

The Free Thinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

[Sub-Editor, J. M. WHEELER.

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

PURIFICATION.

THIS Sunday (February 2) is kept in the Church as a solemn festival of purification, in memory (so it is said) of the humiliation of a certain Jewish virgin, who, having given birth to a male child without a human father—whose father, indeed, was God, and himself God—nevertheless went to the temple, in accordance with the Mosaic law, to be purified from the stain which her motherhood had brought upon her.

The law of God, given through Moses in the twelfth chapter of Leviticus, deliberately pronounced the woman who continued her kind to be unclean and impure. For three-and-thirty days she was allowed to touch no hallowed thing, nor to come into the sanctuary, if she had borne a son. But, if her offspring proved to be female, she was doubly impure—"she shall continue in the blood of her purifying three score and six days." An atonement was necessary, and, of course, an offering to the Lord, or the priest. The regulation was: "She shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtle dove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest"—who doubtless liked roast lamb and pigeon pie. If too poor to bring a lamb, "then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean."

The whole purport of priestly legislation, Jewish and Christian, is a slur on motherhood. The most holy and beautiful of human relationships is stigmatised as sin, and the burden of atonement thrown on the woman. In the old ceremony of the "Churching of Women"—that is to say, permitting them to re-enter the holy building after their "defilement"—the woman had to stay outside the church porch until the priest came with holy water to consecrate her. In our present Church of England Service the woman has to prostrate herself upon her knees, and "must offer accustomed offerings."

This story of the purification certainly tends to throw suspicion upon that other of the Immaculate Conception. If Mary believed her offspring was of the Holy Ghost, why should she atone for it as for an ordinary sin-begotten child? The angels had announced the extraordinary birth from heaven. The shepherds are said to have "made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds" (Luke ii. 17, 18). Yet Mary takes her doves to the temple, as if to throw dust in their eyes, and those of Joseph, her husband. Although rich enough to come up from Nazareth to be taxed, and despite the gifts of the Magi and the adoration of the shepherds, she failed to present a lamb, but took two pigeons, which, perhaps, were appropriate to the paternity.

Purification was followed by presentation. Thus we are told: "And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord." Here was another barbarous custom. As in early savage tribes all the offspring were at the disposal of the chief, so Jehovah affirmed

that the first-born males of men and beasts are devoted to him. In accordance with that claim, the first-born males of the beasts are duly sacrificed, and it is only by special permission that the claim to the first-born of men is waived, and it is enacted that they may be redeemed (Exodus xiii. 12-15). As Professor Huxley asked: "Is it possible to avoid the conclusion that immolation of their first-born would have been incumbent on the worshippers of Jahveh, had they not been specially excused? Can any other conclusion be drawn from the history of Abraham and Isaac?" As in that case the injunction was for sacrifice, but a ram was permitted to be substituted, so the lamb, and afterwards money, offered for redemption, was a continual witness to the Lord's claim. Here is a similar difficulty: If Joseph and Mary believed in the angel's visits and the miraculous conception; if they knew their child to be of divine, and not of human, origin, they must have felt, not only that the payment of a ransom was not needed, but that to offer it was to mock Jehovah. Neander, whose Jewish training showed him this difficulty, endeavors to mitigate it by saying that "it would be natural to suppose that Mary must have hesitated, and laid her scruples before the priests for decision, before she could make her mind up to perform these ceremonies." It was a delicate question to lay before priests, and Neander goes on to say: "Mary did not venture to speak openly of these wonderful things." But how, unless she spoke openly, could the priests understand her scruples? The evident fact is that the narrative of Mary's purification, and of the circumcision and redemption, shows that his parents knew of nothing wonderful about the birth of the child.

The Christian feast of Purification—or, as it was known in the Catholic times, "Candlemas"—is a substitution for the Pagan Lupercalia, which was regarded both as a feast of purification and as being intended to render the females fruitful. The blessing and burning of many candles at this time was a survival from gross Pagan practices. The Mass was actually performed for the candles, and, says Brady, they "even offered up petitions to the waxen creatures themselves, that they would, 'in the name of our Lord and the Holy Trinity, etc., etc., repel, extirpate devils,' and forth."

Pope Innocent, in a sermon on Candlemas, quoted in *Pagano Papisnius*, inquires: "Why do we in this feast carry candles? Because the Gentiles dedicated the month of February to the infernal gods [the deities beneath the earth], and as, at the beginning of it, Pluto stole Proserpine, and her mother, Ceres, sought her in the night with lighted candles, so they at the beginning of this month walked about the city with lighted candles; because the holy fathers could not utterly extirpate this custom, they ordained that Christians should carry about candles in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Thus, what was before done to the honor of Ceres is now done to the honor of the Virgin."

Brady tells us that this feast was also known as the *Wives' Feast*, from the excessive feasting with which the churching of women was celebrated by the gossips.

Like the other festivals of Christianity, Purification Day betrays its Pagan origin, and shows traces of underlying barbarism. In nothing is this more evident than in the slur cast on women who fulfil the most evident and natural function of their nature. What worse can be said of a faith than that it treats as essentially unclean the holy office of motherhood?

J. M. WHEELER.

GOD'S OPPORTUNITY.

(Concluded from p. 33.)

HAVING raised Bradlaugh from the dead, and set him preaching Christianity—supposing there were any need for preaching, in addition to his presence—the Lord might next proceed to convert Ingersoll. We have already said that we do not know how this could be done, but omnipotence should be equal to anything, and one more mystery is nothing in a religion which is full of incomprehensibilities. Up to the present the prayers of the Christian Endeavorers for Ingersoll's conversion have been utterly futile. The great Freethought orator gives them credit for good intentions, but smiles at their simplicity. He says he is less a Christian than ever, if there are degrees in negation. But when the Lord begins business with Ingersoll, and clears the field of all the little kneeling Christians, we may expect a startling issue. Though he wrestled as stoutly as Jacob, the "infidel" would be finally subdued; and what a shout would go up from all America when the godly could say of him, as they once said of Saul, "Behold he prayeth."

Our next suggestion is that God should do something for the Armenians. *How* he should do it is difficult to determine—that is, difficult for us; but he is omniscient, and a know-all God ought not to be staggered by such a trifle. There is one method which is obvious, and perhaps feasible, though it involves a tremendous miracle. It is perfectly clear that every male Armenian who is murdered, and every female Armenian who is worse than murdered, suffer in consequence of the political jealousies of their European co-religionists. The great Powers hate each other more than they love mercy. They permit atrocities which they might easily prevent, because they all know that any one of them that interfered would certainly thieve all it could lay hands upon in the process; and each exclaims, "Let murder and outrage continue, sooner than you shall steal before me!" Now in this state of things there is a fine opportunity for God's interposition. Let him fulfil that aged prophecy about "goodwill toward men." Let him fill the hearts of the Christian nations of Europe, if only for once, with an ardent love of justice and humanity. Then the great Powers would be united on behalf of Armenia. They would speak the united word of omnipotent effect, the Shadow of God at Constantinople would instantly submit, murder and outrage would immediately cease, and the world would at last know that there was a God of some real use to mankind.

This astounding miracle of a just and generous Europe might be followed up by the Reunion of Christendom. Switzerland picnics, and trips to Rome and Jerusalem, are unable to achieve this desired consummation. It requires something more than human power to harmonise the household of faith. "How these Christians love one another" was said a long time ago, when they were few and feeble, and had to hang together to avoid hanging separately. They stood then back to back. As soon as they were numerous and strong enough, they stood face to face, and they have been quarreling and fighting ever since. Century after century a state of things has prevailed, in which the bitter *mot* of Swift's is all too terribly true, that most men have just religion enough to make them hate each other. Yet it was promised by Jesus Christ that his disciples should be one with him, as he was one with the Father. Well, let him keep his word, or let the Father keep it for him. The voice that stilled the raging billows of the Sea of Galilee should once more cry "Peace!" to the mutual animosities of Christendom.

On the whole, however, we rather hope that this Reunion will not take place in our time. Christian divisions have been very useful to the Freethinker. They furnish him with a perennial argument against the divine claims of Christianity. They also assist him in his efforts towards self-preservation. While the Christians worry each other he stands a chance of surviving. When they are reconciled he is likely to be devoured.

It would also have a great effect on "infidels" if the sky-pilots were suddenly to be endued with humility and self-denial. If all the bishops, for instance, declared that God had warned them to renounce wealth and abandon their palaces; if they unanimously agreed to live in two rooms on thirty shillings a week; would it not be difficult

for "infidelity" to oppose such powerful Evidences of Christianity?

We may be told, of course, that God will not work miracles to convince Atheists. But is this fair? He worked a multitude of miracles long, long ago, to convince persons who were by no means slow of belief. Why not repeat the performance when it is vastly more requisite? It will not do to say the Atheist is obstinate in his incredulity. He is a man, and not a monster. He is subject to the common laws of human nature. His intelligence works in spite of his will. He cannot help being swayed by facts. He is unable to resist the force of evidence. It is absurd to affirm that he would only smile if the words "There is a God" were written in fire on the vault of night. The first night the words are visible the Atheists will certainly be startled. Most of them will think of going to church next Sunday.

