a zither in an adjoining room. So I said it would be a pleasure to me as a book lover if I might inspect his library. This request was politely accorded, and I saw my opportunity.

"Ah, you have the *Zohar*. Is it the Mantua or the Cremona edition?"

"What do you know of the Book of Splendor?"

"Very little, and that at second hand. It is a compendium of Kabbalism, is it not?"

"What do you know of the Kabbalah?"

"Just as much as you may take upon a knife's point to ohoke a daw withal. I just know Chochmah from Binah, thanks to Dr. Ginsburg's little manual."

"Ah, the Kabbalah, with all its profound philosophy, is responsible for much of the Christian mischief."

"Papa, papa, I will not have you talk of the Kabbalah; it makes you too excited," cried his daughter, entering with a bewitching smile.

I was not deceived. Despite his denunciations, Mr. Kohn was doubly interesting to me as a student of the Kabbalah. But the subject was interdicted, perhaps as dangerous to his health. In view of Miss Bachael's warning, I could not even mention the modern Rosicrucians and Theosophists who have been attracted to the Kabbalah. I again thought of leaving, when my eye caught sight of—what do you think, reader?—a copy of the *Freethinker*.

"What! Do you read the *Freethinker*?"

"Sometimes. It is an amusing little paper. There was an article tickled me immensely. It was entitled 'Who was the Father of Jesus Christ?' Very clever."

My vanity began to swell as I blandly asked, "Who was it written by?"

"It was signed 'Lucianus.' He is a clever writer."

My vanity had got to exploding point, and I blurted out, "Well, I am 'Lucianus.'"

"Nonsense; he is a witty fellow."

My vanity sank into my boots.

"Well, I am he, stupid as I look, and that is why I want to learn your views, Mr. Kohn. I should like, for instance, to know your version of the origin of Christianity, and what you meant by Israel being a caste."

I found I had struck the old man's peculiarity; but the views and opinions he opened up to me were so astonishing that, to do them justice, they must be reserved for another occasion.

LUCIANUS.

CORRESPONDENCE.

SLAYING ENEMIES OF THE FAITH.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

"But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me."—LUKE XIX. 27.

SIR,—In an answer to a correspondent in the current issue you state of the above passage: "It cannot be cited as a positive injunction, but its spirit has sanctioned much persecution." To the first part of this I demur, while as anxious as yourself that Freethinkers should not overstate the case against Christianity. It is true the passage is part of a parable. But what does the parable mean? A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive a kingdom and to return. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us." On his return he makes the above declaration. What does it mean if the nobleman is not Christ, who, when he comes in his kingdom, will have his enemies, who will not acknowledge him, slain? I hold that these books come down to us through the Catholic Church, which represented itself as the vicegerent of Christ's kingdom, and that the very object and meaning of the passage is that it shall have power to dispose of its enemies. I do not say that mine is the only possible, or certainly correct, interpretation of the passage; but I do say that, holding these views, I can cite it, as the Church has done, as a positive injunction.

AN OLD FREETHINKER.

PROVIDENCE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I note in your issue for Feb. 19 you give a list of some terrible disasters that had happened during the week, including the wreck of the Anchor liner the "Trinacria,"

with the loss of a great many lives; but you omitted to state that "the passengers were all going to Gibraltar in connexion with the mission to the soldiers on the Rock, carried on under the direction of Miss Osborne, of Glasgow" (*vide* newspaper accounts of the disaster). To my mind this is a very important point—that such a lot of people, presumably good, should have been drowned while on their way to mission work. I draw attention to this in no carping spirit, but merely as a reply to many of the "unco guid," who fancy that divine protection is given to Christians. It also forcibly illustrates an argument I have sometimes used, viz, that in case of a storm at sea, or a possible wreck, there is no more protection for a shipload of ministers than for a shipload of infidels.

W. H. MORRISH.

THE MISSING SIGNS.

And these signs shall follow them that believe.—MARK XVI. 17, 18.

In days of yore, ere Christ threw o'er
Respect for gravitation,
Spurned earth, and rose—bones, flesh, and clothes—
Back home by levitation,

He gravely then declared for men,
Of ev'ry age and nation,
The mystic cause, effect, and laws
Of what is called salvation.

He told his friends—believing ends
In life above, and praises;
Whilst doubting leads, in spite of deeds,
To death below, and blazes!

He said, as well, that all could tell
The sham from true believers;
For those whose *vis* is not like his
Are dupes, or else deceivers.