A less heroic measure would be the fulfilment of the promises made in the last chapter of Mark. Jesus Christ promised that those who believed in him should drink poison and caress serpents with impunity. The divinity of the Church should therefore be demonstrated. After the sermon (or before it, if he is long-winded) every minister should drink a dose of prussic acid—not prepared in the vestry. It might be tried first on a hopelessly diseased cat, just to show there was no deception; and if the minister survived *his* dose, it would be better evidence than the liquefaction of the blood of Saint Januarius. Further, the clergy (in accordance with another promise in Mark) should go into the hospitals and heal the sick with oil and prayer. This would be rough on the doctors, but it would be grateful to the sick; and if missionaries with this healing power (to say nothing of the poison and serpent tricks) were sent amongst the heathen, the whole world might be converted to Christianity in less than a hundred years.

We might pursue this subject much farther, but what we have written may suffice. All we have to say in conclusion is this—that if the things we have suggested are too strong, we should be satisfied with something weaker to begin with. It would make "infidels" pause if Christian Evidence lecturers were to display a hatred of lies and libels.

G. W. FOOTE.

THE CHURCH AND EDUCATION.

THE truth of the familiar phrase, that "history repeats itself," is being amply verified in the present attitude of the Church towards education. The clergy have always been persistent opponents of the Secular instruction of children. When in 1839 the first grant of £30,000 was proposed by the Government for educational purposes, Canon Wray and the Rev. Hugh Stowell headed an organisation in opposition to it; and in 1843 the English Dissenters resisted, and threw out the Government Factory Educational Bill. The same kind of antagonism was manifested by the Church party towards Mr. Forster's Bill of 1870, the object of which was to establish Board schools throughout the kingdom. The clergy saw that the success of this measure would mean the death-blow to their monopoly of the sham education which was then being imparted to the rising generation. It is true that in 1870 some of the Nonconformists pleaded boldly for secular education; for instance, Mr. Winterbotham exclaimed in the House of Commons: "What did the Nonconformists want? I avow it frankly, *secular education*. A national system of education for a people who do not agree, or who will not admit they agree, in their religious opinions, must be secular." This, at least, was consistent; but contrast such language with the advocacy of the Nonconformists of to-day, who are among the most determined opponents of a national system of secular education.

They are content with what is called the "Compromise," which is as unjust as it has proved useless in its operations. It entirely ignores the rights of thousands of Agnostics and Secularists, who are in no way recognised. This "compromise" was proposed by the Tory leader of the House of Commons on March 8, 1871, and it provides that in all Board schools "the Bible shall be read, and there shall be given such explanations and such instruction therefrom, in the principles of morality and religion, as are suited to the capacity of children." Now, is not such a provision absurd upon the very face of it? Of course it is left to the

teacher to decide as to the nature of the "explanations and instructions" that are to be given, and also what is "suited to the capacities of children." Thus power may be placed in the hands of an orthodox bigot that may prove most injurious to the youthful mind. Besides, this "compromise" has entirely failed to secure harmony, as is shown by the repeated squabbles in the School Board meetings, and the present clerical conspiracy against Board school education. The fact is, as Mr. Gladstone and the Rev. Joseph Parker have stated, the real settlement of the question can be found only in the establishment of a system of secular education. The clergy have their churches, wherein they can impart religious instruction; the schools, supported by the money of the public, must not be made a training ground for superstition and vain speculations.

Upon what is the present clerical conspiracy against Board schools based? It is this: First, that they injure the voluntary schools; and, secondly, that they impose a heavy pecuniary burden upon the public. Now, these complaints come from the supporters of Church schools, which have increased in numbers since 1870 from 6,382 to 11,897, and which in 1894 received grants to the amount of £2,732,000. Besides, the Church has wealth enough, if it were wisely used, aided by voluntary subscriptions—which it ought to command if its schools are really conducted upon the voluntary principle—to provide for the instruction of the children under its control. The editor of the London *Daily Chronicle*, of November 20 of last year, writes: "Let it be remembered that they [the supporters of Church schools] are the State-selected and State-favored body, receiving yearly for ecclesiastical uses between six and seven millions of State money and property. Turning to their official year-book, it will be found there stated that the voluntary gifts of this immensely wealthy body amount to about five millions annually for all religious and educational purposes. To these sums has to be added their share of the money voted by Parliament under the Education Acts for the maintenance of elementary day schools; a sum covering more millions, the product of national taxation." In spite of these facts, the advocates of voluntary schools complain of the pecuniary burden which the taxpayers have to bear in supporting Board schools. It appears to be overlooked that, if the demands of the Church party for additional grants are complied with, that "burden" will be considerably increased. Let us grant that the cost of our national education is great; but the expense of providing for our criminals is the less in consequence; for, in proportion to the increase of true education, crime decreases.

The voluntary method has had its trial, and has proved a complete failure; if it had been successful, there would have been no need for Board schools. Before 1870 the Church schools had it nearly all their own way, and what was the result? Only about six per cent. of the population received the very imperfect instruction then imparted. Mr. Forster, in introducing the Education Bill in 1870, said: "It is calculated that in Liverpool the number of children between five and thirteen who ought to receive an elementary education is 80,000; but, so far as we can make out, 20,000 of them attend no school whatever, while at least another 20,000 attend schools where they get an education not worth having. In Manchester—that is, in the borough of Manchester, not including Salford—there are about 65,000 children who might be at school, and of this number 16,000 go to no school at all.... As a Yorkshireman, I am sorry to say that, from what I hear, Leeds appears to be as bad as Liverpool; and so also, I fear, is Birmingham." Now, such was the state of things before Board schools existed, when the opponents of secular education had an opportunity of showing what they could do. Why, at that time there was not one school in "the swarming region of Whitechapel, and many other equally poor and populous regions of London, much less in country towns and agricultural parishes." This is stated in *Cassell's History of England*, which adds: "The consequence was that the condition of the agricultural population was as debased morally as it was destitute physically in the almost total absence of education, the very funds granted by pious testators for this end being embezzled by the clergy or squirearchy." A noble record this, truly, of educational effort under Christian rule!

Of course we are not opposed to voluntary education—the more of it the better; but, if additional grants from the public treasury are to be made to Church schools, it must

be upon the understanding that the extra grants shall be utilised to increase the efficiency of the schools, and not to save the pockets of those who boast about the superiority of the voluntary method. Moreover, all schools receiving financial aid from the public ought to be, and must be, under the control of the public. We are upon the eve of an important educational crisis, and it is the duty of all Secularists to carefully watch the doings of the Tory and clerical alliance during the next few months. After years of hard fighting we have deprived the Church party of the control they once had over the minds of the rising generation; be it our duty to struggle to the bitter end to prevent them regaining that control. Further, Secular parents should make it a point on all occasions to withdraw their children from school during the giving of Bible lessons. Let parents remember what Professor Huxley said to the School Board when he was a member thereof. His words were: "What I ask, and what I have a right to ask, and what you as honest men must grant, is this: that these tender children shall not be taught that which you do not yourselves believe." CHARLES WATTS.

SECULARISM IN SCOTLAND: PAST AND PRESENT.

EVER since the time of the Reformation there has been some measure of Freethought in Scotland, as even the ultra-orthodox Dr. McCosh—the McBosh of Huxley—admits in his partisan *History of the Scottish Philosophy*; but in a country where the fierce zeal of the people gave the clergy practically untrammelled power any public avowal of heresy was naturally dangerous, as was proved by the judicial murder of the poor lad Aitkenhead; by the Scottish Presbyterian clergy in 1646; and by their determined but futile attempts to bring even so powerful and well-protected a heresiarch as Hume before an ecclesiastical tribunal. It is to Hutchinson, Professor of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow University, one of Hume's contemporaries, that we owe the introduction of Latitudinarianism into the Scottish Church. This movement, at first academical, took some decades to ooze out to the "common people"; but in Burns's day it had reached the market-place in the form of the famous controversy between the "Auld Lichts" and the "New Lichts"—representing, respectively, Ancient Orthodoxy and New Knowledge, which inspired some of Burns's most poignant satires. The acclamation with which these were received shows that even then there was a considerable leaven of Freethought working amongst the Scottish people, and there is no doubt that this would have spread rapidly but for the panic legislation against liberty of the press and of speech, passed during the height of the great reaction which followed upon the first French Revolution. One of the most precious enactments of the recrudescence of barbarism which marked that agitation was the extension to Scotland of the Acts 9 and 10 of William and Mary, the infamous Blasphemy statutes, with an important addition marking the legislators' nice sense of the superior sanctity of the Scotch, and their consequently greater repugnance to blasphemy. While in England the maximum sentence for that offence is three years' imprisonment, in Scotland the penalty is from seven to fourteen years' transportation. The rigor with which George the Third's penal code was enforced was illustrated by the numerous trials for "sedition" during the closing years of the last, and the opening decades of the present, century. It was actually an indictable offence to lend to a friend copies of Paine's *Rights of Man* or *Age of Reason*, and that he had done this formed one of the gravest charges against the gifted but luckless Muir.

It is surprising that, under these adverse circumstances, Freethought should have made any headway at all. That it did so was due, in part, to the conflict between Orthodoxy and moderation, and to the extensive, although probably clandestine, circulation of the excellent translations of the works of Voltaire and Rousseau, issued, during the lifetime of the authors, by Urie and other Glasgow and Edinburgh publishers, and also of the widespread diffusion of Paine's writings. We reach the beginnings of organised Freethought in the first years of the third decade of the century, when the "Zetetic Society of Edinburgh" produced its *Shorter Catechism for Explaining to the Young and Ignorant the Principles of Atheism*, for the publication of which, and the

sale of Richard Carlile's *Republican*, in 1824, James Affleck was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, and ordered to find security for five years, under a penalty of £100. Affleck only averted transportation by tendering a plea of guilty, and making an abject apology. From this time forward we have records of virtually continuous Free-thought propaganda in Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, as will be seen on a reference to the old volumes of Carlile's *Republican* and *Lion*, G. J. Holyoake's *Reasoner*, Robert Cooper's *London Investigator*, and the later Secularist organs.

I am not disparaging the status or service of Edinburgh or Dundee when I say that Glasgow has always been well in the forefront of the Free-thought movement in Scotland. The West of Scotland is proverbially more advanced in political and religious thought and life than the rest of the country. There is a legend, sacred to the local sermon and religious tract, about a certain "Hell-fire Club," the Atheistical members of which assembled at "the witching hour of night," to gyrate like dervishes, yelling all the while, "There is no God! There is no God!" In my salad days that picture used to have an awful fascination for me. I understand the feeling now. It was the natural response to the titillating stimulus that picturesque fiction always begets. When we get beyond the nebulous atmosphere of myth and legend, we discover that the first Free-thought Society in Glasgow was a namesake of, and sister to, the Edinburgh Zetetic Society. The Glasgow Zetetics did one good piece of work, through the agency of "Anti-Theos," whose examination of Gillespie's *Argument for the Existence of the Lord God* is a really clever and forcible performance. To the "Zetetics" succeeded the "Universal Community of Rational Religionists," an offshoot from Owenism. This body erected a spacious meeting-place, which—"to such base uses may we come at last"—is now a Catholic chapel. In the heyday of their prosperity—when overflowing meetings were the rule—crowds of gaping bigots used to line the streets near the hall, to behold what manner of men these Atheists were. It was under the immediate influence of the Owenite view of education that the Glasgow Secular School took its rise. It enjoyed a prosperous career, and turned out many pupils who were a credit to its methods, and a blessing and honour to the society in which they moved. Some of them still survive, in a green old age, whose memories of a school-life free from the burdens of Bible and Catechism, and the Solomonic rigor of the traditional pedagogy, are amongst their fondest possessions. The Owenite phase merged into "The Eclectic Institute," which had various homes. It was under the auspices of the "Institute" that Mr. Bradlaugh first came to Glasgow, and during its régime Charles Southwell, G. J. Holyoake, R. Cooper, J. Barker, and Mrs. H. Law frequently lectured and debated in Glasgow and the neighboring towns. Some years after the formation of the N.S.S. the title of the Glasgow Society was changed to "The Eclectic and Secular Institute," and finally to "The Glasgow Secular Society," which, with the addition of "and Branch of the N.S.S.," is the name it now bears.

Glasgow has borne a good share of the brunt of Secularist propaganda and defence in Scotland within the last twenty years. It rendered yeoman service to Mr. Bradlaugh all through his heroic Parliamentary struggle, and when old Mr. Ferguson was prosecuted for selling the *Freethinker* in 1885, with the aid of Mr. Foote, and backed by the Secularists of Great Britain, the Glasgow Branch procured the quashing of the magistrate's sentence, and elicited an expression of opinion from the judges of the Supreme Court which will have the effect of preventing similar prosecutions for a long time to come. It is, therefore, specially gratifying to me to know that Glasgow so worthily sustained her good record by contributing liberally to Mr. Foote's lecture scheme, of the wisdom and utility of which I have just had striking proof.

During the week ending January 25, Mr. Charles Watts lectured under the scheme at Kilmarnock, Paisley, Motherwell, and Camberslang. It will be for him to give his impressions of the week's work, from the lecturer's point of view; but as one who took some part in promoting the meetings, and as an eye-witness of the series, I should like to testify briefly to their great importance and unqualified success. Much of the latter was due, of course, to Mr. Watts's personal effort and influence. He was in capital form throughout, and his lectures were models of exact and lucid reasoning, concise and connected statement of fact, and persuasive eloquence. Old friends protested

that they had never heard him to such advantage, and new hearers were full of his praises. I have had a large experience of audiences, and can safely affirm that I have seldom seen more intelligent or attentive gatherings than those which Mr. Watts addressed at the places named. This was notably the case at Motherwell, where the meeting consisted largely of alert-looking young men, who evidently followed the lecture with the keenest interest. There can be no doubt that Mr. Watts's meetings at Kilmarnock, Motherwell, and Camberslang will have the immediate effect of exciting lively local discussion and speculation as to the character of Secularism; and if those places are visited shortly by other special lecturers, the material will soon be forthcoming for the constitution of branches.

The most decisive proof of the practical value of Mr. Foote's scheme is found in the fact that, but for its existence, I should not have been able to get up meetings at all. The local organisers of them were in every case working-men, who simply could not have faced the responsibility of meeting the expenses, plus a lecturer's fee. It was the assurance that the scheme relieved them of the latter obligation that cleared the way for action. I am glad to report that, all through, the arrangements were most efficient, and that the local friends worked with the greatest enthusiasm and energy for the success of the meetings. At Motherwell no collection was taken, the local Secularists having agreed to defray the expenses themselves. At none of the other places, in spite of the good attendance, did the income quite cover the outlay. But for the scheme, this meant that the local friends would have been obliged to make a special box to fee the lecturer, or send him away unpaid. In the first case, there would be no disposition to repeat a costly experiment; and in the second, the lecturer could not afford to return.

The next great advantage of which the scheme gives promise is that of extending and strengthening Secularist organisation. Many years ago, writing in the *National Reformer*, I declared that even in remote Highland villages Freethinkers were to be found, while in the large towns they were to be computed by tens of thousands. Subsequent observation satisfies me that my estimate was well within the mark. What, then, is wanted to bring all these incohering atoms into combination? Obviously, some well-contrived and sedulously-sustained plan of propaganda and edification. In the smaller towns Freethinkers may be unknown to one another, or there may be many in a transitional state, who lack full and exact information as to the principles and policy of Secularism. A public meeting brings everything to a focus; introductions are effected, and misconceptions cleared up. We in Scotland have long been anxious to establish a Federation of the Scottish Branches, but have hitherto failed to devise the means appropriate to that end. In Mr. Foote's scheme we possess, in my opinion, a first step towards that "consummation devoutly to be wished." In the first place, the provinces must be worked up thoroughly, and as many new Branches as possible started; while Branches in the large towns which are languishing will need tonic treatment. Then, when this preparation has been made, the "psychological moment" for co-operation between the Branches will be easily divined. This project depends, of course, on the continuance of Mr. Foote's scheme, and that again on the amount of support it receives from the party at large. Surely, in view of what the scheme has actually achieved, and of the rich promise that it holds out of wider usefulness, all Secularists ought to befriend it to the utmost of their power.

Superstition and bigotry die hard, but they are dying. I have been very much struck with the comparative ease with which halls were obtained, and other arrangements carried on, for Mr. Watts's meetings. Thirty years ago, in the same places—with the exception of Paisley—there would have been serious difficulty in procuring a meeting-place, and it is not likely that any local printer would have risked doing the bills, etc. Now there is no sensible hitch in these respects; and the lecturer, instead of being hooted, mobbed, and pelted with decaying animal and vegetable products, is treated with an almost disappointing deference and amenity. But let no one flatter himself that the danger is over, and the need for the war upon Unreason past. Education is doing much to sap the foundations of orthodoxy, and spread abroad the spirit of fraternity; but so long as the Secularist is technically—and sometimes actually—

an outlaw, so long as religion is entrenched within its strongholds of State-bestowed privilege and fortified with the armaments of sinister social influence; so long must we fight unyieldingly and unceasingly. An endowed Church and unrepealed Heresy Laws are a perpetual menace to liberty. In the event of some insensate reaction, they would certainly be used as engines of persecution; and we do not know the hour when perchance the blustering wind of religious fanaticism may kindle into a fierce, devouring blaze the now smouldering fires of the Moloch of superstition. We shall never be safe until they are utterly extinguished; but in the meantime we will be fairly content if we can prevent any active combustion in the sullen, smoking pile.

J. P. GILMOUR.

"ACTS OF GOD."

It is the duty of people who accept the dogma that "God governs in the affairs of men" to give the world some system by which catastrophes due to supernatural intervention may be distinguished from those which are referable to natural causes. Until they do this, we shall never know when to ascribe an event to divine displeasure, and take warning accordingly, or when to look elsewhere for an explanation. The phenomena in themselves afford us no guide. Here is an incident which has enjoyed the publicity usually accorded to such things:—

"HIS DEATH AN ACT OF GOD."

Bridgeport, Dec. 14.—Judge John B. Douglas, who drew up the writ for the arrest of the Rev. Dr. Joseph Pullman, who denounced Jane May, the actress, from the pulpit last Sunday, died of heart failure to-day.

"The news of his death spread rapidly about town. Some of Dr. Pullman's sympathisers pronounced the sudden summons a retribution. Some said it was an act of God, meted out as a warning to lawyers against issuing body writs for the arrest of clergymen."—*New York World*, Dec. 15, 1895.

Obviously, the significance of the foregoing is that the deceased, by his act, incurred the wrath of heaven, and that death was sent as a warning to other judges not to draw up writs for the arrest of clergymen. The penalty proves the enormity of the offence. Now, if we are to take death in such instances as sure proof that God disapproves of the particular act with which it is associated, what inference shall we draw from the following?—

Dayton, O., Oct. 7.—The Rev. Dr. Longstroth dropped dead in the pulpit of the Wayne-avenue church yesterday while conducting services.