Because he'd send, till earth shall end,
To each who had salvation,
Prodigious dow'rs of monstrous pow'rs,
By way of attestation:

To heal the sick, evict Old Nick,
Lift serpents, speak new lingoes,
And safely drink, without a wink,
All deadly draughts and stingoes!

We therefore see that only he
Whose pow'r is superhuman,
Can truly claim the Christian name,
And say that he's a *new* man.

Let none, then, say, in this our day,
That he's received salvation,
Unless he can display to man
The promised demonstration.

G. L. MACKENZIE.

MIRACLES AND TESTIMONY.

No Protestant, probably, would be convinced that the miracle of St. Denys has been repeated during the French Revolution; that a Romish priest, after being guillotined, had picked up his head and walked away with it. No Christian would believe that true miracles were worked at the shrines of Siva or Vishnu, or that an Indian conjuror was able to cause rain by his incantations, or to excite or to allay a storm. Any number of eye-witnesses might be produced to prove the alleged fact, but the antecedent improbability of their occurrence would outweigh them all. It is not a question of testimony but of faith. Facts which conflict with received beliefs will be discredited in spite of evidence, or rather they will be contemptuously dismissed as undeserving of inquiry; and facts which harmonise with these beliefs will be accepted almost without examination, merely upon the ground of their general reception.—*Sir R. D. Hanson, "The Jesus of History,"* p. 6.

OBITUARY.

The Chester-le-Street Branch has lost a faithful worker by the death of Mrs. Mary Pack, aged 56. She was a consistent Freethinker and supporter of our local Branch. Although the priests preyed around her deathbed like vultures, she distinctly refused to see any of them, and died a firm adherent to her principles to the end. Her body was interred at Old Pilton Churchyard on Feb. 18. Her last brave wish for a Secular funeral was carried out, the service being conducted by our local secretary.—THOS. BIRTLEY.

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.

"And so you think heaven is like Boston?" "Well, I did think so, but you know Boston has improved a great deal in the last twenty years."

"Why do you sign your name J. John B. B. B. Bronson?" asked Hawkins. "Because it is my name," said Bronson. "I was christened by a minister who stuttered."

Old Discipline—"Johnny, suppose I promised you a stick of candy and did not give it to you, what would you think?" Young Three-Year-Old (promptly)—"That you had told a story, papa." Old Discipline—"Well, suppose I should promise you a whipping and do not give it to you?" Young Hopeful (doubtfully)—"Papa—I—dess—that—would—be—a—story too. But I t'ink Dod would forgive you."

A certain Flemish settlement on the coast of South Wales used to be notorious for its prowess in smuggling and wrecking, which were looked upon as honest and laudable enterprises. On one occasion an aged Christian disciple rose at the local Methodist love-feast and briefly narrated his religious condition in the following terms—"My dear brothers and sisters on the road to Heaven, I'm tryin' to kip my pore auld feet in the narra way. But it's main hard work trustin' in the Lord in these times. All through this long winter He's only sent us three wrecks—and them little 'uns!"

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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

LONDON.

Battersea Secular Hall (back of Battersea Park Station): 8, entertainment and dance (free). Monday at 8, social gathering (free). Tuesday at 8, at Chatham Hall, adjoining Battersea Park Station, G. W. Foote, "Can we Follow Christ?" (3d., 6d., and 1s.) Bethnal Green—Libra Hall, 78 Libra-road, Roman-road: 7.30, H. Snell will lecture. Monday at 9, member's special meeting. Saturday at 9, concert and dance.

Camberwell—61 New Church-road, S.E.: 7.30, A. B. Moss, "My Path to Freethought"; preceded by a dramatic recital. Friday at 8, G. Standing, "One Thousand Reasons for Not Going to Church" (free). Free science classes (hygieny and astronomy) every Friday evening at 7.30.

Edmonton—North Middlesex Hall, Fore-street: 7, C. Cohen, "The Fate of Religion."

Hall of Science, 142 Old-street, E.C.: 11.15, Touzeau Parris, "Social Democratic Hopes" (free); 6.30, musical selections; 7, Touzeau Parris, "Serpent Worship" (3d., 6d., and 1s.) Wednesday children's party, tea at 6.

Notting Hill Gate—"Duke of York," Kensington-place, Silver-street: Monday at 8, adjourned meeting.

Westminster and Lambeth Branches N.S.S., "Duke of Ormonde," Prince's-street: 8, conversazione.

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Battersea Park-gates: 11.15, F. Haslam, "God so Loved the World."

Hyde Park (near Marble-arch): 11.30, Mr. St. John, "The Shelving of the Gods."

COUNTRY.

Aberdeen—Oddfellows' Hall Buildings (Hall No. 5, upstairs): 6.30 W. S. Rennie, "Malthus and Ibsen" (free).