Lockhart, Texas, Oct. 22.—Rev. A. J. Potter dropped dead at this place while preaching. He fell in the pulpit and died instantly.

Worcester, Mass., Oct. 24.—Rev. William Gordon, of Michigan City, Ind., dropped dead last evening while attending prayer meeting at Grace Methodist Episcopal Church.

Chicago, Oct. 23.—Ephraim I. Bond died while kneeling at his bedside in morning prayer yesterday.

Brooklyn, Nov. 24.—Margaret Farell, an aged widow, left her home at about six o'clock yesterday morning to attend early mass in St. Agnes's Church. She was prostrated with heart failure while the services were in progress, and expired just as an ambulance arrived.

The Rev. Samuel Y. Lum, a retired Presbyterian clergyman and missionary, residing at Rutherford, N.J., was struck and instantly killed by an express train on the Erie Railway at that place.

Brooklyn, Dec. 16.—Harvey Doolittle, a war veteran, aged sixty-five years, dropped dead last night while on his knees at prayer just preceding the services in St. Peter's Episcopal Church.

New York, May 4.—Mrs. Hannah Kimbrook was among the exhorters at the Salvation Army Hall in Newark Thursday night. She had thanked the Lord for the favors he had granted her, and sat down. A moment later she shrieked and fell to the floor dead.

New York, Dec. 30.—Andrew P. Rogers, class leader of the

Bedford-street M. E. Church, complained of feeling ill directly after entering the class meeting-room yesterday morning. A physician was summoned, but he died immediately.

Mitchell Station, Ala., July 28.—Services were being conducted in a negro Church near here to-day when the report of a pistol rang out and the preacher, Eli Williams, fell dead in his pulpit, the ball having entered his heart.

Hartford, Nov. 17.—Mrs. Mary Howe, of Putnam, was burned to death while reading her Bible last night. She went to her room with her Bible, as was her custom. In some way she upset the lamp, and her clothing took fire. She died on the following morning.

The theory in the case of Judge Douglas, of Bridgeport, as has been pointed out, is that he brought death upon himself by doing that which was displeasing to the Almighty. We, of course, cannot disprove this; but if it is asserted as a fact to be used in subsequent syntheses, how will its asserters dispose of the other facts cited? And while resting in the conclusion that God punishes those who commit acts displeasing to him, will they assent to the related inference that such acts as are not rebuked by him are to be regarded as pleasing in his sight?

We ought to feel justified in believing that God, having said, "Thou shalt not kill," would, if he were present, arrest the arm of the murderer before it had delivered the fatal blow—that he would stand between the victim and the assassin; but there is no instance of his ever having done this. Again, since he has directed his ministers to preach to all nations, we might naturally suppose that he would protect them in doing so. The record of his missionaries slain in China, in Turkey, and elsewhere, shows how baseless is such a hope. But if he does not take the pains to shield them from his enemies, surely he does not smite them himself! Read of the deaths of the Rev. Dr. Longstroth, the Rev. A. J. Potter, and the Rev. Mr. Gordon, as told in the dispatches we have reproduced, and then, with the case of Judge Douglas in mind, account for them on any other hypothesis than that he does so smite them. Give us some organon by which these deaths may be distinguished from the miraculous, so that those who feel impelled to follow the example of the deceased clergyman and preach, or of the deceased worshippers and pray, may know whether or not they are rushing upon certain destruction. It may be unsafe to generalise on a basis of nine deaths for worshipping to one for drawing up a writ; but the data at hand certainly do not indicate that the lives of those who put their trust in God are any safer than the lives of those who do not. His visitations are impartial and indiscriminate.

The God who thus conducts himself—totally insensible to the needs of his worshippers, allowing their worst enemies to trample them unrebuked, and himself visiting them only with sudden death—is the deity habitually addressed in prayer by millions of Christians. We don't believe that any such being exists outside the imaginations of the persons who so address him. We believe that the death-dealing powers attributed to him are the gift of their own malice, and that when these Bridgeport Christians say that God inflicted capital punishment upon Judge Douglas for issuing a body writ for the arrest of the Rev. Dr. Pullman, they thereby only indicate what they would do themselves if they had the power they ascribe to their deity.

—*Truthseeker.*

Bishop Whipple, of Minnesota, says that the Dakota Indians once held a war dance near a mission house. He went to Wabasha, the chief, and said: "Wabasha, you asked me for a missionary and teacher. I gave them to you. I visit you, and the first sight is this brutal scalp dance. I knew the Chippewa whom your young men have murdered. His wife is crying for her husband; his children are asking for their father. Wabasha, the Great Spirit hears his children cry. He is angry. Some day he will ask Wabasha, 'Where is your red brother?' The old chief smiled, drew his pipe from his mouth, and said: "White man go to war with his own brother in the same country; kill more men than Wabasha can count in all his life. Great Spirit smiles, says: 'Good white man! He has my book. I love him very much. I have a good place for him by-and-bye.' The Indian is a wild man. He has no Great Spirit book. He kills one man; has a scalp dance. Great Spirit is mad, and says: 'Bad Indian! I put him in a bad place by-and-bye.' Wabasha don't believe it."

THE NATURAL BASIS OF MORALITY.

THROUGH many centuries of experience man has learned that some actions conduce to human happiness; that others cause unhappiness. One class of actions is called right, the other is called wrong. The only criterion by which we can ultimately decide as to the moral quality of acts is the effect they produce for or against human well-being. Hence, utility is the standard and test of virtue and goodness. "The moral law" is a generalised expression for all those actions which have the approval of our highest judgment. In external nature there is no reign of moral law, no trace of moral sensibility. Only in the conscious mind do we find moral law, and there it is a conception of an order, made by abstracting from character and conduct, and combining in an ideal sequence all those moral qualities which experience has taught us are advantageous to the race.

The useful comprehends, of course, among other components, the pleasurable, the ornamental, the beautiful, art, poetry, music, love, and passion, as well as printing presses, steamboats, telegraphs, and sewing machines. Our ideas of duty become more correct with advancing culture, because it enables us to understand more fully our relations to our fellow men and to the external world, and to perceive the result of certain lines of action and courses of conduct, by which we learn what is involved in those general principles and precepts which have descended from the early and comparatively uncultured periods of human history.

Life has been evolved and sustained, in a perpetual conflict it is true, yet primarily, by actions which are accompanied by pleasurable sensations. Were it possible for a race of animals to seek pleasure in injurious actions, and to avoid beneficial actions as painful, such a race could not fail to become extinct very soon. It is certain that, under such circumstances, no race could come into existence. It follows that our knowledge and practice of virtue—the sum-total of acts that conduce to our well-being—have been attained by the desire for happiness.

Experience has taught men that some acts which are pleasurable for the moment are, under some circumstances, ruinous in the end; that others, which are painful for the time, are ultimately the source of great happiness. It has also taught that acts which may be a source of pleasure to the individual, if he can enjoy it without reference to others, may be against the happiness of the community, which in tribal, and much more in civilised, life is the main consideration. The community, which once was but a tribe, has extended till it includes the entire human family; and the theorem of the utilitarian philosophy, broadly interpreted, is that those actions are right which are best adapted to promote the well-being of all mankind.

Undoubtedly man has a moral sense called conscience. It does not teach us what is right and wrong. In two individuals, indeed, it may approve acts diametrically opposite in moral quality. It is not "the voice of God." Its decisions depend upon the views which are held, and these upon inherited character, education, and circumstances. Still, this moral sense is *à priori* in the individual, although acquired by the race. I hold with Mr. Spencer when he says: "I believe that the experiences of utility, organised and consolidated through all past generations of the human race, have been producing corresponding modifications, which, by continual transmission and accumulation, have become in us certain faculties of moral intuition—certain emotions responding to right and wrong conduct, which have an apparent basis in the individual experience of utility."

The moral sense is the highly-complex product of human culture. Although intuitive in civilised man, there is every argument that the case admits of in favor of the view that it is the result of acquirement in the race. We have here, in its application to the moral sense, a complete reconciliation of the old sensational theory of Hobbes and Locke and the transcendental theory of Liebnitz and Kant, each of which contained an element of truth and an element of error.

If a man is just, honorable, and noble, he is so, not because behind all his acts and decisions is a metaphysical entity called "the will," which acts uninfluenced by motives, but because he is so constituted, or he has been so influenced by his education and surroundings, that his desires and

aversions determine his actions in accordance with just, honorable, and noble principles. The harmoniously-developed and truly moral man is he with whom the performance of an act that is right, far from involving a struggle, is easy and pleasant, whatever sacrifice it demands. The sense of coercion, the feeling that the act must be done, gives way to a cheerful readiness and desire to do what is right.

"Conscientiousness," says Herbert Spencer, "has in many outgrown that stage in which the sense of a compelling power is joined with rectitude of action. The truly honest man, here and there to be found, is not only without thought of legal, religious, or social compulsion, when he discharges an equitable claim on him, but he is without thought of self-compulsion. He does the right thing with a simple feeling of satisfaction in doing it, and is, indeed, impatient if anything prevents him from having the satisfaction of doing it."

Naturalism gives prominence to what admits of no dispute—that we must all leave behind us the influence of our thoughts and deeds, which will go on in the great general life of mankind. Man lives not for himself alone, nor for those simply who claim his attention during his personal existence, but as well for the millions that come after him to receive for a heritage whatever contribution, material or psychical, he has made to the progress of the race. Every human life, from the least to the greatest, leaves traces of its existence which, in one form or another, must last while the race endures. Who that is moved by lofty considerations can fail to find in this great truth an impulse to a noble life?

B. F. UNDERWOOD.

—*Secular Thought.*

ACID DROPS.

"TWIXT the Two Millstones" is the title of a story which is running through the *Methodist Times*. It is all so delightfully simple—just suited to the taste and intelligence of Methodist readers! There is a beautiful Christian character, of course; and equally of course, an ugly Atheist character. The latter's portrait is painted in this fashion: "There were about fifteen men and boys in all. One of them, to whom all gave precedence, was a tall, thin, wiry-looking man, grey-headed and grim-visaged. His eyes were grey and cold, and his expression was cynical, deepened by a crafty kind of smile, as if he knew a great deal more to everyone's detriment than he meant to declare. This was the old workman Cartledge had spoken of as 'Shakeshaft.' Whether or not this was his real name, or only a nickname, no one knew; but it was the only name he was known by at Cartledge and Brown's. Shakeshaft ruled the shop, and had done so from time immemorial. He was head spokesman, when one was needed. He was treasurer and head of their little trade club, for the braziers here were at that time in no general trade union, mainly through Shakeshaft's influence, who, though a stern Radical, did not believe in general unions. These, he maintained, only enabled a few lazy officials to fatten without work. He was also their chief authority upon all public questions, the men taking their opinions from him with only one or two exceptions. One of the exceptions was Hobson Baines, who preferred to think for himself, and generally thought differently from Shakeshaft upon all questions alike, whether industrial, political, or religious. Shakeshaft read *Reynolds's News* and the *Weekly Dispatch* through every Sunday—the *News* in the morning, and the *Dispatch* in the evening. These furnished him with texts for the whole week following. He had been a Chartist in his early youth, and was a Republican as well as a Radical now. He was fond of dropping in to hear Bradlaugh at the 'Hall of Science' in Old-street, on his way home to a street off Bath-street, City-road."

"Shakeshaft" once "baited" a poor apprentice who "still showed some respect for the beliefs of his father and mother"; but Bill Baines gave him a dreadful licking, and he sang small afterwards. Bill Baines died in due time, but Hobson Baines (his son) still made it warm for the Atheist. He argued down "Shakeshaft," and "in that shop, at least, Bradlaugh's superficial attacks upon Christianity were thoroughly exposed." Perhaps they were, and perhaps they weren't. But this, at least, is certain—that the writer of this pious story, the Rev. S. E. Keeble, never, to our knowledge, went to the Hall of Science and answered Bradlaugh *himself*. He found it easier to reply to Bradlaugh's "superficial attacks" at a considerable distance.

"The eight days' mission in Craven Chapel," says the *Methodist Times*, "is now progressing with encouraging

results. Mr. Price Hughes preaches every evening at eight. There have been conversions, some of them of extraordinary interest, every night." *Extraordinary interest! Does this portend a new Atheist Shoemaker?*

The *Daily News* Paris correspondent states (January 25) that strenuous attempts were made by the clergy to bring back M. Floquet on his death-bed to the Church in which he was piously reared. The Cardinal Archbishop of Paris sent word through a Basque relative of M. Floquet—M. Etcheverry, ex-Deputy—that he wished to be allowed to pay a visit to a dying man. Madame Charras, sister of Madame Floquet, received the message. She said that her brother-in-law's well-known views had not altered, and that she must keep out everyone coming with the intention of effecting a change. Madame Larre subsequently backed up the Archbishop. She has two sons in the Church. One is Curé of St. Eugénie's Church at Biarritz, and the other Vicar of St. Jean-de-Luz. Their sister is mother of the Abbé Bodin, Vicar of Notre Dame de Plaisance in Paris. After the Archbishop's offer had been rejected, an Abbé presented himself at M. Floquet's. Doctor Debet told him that he must bar the door against him. Later on a fresh attempt was made by another priest, but with no better success. M. Floquet was long afraid that he would be laid siege to in his last days. He carried about on him for some years a paper directing that should he fall ill or die suddenly he was to be treated as a Freethinker, and given a funeral as such. Madame Floquet is a Protestant.

"Who discovered America? Historic facts prove that God intended this country to be colonised by a Christian people."—*Rev. Dr. McAllister, Editor of the "Christian Statesman."* Catholics discovered America, and if that fact had any prophetic significance it meant that "God intended this country to be colonised" by a Catholic people. But Dr. McAllister is trying to humbug his readers. Not he nor any of us knows the first thing about what God "intended." If there is any such deity as the one alluded to, we can only hope that his intentions are honorable, and let it go at that. —*Truthseeker.*

The Rev. James A. West was arrested on the streets of this city a few days ago for improper behavior in public. His denomination is not given in the report of the arrest, and his conduct affords no clue to it.—*Truthseeker (New York).*

The Rev. William M. Ritchie, of Asbury Park, N.J., has been circulating the report that the Rev. Howard T. Widdemar, of the same place, is too gay for a minister of the gospel: that he gets into girl scrapes wherever he goes, and that he is not regularly ordained. Widdemar sued Ritchie for \$5,000 damages as a slanderer, and recovered \$750. The Rev. Mr. Ritchie persists in his charges, and will appeal.

The Rev. Henry Sandwith, a Yorkshire clergyman, shot himself near Basingstoke. It is not believed that he was afflicted with Atheism, which, according to Talmage, is the principal cause of suicide.

Brother C. C. Moore, of the Cincinnati *Blue Grass Blade*, has been in the ministry, and this is what he says of the Christianity of the day: "There is nothing in the world that is so breeding hypocrites and liars as religion is. The Christians do not care at all whether a man really believes their religion, if he will only be enough of a hypocrite and liar to pretend that he believes it; and the whole country is full of people who are members of churches and secret societies just for the same reason that it assists them in business."

Voltaire said "Mustapha does not believe, but he believes that he believes." We wonder if even as much as this can be said of the ordinary Christian, who asserts himself quite sure that Jesus rose from the dead, but will privately express qualms as to the story of Jonah and the whale.

Inquisition into religious views has, it is commonly supposed, died out in the public service. The clergy, however, attempt it wherever possible, and especially in the case of teachers. The Reactionaries on the London School Board now propose to ask the teachers: "Do you regularly attend a place of worship on Sundays?" a question which has nothing to do with their teaching qualifications, and is insolently in opposition to the spirit of the Education Act. If the teachers are ready to submit to this sort of thing, we should say they are wanting in pluck and self-respect—qualities far more essential for the teaching of the young than religion. The old Test Acts had far more ground of justification than this new inquisition.

Mgr. Izmirlian, patriarch of Armenia, estimates the number of recent forced conversions from Christianity to Islam at 50,000.

Thomas Phillips and Lady Llanover established at Llandovery, in Carmarthenshire, a "Welsh Institution," the intention and object of the founders being instruction and education in Welsh language and literature. The *Daily News* says: "During the most palmy days of the school's history 'the primary intent and object of the founder was faithfully observed.' It was only when the present Bishop of St. Asaph succeeded to the wardenship that the pious founders' wishes, though scarcely thirty years old, were ignored." It remarks on finding the Bishop of Asaph, that energetic upholder of the Establishment, setting the fashion in diverting endowments to other purposes than those intended by the pious founders.

At Luiz, in Austria, where Catholics and Protestants have long lived in harmony, the bishop suddenly ordered that Protestants should no longer be given burial in the common churchyard. The Protestant clergy refused to enforce this injunction, not seeing any reason for changing what had been right for so long. The Governor supported the bishop, but the Mayor and Town Council have protested, and religious animosity is aroused.

The *Leavenworth Herald* is opposed to the folly of sending missionaries to convert the heathen in foreign lands, when there are heathens to be found in almost every town and hamlet in our own country. We are by no means a Christian nation, and, until we are, what folly it is for us to attempt to Christianise the world.

It is related that Benjamin Franklin read the manuscript of Paine's *Age of Reason*, and advised the author against publishing it, using the famous warning, "Don't unchain the tiger." Franklin died in 1790, and the *Age of Reason* was not written until 1793, so that Franklin's advice must have come in the form of a spirit communication; but it is, nevertheless, regarded by the Church as good enough material for Sunday-school history.

Professor G. D. Herron, writing in the *Arena*, says: "The Nicene Council, from which the Church received its theology, was so shamelessly immoral, so without sense of right and human honor, as to outrage even Constantine's sense of ethical decency—and he, although styled the first Christian emperor by Church fables, was avowedly Atheistic in both morals and intellect, a character that might stand as the historic incarnation of the political genius of evil." We notice that Professor Herron always uses Atheistic as synonymous with base. It is, however, absurd to suppose Constantine was an Atheist. He was a Superstitious, influenced by the sign of the Cross and baptism.

Young women ushers are an attraction held out in some American churches to catch the hoary-headed sinner and keep the would-be prodigal son within the fold. The racket works for a time, but the novelty soon wears off, and the girls may yet have to don the new woman's garb in the blessed cause.

The Ritualist organs are still crying out at the bishops because they obey the law of the land rather than the law of the Church, and permit the re-marriage of divorced persons. The *Tablet* mildly tells them that if they take Cæsar's pay they must obey Cæsar's rules.

Who was Azazel the scapegoat? This is the momentous question now agitating the American religious journals. The diversity of interpretation is illustrated by the fact that some hold that Azazel was Satan, and others that he was a type of Christ.