Belfast—Crown Chambers Hall, 64 Royal-avenue: 7, W. M. Knox, "Is Christianity Played Out?"

Birmingham—Baskerville Hall, Crescent, Cambridge-street: Charles Watts, 11, "The Political Situation—Ireland's Future"; 7, "Mr. Roberts's Theory of Christ's Second Coming a Delusion and a Snare."

Bristol—Shepherd's Hall, Old Market-street: 7, meeting to form cricket club.

Bradford—Unity Lodge Rooms, 65 Sunbridge-road: 6.30, F. J. Newbould, "Secularism and Religion."

Bradford—Laycock's Temperance Hotel, Kirkgate: 6.30, A. B. Wakefield, "Ernest Jones: the People's Friend."

Glasgow—Ex-Mission Hall, 110 Brunswick-street: 12, discussion class, Members, Literary Selections"; 6.30, J. Bruce Glasier, "Our City Architecture: a Lesson in Sociology."

Grimsby—Hall of Science, Freeman-street: G. W. Foote, 11, "How to Read the Bible"; 3, "Happiness in Hell"; 7, "Is Christianity Played Out?"

Jarrow—Co-operative Hall (small room), Market-square: 7, business meeting; 7.30, H. Richardson, a Paper.

Leeds—Waverley Hall, York Buildings, New York-street, Kirk-gate: 7, H. Smith, "Modern Inspiration and what it Means."

Liverpool—Oddfellows' Hall, St. Anne-street: 11.30, Tontine Society; 7, Mr. Ross, "Bible Origins."

Manchester N.S.S., Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints': James Hooper, 11, "Where are the Christians?"; 6.30, "God's Chosen Race; who are they?"

Newcastle-on-Tyne—Eldon Hall, 2 Clayton-street: 3, monthly meeting of members; 7, "A Night with the Poets."

Nottingham—Secular Hall, Beck-street: 7, W. D. McSiccar, "Robert Buchanan's Wandering Jew and its Lessons."

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

Portsmouth—Wellington Hall, Wellington-street, Southsea: G. Googe, 3, "Is Christianity a Failure?"; 7, "Is Atheism a Failure?"; replies to Celestine Edwards.

Reading—Foresters' Hall, West-street: 7, Mr. Jones, a Reading.

Sheffield—Hall of Science, Rockingham-street: 7, John Gorrill, "The Sun." Feb. 28, and March 1, 2, and 3, course of lectures by Charles Watts, in Vestry Hall, Westbar; each evening at 8.

South Shields—Capt. Duncau's Navigation School, King-street 7, a business meeting.

Wolverhampton—Athenæum Assembly Room, Queen-street: 7, miscellaneous entertainment.

LECTURERS' ENGAGEMENTS.

TOUZEAU PARRIS, Clare Lodge, 32 Upper Mall, Hammersmith London, W.—Feb. 26, Hall of Science. March 26, Hall of Science April 2, Camberwell; 16, Bristol; 30, Hall of Science. May 7 Camberwell.

H. SNELL, 6 Monk-street, Woolwich.—Feb. 26, Libra Hall. March 12, Battersea; 19, Camberwell; 20, Blackheath Liberal Club; 26, Libra Hall. April 2, Manchester.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, Rotherhithe, London, S.E.—Feb. 26, Camberwell. March 5, Hall of Science; 12, Walworth Radical Club; 19, Hyde Park. April 2, New Brompton; 16, Hyde Park; 23, Hammersmith.

C. COHEN, 154 Cannon-street-road, Commercial-road, E.—Feb. 26, Edmonton. March 5, Libra Hall; 12, Manchester; 19, Edmonton; 26, Camberwell.

O. J. HUNT, 48 Fordingley-road, St. Peter's Park, London, W.—March 12, m., Battersea; 19, Bethnal Green; 26, m., Hyde Park.

S. H. ALISON, 52 Vassall-road, Brixton, S.W.—March 15, Hall of Science. April 9, m., Wood Green; 16, Manchester.

STANLEY JONES, 53 Marlborough-road, Holloway, London, N.—Feb. 26, Wigan. March 5, Sheffield; 7, 8, 9, 10, Manchester; 12 and 13, Hull; 14, Beverley; 19, Plymouth; 26, Birmingham; 30, Hammersmith. April 2, Reading; 12, Hall of Science; 24 and 25, Sunderland; 29, Arbroath; 30, Aberdeen. May 7, Edinburgh.

SAM STANDRING, 2 Morton-street, C-on-M, Manchester.—April 16, Hull.

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