"Francis Jay" writes in the *Open Court*, of Chicago, on "The Holy Spirit, the Female of the Godhead." "F. J." fancied the Rev. Mr. Schultz, of Royersford, Pa., is to be credited with the sublime thought, which "F. J." works out not very decently in connection with the story of the Immaculate Conception. But Joanna Southcott and Mother Ann Lee were both before the Rev. Mr. Schultz, and the Ghost is spoken of as feminine in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, perhaps the earliest of all the gospels.

The Rev. Philip Fletcher, Grand Master of the Guild of Ransom, has been lecturing on the conversion of England before a select audience of dignitaries in Rome. It seems the Guild looks to prayers, pilgrimages, and processions as the plate of p's that will bring England to Rome.

The *New York Sun*, which is distinguished by its anti-English feeling, says that either the Pope or the Czar would be good enough arbitrators in the Venezuela dispute, but the Pope would be an ideal one. That officious old gentleman is said to have offered his services—declined with thanks.

The Rev. J. S. Balmer, of Blackpool, has undertaken to discourse on "What is Christianity?" His definition appears to have been largely negative. "Christianity," he said,

"was not of this world, neither was it controlled by this world. It was not subject to military control, to political power, or to Caesar's sceptre." From what little we know of history, we should say Mr. Balmer's Christianity had never been in the world at all.

The Salt Lake *Herald* says of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism: "Beyond all question, the number of those who revere his name and memory as a prophet and a witness for God is constantly increasing." The prophet Joseph is a good instance of how easily a reputation may be achieved when the appeal is made to religious fanaticism.

It is proposed to establish an International Moslem Union, having headquarters at Calcutta, with the special intention of bettering the condition of Moslems. Among things proposed are weekly lectures to young Moslem ladies behind a curtain, and accompanied by a *chaperon*, given by gentlemen of age and character. Despite the reservation, the proposal shows the influence of new ideals.

The bones of St. Stephen, the proto-martyr, are still knocking about, and have been taken by Bishop McDonnell from Rome to New York to confirm the faith of the faithful in the latter city. These bones are by no means the greatest curiosity now in America. In Canada they have a portion of St. Ann, the grandmother of God; the prepuce of the infant Jesus used to be in more than one church; and among holy relics were the breath of St. Joseph and the tail of Balaam's ass.

A pious Methodist lady used to say: "Praise the Lord, I've lost my husband and my only boy; I've got the rheumatics, and lost all my teeth but two; but, praise and bless his holy name, they are opposite to each other." This spirit of being thankful for extremely small mercies is strongly exhibited by Professor A. C. Armstrong, in the *Methodist Review*. It is true science has been in antagonism, but then Huxley is dead, and Balfour and Kidd are living. He says: "If the Old Testament records seem in danger from a disintegrating attack, which must radically alter the view hitherto taken of them by the Christian world, it must be remembered that the New Testament writings, passing through the same fire of criticism, have been found to stand the test much more successfully than appeared possible in the early days of the controversy." So let us sing to the praise and glory of God.

In an article on the Calendar, in the *Secular Almanack for 1896*, attention was called to the absurd position of Russia dating twelve days ahead of the rest of the world. The official organ, *Novoe Vremya*, has written on the advisability of adopting the new Calendar, but sees the difficulty that any change will be regarded as an act of sacrilege by the pious peasants. A suggestion has been made that, to carry out the reform with as little friction as possible, each of the long months should be docked of a single day. This would effect a change within two years. In England, when eleven days were knocked off at once, some stupid people complained of being defrauded of so many days of life.

Professor Garvin, Disciple or Campbellite, suggests that, to avoid confusion, the name of his denomination be made "Kristyun." He says it is quite possible for one to be a Kristyun and not a Christian.

Dr. T. Mitchell Prudden, in the *Popular Science Monthly*, says: "In its primitive phases medicine brought gods and men into close relationship, and led constantly to religious conceptions. It was, in fact, not a science, but a religion. The early priests were physicians, the primal gods were gods of healing, and their temples were hospitals."

The Chovevi Zion, or Lovers of Zion, have been holding a meeting at Glasgow. Mr. Prag, of London, who addressed the Zionites, complained that Jews did not shell out properly. If every Jew contributed a shilling per year, they would soon get possession of all the land of Palestine, and all the Jews in the world would be able to go and live there, and show a model State to the world. But is there room in Palestine for all the Jews on this planet? And would they go there if there was? We guess not. For the present, we dare say that gentlemen like Mr. Prag will know what to do with the subscriptions.

The Rev. Dr. Judson, Secretary of the American Board for Foreign Missions, defends the missions on the curious ground that objections to them are fatal to the whole Christian scheme. Nothing is more certain than that Jesus claimed to be the only savior of mankind; as Mr. Judson says, "He is the Redeemer and Lord of all the nations and generations of the earth, and that 'of His kingdom there shall be no end.' If Christ was mistaken upon these fundamental points, so that the effort to carry out his purposes and build His kingdom in all the earth is absurd and fruitless, His authority

as teacher and His power as Redeemer are at an end." Thus does he lightly put aside all questions as to how Christians would stand Moslem or Confucian missions, if they were carried on as Christian missions are among the heathen. Virtually he says, "Our creed is divine, so we can do as we like."

According to the official census, the Methodist Church in the United States possesses \$132,140,179 worth of property, which yields no return for the protection it receives from the community. The *Truthseeker* says: "The total value of all Church property in the country probably reaches two thousand millions, yet we exempt it from taxation—that is, we add its tax to the tax on secular property."

The Rev. Philip O'Brien, Vicar of Camden Parish Church, Camberwell, went on a missionary tour in Lancashire, where it is to be presumed there is an extra supply of "heathen" to be converted. On returning to his own parish, the reverend gentleman heard with grief and amazement that the Camberwell Board of Guardians had refused to send a vote of condolence on the death of Prince Henry of Battenberg. One member of the Board, a wretched Radical named Foster, had actually said that there was no more cause to sympathise with the Queen than with any poor mother-in-law whose son died in the infirmary. This disloyal language was stigmatised by the Camberwell man of God as deplorable and disgraceful. Let us hope that fire from heaven will not fall upon the Camberwell Vestry. Let us also hope that the Rev. Philip O'Brien will cool down. Whether he does or not, we dare say it will make very little difference to Camberwell, and still less, if possible, to the British Empire.

The Chester-le-street Branch of the National Secular Society has been holding its meetings at various members' houses, one of them being the residence of Mr. Newrick Richardson. On hearing of this his landlord, Mr. James Harrison, who is a Wesleyan bigot, has informed Mr. Richardson by letter that these innocent meetings must cease, or the house will have another tenant. "I would not be guilty of countenancing infidelity," he says, and he is "resolved to please" the Being he "worships." We venture to suggest to Mr. Harrison that his solicitude about God Almighty is rather gratuitous. It is quite possible for Omnipotence to stop "infidel" meetings at Mr. Richardson's house without troubling Mr. Harrison. Are there no thunderbolts in stock?

Dr. Allbutt, of Leeds, committed the heinous offence of writing a *Wife's Handbook* and publishing it at sixpence. Seven-and-sixpence would have been all right. But *sixpence!* It was quite shocking. So the British Medical Council struck him off the register. However, he continued to call himself a doctor as before; and for this offence the Medical Council has spent a hundred pounds in prosecuting him. The Leeds Stipendiary Magistrate inflicted a comparatively slight fine and small costs. After this, we presume, the British Medical Council will leave Dr. Allbutt to the judgment of his own patients, who are quite able to decide whether his services are of any use to them. After all, if a doctor settles your hash in three visits, there is very little consolation in knowing that his name is on the register of the British Medical Council.

A Preacher's Flirtations.

I know a brainy young minister, a fine preacher and a spiritual man, who kept himself popular for a long time with the maidens of his church, and, reflexly, with their mothers, of course, by a method which I consider reprehensible.

It might be termed the inspiration method, and this is about the way in which he manipulated it. One of his inspirations gave me the facts, so they are perfectly reliable: "Ah, Miss Blanche, good morning. I was glad to see you in the pew yesterday; I can always treat my theme better when your face is before me. I trust you will not be offended when I say that it acts upon me as a—in fact, you are—ah—a great source of inspiration to me."

Of course, any girl would be flattered to know that she was a talented preacher's inspiration, and would begin to consider her qualifications as a preacher's wife. Unfortunately, the preacher had about a dozen such inspirations scattered about in the pews, and it so happened that they one day chanced to compare notes, with results rather uncomplimentary to the unfortunately susceptible man.

What is science? To see the absurdity of the prejudice against it, we need only remark that science is simply a higher development of common knowledge; and that, if science is repudiated, all knowledge must be repudiated along with it.—*Herbert Spencer, "First Principles," sec. 5.*

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, February 2, Oddfellows' Hall, St. Anne-street, Liverpool:—11, "What has Become of the Devil?" 3, "The Sign of the Cross," *apropos* of Mr. Wilson Barrett's play; 7, "How and Why was Jesus Born?"

Tuesday, February 4, Co-operative Hall, Bolton, at 8, "What has Become of the Devil?"

Wednesday, February 5, Venetian Hall, Darwon-street, Blackburn, at 7.30, "The Curse of Creeds."

February 9, Glasgow; 16, Hull; 23, Camberwell.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS.—February 2, Athenæum Hall, Tottenham Court-road, London; 3 and 4, Ipswich; 9, Camberwell; 11, Wellington Hall, Islington, London; 16, Athenæum Hall, London; 23, Manchester. March 1, Camberwell; 15, Leicester; 16 and 17, debate with the Rev. James Hyde at Derby.—All communications for Mr. Watts should be sent to him (if a reply is required, a stamped and addressed envelope must be enclosed) at 81 Effra-road, Brixton, London.

K. SYKES.—By all means leave them alone to meet their own fate. Thanks all the same.

W. C. DORKING sends us 5s. for the N.S.S. Children's Party.

W. GRANT.—Darwin's chapters on the Physical, Mental, and Moral Evolution of our Race, in the *Descent of Man*, are models of terse and vigorous exposition. Read them carefully, follow out the subject by means of the references in the footnotes, and you will soon command a good view of the whole subject. You will find, on the religious side, a great deal of valuable information in Mr. Wheeler's *Bible Studies and Footsteps of the Past*.

E. J., jun.—Your verses show promise, but need polish.

T. SEARLE.—The Revised Version of 2 Kings xix. 35 and Isaiah xxxvii. 36 reads: "And when men arose early in the morning behold they were all dead carcases." The Douay Version is: "And they arose in the morning, and behold they were all dead carcases." R. Young reads: "And they rise early in the morning, and lo, all of them are dead carcases." Pay your money and take your choice, but never make nonsense of the Blessed Word. See, for construction, 1 Kings xiii. 27.

C. WRIGHT.—(1) Always pleased to receive good jokes. (2) The Bull of Pius V., deposing and excommunicating Queen Elizabeth, is entitled "Regnans in excelsis." "He that reigneth on high committed the Church unto Peter, and his successor the Roman Pontiff," etc., are its first words.

G. CROOKSON.—Glad to hear that Mr. Cohen "had a good audience and gave a good lecture" at Barnsley. Mr. Foote intends writing on "The Sign of the Cross." Why do you speak of yourself as "an obscure individual"? We have known you for many years as a loyal friend of the movement.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND.—L. H. (per R. Forder), £1.—This fund should be closed for the present year. The committee appointed by the last N.S.S. Conference (Messrs. G. Anderson, C. Watts, R. Forder, and G. Ward) appealed for £100 for the current year, in order to save the President from absolute loss in attending to the Society's affairs. About £75 has been subscribed. The other £25 ought to be made up immediately.

MR. FOOTE'S LECTURE SCHEME.—Per R. Forder: S. Hampson, 2s. 6d.; L. H., £1. Motherwell, 1s. 5d.; Painter, £1.

F. A. DAVIES.—See paragraph. We hope the Lambeth Branch will be recruited in strength by the experiment.

J. M. HEADLEY.—We note that you have withdrawn from the Yarmouth School Board candidature, as a compromise has been effected, and some of your supporters pressed you to retire instead of throwing the expenses of an election upon the ratepayers. You protest against this avoidance of an appeal to the people; but the only effectual protest is forcing on the appeal. We say this without any reflection on your judgment or courage. Of course you understand the local circumstances better than we do.

J. G. DOBSON.—Pleased to receive your glowing account of Mr. Watts's visit to Stockton-on-Tees. The presence of ladies at our meetings is specially welcome.

W. WILSON.—It would be difficult and costly to arrange for a lecture there without local assistance.

JOHN JONES.—Thanks for the cutting and your interesting letter.

N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges: T. Thornett, 5s.

T. LANSDELL.—We note the postponement.

W. DYSON states that the Barnsley Branch, at its annual meeting, decided to hold a general meeting on the first Sunday in every month.

PAINTER.—Thanks for your further subscription to the Lecture Scheme. Your advice is good, and shall be followed as far as possible.

PARSIFAL.—Mr. Watts says it was Canon Fremantle, in the *Contemporary Review*. A pamphlet on missions would certainly be useful, but Mr. Foote has not time to write it at present. Society business makes such inroads upon his time. The Church pamphlet, or rather volume, will probably be written during the summer. Your other suggestions are worth considering.

ATHEOS.—The 1613 Bible may be worth a little. The other books are of no particular value.

WHITTELL (Hull).—Your signature is smeared, and we are not sure that we have it correctly. Ingersoll has not replied to Father Lambert. No one in America expects him to do so. The objections to the Confessional are obvious enough. All priests are men, and a strange man ought not to be able (under the cloak of religion) to ask all sorts of questions about "secret sinful thoughts" of other men's wives and daughters. Even if there is nothing wrong physically, there is morally, in such a proceeding. The wife who confesses commits a kind of spiritual adultery with the priest, who soon becomes her real lord and master. Some of Ligouri's works are translated into English, but not those you have in mind.

H. LEES SUMNER.—Mr. Foote is better, but has still to be careful. Your advice is excellent, but Mr. Foote's occupation involves extra risks. He takes what precautions he can, and his health is generally first-rate.

THOMAS REYNOLDS.—Nothing new in it. Prophet Baxter has often been exposed in the *Freethinker*.

A. W. ORR.—Will insert it in our next issue, probably with Mr. Watts's reply.

G. L. SISMAN.—A good story, but it appeared in our columns some years ago.

G. KERSLEY.—Mr. Foote will answer any relevant question after his address at the Memorial Hall. It goes without saying that he will deal with the subject announced. Sorry to hear you were dissatisfied with Mr. Frederic Harrison. He is a powerful rhetorician, but we never formed a high estimate of his intellectual powers.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—New Age—South Shields Free Press—Clarion—Literary Digest—Peterson's Magazine—Woman's Life—Paisley Mirror—Progressive Thinker—Free Review—Literary Guide—Huddersfield Examiner—Liberty—Blackburn Times—Liberator—Two Worlds—Open Court—Worker's Friend—Der Arme Teufel—Monist—Metaphysical Magazine—New York Public Opinion—Islamic World—Crescent—Blackpool Herald—Chat—Freedom—Eastern Morning News—Newcastle Chronicle—New York Christian Advocate—New York Tribune.

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

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

LECTURE NOTICES must reach 28 Stonecutter-street by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 28 Stonecutter-street, London, E.C.

The Freethinker will be forwarded, direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One Year, 10s. 6d.; Half Year, 5s. 3d.; Three Months, 2s. 8d.

ORDERS for literature should be sent to Mr. R. Forder, 28 Stonecutter-street, E.C.

SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS.—Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements:*—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

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

SUGAR PLUMS.

THERE was a fine audience at St. James's Hall on Sunday evening, when Mr. Foote lectured on "The Sign of the Cross." He was still a little hoarse, and rather weary from insomnia, but he managed to get through his task to the evident satisfaction of the meeting, which was very lively and enthusiastic. Mr. A. B. Moss attended again and took the chair. This ends the course of lectures at St. James's Hall, but the experiment will probably be repeated in April. It is beyond doubt that much advantage to the movement will be gained by a continued attack upon the west end of London.

Mr. Foote is visiting Liverpool again after a rather long absence. He lectures three times to-day in the Oddfellows' Hall. Elderly friends, who have previously complained of this hall being very cold in the winter, will be glad to hear that it will be made warm and cosy on this occasion. Mr. Foote's subjects should attract large audiences. In the morning he will ask, and as well as he can answer, "What has Become of the Devil?" His afternoon subject will be "The Sign of the Cross," *apropos* of Mr. Wilson Barrett's play, which caused a great stir when it was produced in Liverpool. In the evening the question for consideration is, "How and Why was Jesus Born?" Before the lecture Mr. Foote will give a rendering of Tennyson's "Rizpah." Surely this is a good bill of fare for one day.

Tuesday and Wednesday evenings will be devoted by Mr. Foote to free lectures at Bolton and Blackburn, particulars of which will be found under Lecture Announcements. On the following Sunday he will deliver three lectures at Glasgow, and during the whole of the following week he will be delivering free lectures in South-west Scotland, at

Dunoon, Paisley, Greenock, Motherwell, etc. Sunday, February 16, is engaged for three lectures at Hull. There again the admission is free, as, owing to the terrorism of the Chief Constable, it is impossible to obtain a hall in Hull for Sunday lectures with a charge for admission.

The Athenæum, Tottenham Court-road, nearly opposite Store-street, has been taken by Mr. Foote for two Sunday lectures in February by Mr. Charles Watts. Reserved seat tickets, at sixpence and one shilling, can be obtained at 28 Stonecutter-street, or from the secretaries of N.S.S. Branches in the western and south-western parts of London. We hope these reserved seats will be all filled by Freethinkers. The back part of the hall will be set apart for "free admission" seats and standing room. Mr. Watts opens this evening (February 2) at 7.30, his subject being "A Plea for Unbelief." His second lecture will be given a fortnight later, on February 16.

Mr. Charles Watts was taken ill some weeks ago, and unable to lecture at Ipswich. This entailed a loss upon the Branch, and Mr. Watts has undertaken to give two free lectures on Monday and Tuesday (February 3 and 4), in the Co-operative Hall. We hope the Ipswich friends will do their utmost to bring the general public to these meetings.

Mr. Charles Watts had his usual good audiences last Sunday at Edinburgh, where he lectured afternoon and evening. He met with a hearty reception from both audiences.

Mr. Watts brought his eight days' tour to a close last Monday evening at Stockton, when he lectured to a crowded meeting, which was exceedingly enthusiastic. The tour has been most successful, and the good results of Mr. Foote's lecturing scheme have been very gratifying.

On Tuesday, February 19, Mr. Foote delivers an address, under the auspices of the Humanitarian League, on "The Rights of Men and Animals." He will give "The Secularist View." Other speakers before him have given the Theosophical, the Church, the Ethical View, etc. The address will be given in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon-street, near Ludgate Circus. Admission is free, and opportunity given for questions and discussion.

Mr. A. B. Moss took Mr. Foote's place at Camberwell on Wednesday, January 22. There was a good audience, and Mr. Moss's lecture gave great satisfaction. Mr. Forder took Mr. Foote's place at Islington, and Mr. Heaford at Edmonton. Though recovered from his illness, it was necessary to give his chest and throat a good rest before plunging heavily into platform work. Mr. Foote intends to make up for the breakdown in a month or so.

The Wood Green Branch sends us its financial statement for 1895. At the end of last year there was a small balance due to the treasurer, who has now a few pounds in hand. The Branch has organised 76 outdoor lectures and 15 indoor lectures during the twelve months. This is certainly very creditable. We wish the gallant Wood Green Branch still greater success in 1896.

The Lambeth Branch has engaged the lecture hall of the North Lambeth Liberal and Radical Club, 108, Westminster Bridge-road, for a course of Thursday night free propagandist lectures. Mr. W. Heaford opens next Thursday, February 6, with a lecture on "Christianity as a Guide to Conduct." We hope the local Freethinkers will give the fullest publicity to this course of lectures, and try to induce their Christian friends to attend them.

A meeting of the members of the Finsbury Branch of the N.S.S. was held on Monday evening, with a view to its re-organisation. Mr. Foote attended and addressed those assembled. Mr. Bater was elected president, Mr. Harry Brown secretary, and Mr. Leat delegate to the Executive. Arrangements are being made for a vigorous propaganda on Clerkenwell Green during the summer, in which the Branch will have the President's fullest support.

Mr. H. Snell will lecture at the Battersea Secular Hall this Sunday evening (February 2), his subject being "Charles Bradlaugh: Atheist and Reformer." This lecture will be given with limelight illustrations, and will doubtless be entertaining and instructive. Admission is free, and there should be a crowded audience.

The Stockton-on-Tees Branch will have a social gathering next Thursday (February 6). Refreshments and a pleasant entertainment will be provided.

The Finsbury Park Branch holds its annual general meeting to-day (Feb. 2), at 3.30, at the Bradlaugh Club and Institute. Members should turn up in full force on this occasion. It is intended to make preliminary arrangements

for an exceptionally vigorous open-air propaganda in the district during the summer.

Members of the National Secular Society should all have a copy of the *Secular Almanack*. It is edited by Messrs. Foote and Wheeler, and contains a lot of useful information, besides items of general interest. It is published at the low price of threepence, and all profits on the sale accrue to the Society. The new issue of the Almanack has sold better than the previous one, but there are copies left still, and we should like to see them all cleared out.

The Annual Children's Party committee have decided to hold this year's gathering in the large Concert Hall of the Club and Institute Union—next door to the Holborn Town Hall. It will take place early in March. Funds are urgently needed, and Miss Vance will be happy to send Collecting Cards to friends applying for them. A postcard is a sufficient application.

Mr. George Anderson finds he can send cheaper by parcel-post than by book-post. He will, therefore, send post-free to any applicants, for circulation, copies of Winwood Reade's *What Christians Believe* (6d.), or Mr. Charles Watts's *Claims of Christianity* (6d.), at the following rates: One copy, 2½d.; ten copies, 1s. 8d. Freethinkers who want to spread the light among the "heathen" (Christians they call themselves) should write to Mr. Anderson at once for a supply of these well-written pamphlets. Address, 35A Great George-street, Westminster, London, S.W.

The *Free Review* for February says: "*Footsteps of the Past* is a study of superstitions which will carry conviction to any honest inquirer. It is written in the true spirit of scientific history, and it is the work of an earnest thinker and scholar of well-deserved repute." The *Literary Guide* also gives a full notice of the book, under the title, "The Savage Roots of Religion," and pays Mr. Wheeler some high compliments.

Anatole France, who takes the *fauteuil* of Alexander Dumas at the French Academy, is, like his predecessor, a Freethinker, his views being, however, shown rather by delicate satire than by pronounced opinion.

There is always a good selection of scientific news and notes in the *English Mechanic*, while the queries and answers show the varied and up-to-date information of the numerous contributors.

The January number of the *Freethought Magazine* appears with a new cover. It gives a good account of "Mrs. Stanton, the Woman's Bible, and the Clergy," and reprints Mr. Foote's article on "Praying for Ingersoll." The *Freethought Magazine* is now published at 213 East Indiana-street, Chicago. The subscription price is \$1.50 per annum.

The *Freethought Ideal* also has a new heading, "Without God, Ghost, or Devil," and a new editress, Laura Knox, 327 South 3rd-street, Arkansas. This cheap little paper is semi-monthly, and only 50 cents a year. We trust it will be well supported.

We have frequently been asked whether Colonel Ingersoll had said anything in rebuke of the Jingo fever which has been, and to an unfortunate extent still is, raging in America. This question can now be answered. The *Daily News* of January 23, in the course of a letter from its New York correspondent, contained the following: "Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll, a politician and public speaker of national reputation, who has been travelling throughout the West, says: 'I have talked with a great many people about the Venezuelan question, and find almost in every instance that they condemn the President. I feel, and find that nearly everyone agrees with me, that his message was unwise, uncalled-for, and altogether a mistake. It is no business of ours. When Venezuela and the British have a dispute about a boundary line, let them settle it themselves. I do not think the President is going to get much sympathy for his action. We are a patriotic people, and will fight for what is just, honorable, and necessary; but this thing was not our quarrel, and there was no use going into it in a blundering way. I think the storm is over, and that we shall hear little more about the whole matter.'"

This is exactly how we expected Ingersoll would speak. It is replete with common-sense and directly to the point. It sums up the whole matter. There is really no more to be said upon the subject.

We are grateful to the *Daily News* for having Ingersoll's words flashed across the Atlantic and printed in England. But why on earth does it call him a "politician"? Ingersoll has no love for the word or the thing it designates. "A statesman," he has said, "wants to do something for the

people; a politician wants the people to do something for him."

"Public speaker" is also good in the *Daily News* description. Public speaker on what? Aye, there's the rub! Our Nonconformist contemporary did not like to tell its readers that the man who uttered those wise words was "the boss infidel of America," as Christians are fond of calling him. Had the words been uttered by a man of God, the *Daily News* would have taken care that he was recognised as "Rev.," so that the full credit might accrue to religion. But "Mum's the word" when there is any prospect of advantage to "infidelity."

Ingersoll has been "travelling throughout the West." How beautifully vague! What has he been travelling for? Why, to preach the Gospel of Freethought. Night after night, in town after town, he has been lecturing to thousands of people against the Bible and Christianity.

The *Progressive Thinker* says: "One must hear Ingersoll to get the full benefit of his works. To read them is not enough; for while in doing so one may be charmed by the broad and liberal thought and the brilliant rhetoric of their author, he yet fails to catch the personal magnetism, or to be uplifted to the matchless oratory of the man, which is felt by all who listen to his words."

INGERSOLL.

THE following specimen of what an American illustrated magazine finds to say of the minister of the Gospel of Freethought may be interesting to our readers: "Some ill-advised Congregationalists and Church societies have been advertising Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll pretty extensively lately by organising themselves into praying committees for the conversion of the famous infidel's soul. Apart from the ludicrous aspect of this measure, it is hardly a politic one, for, if the prayers have no effect, and the Colonel remains as great an unbeliever as ever, the faithful will be somewhat shaken in their trust in the efficacy of prayer. Liberal church people are in favor of letting heaven work out its own plan for the salvation of the Colonel's soul. They most decidedly discountenance the absurd measures proposed, which can serve only to advertise the Colonel and his lectures. Colonel Ingersoll has devoted his life to unbelief, and has made a large income by it. He also practises as a lawyer, but the bulk of his income is derived from his lectures and his books, most of which are attacks on all existing forms of religion. Yet Ingersoll is not an Atheist. He has never denied that there is a Supreme Being. He is too intelligent a man for that. He does not believe there is one. He does not believe in the God of the Christians, or in the Jehovah of the Jews. His god is Nature, whose work his eye can appreciate. Doubtless there are many thousands of good people in this country who are fully persuaded that Ingersoll is a very wicked man, an unfit associate for respectable persons. There could be no greater misconception. In private life, in the bosom of his own family, Ingersoll is the most moral, the most upright of men, the best of fathers, the best of husbands. Nowhere throughout this broad land can be seen a more happy, better-conducted home than that of Robert G. Ingersoll. Ingersoll has his faults. He is often reckless in statement; he sometimes distorts passages in quotations for theatrical effect; his similes are often in questionable taste. Yet, arrayed against these trifling peccadilloes, what sincerity of purpose, dogged obstinacy, beautiful oratorical power, brilliant flow of language, poetry of expression! Ingersoll would have been a far greater man in any other path of life than in that he has chosen. Religion has been his fad and his hobby. It has been a barrier to his greatness. But for that Ingersoll might have become President of the United States."—*Peterson's Magazine* (N.Y.), January, 1896.

A good instance of downright matter-of-fact Christian prayer was the following:—A maiden lady of limited income used nightly to pray to the Almighty for a "competency," concluding as follows: "And in case, O Lord, thou shouldst not be aware of what I mean by a competency, I mean £400 a year, payable quarterly in advance!" No deity, however obtuse, could possibly misunderstand this.

LIBERALISM.

A LIBERAL is a person who wants more liberty in religious matters than we have at present in the civilised world. He wants the liberty to believe in, and preach, one God or no God; a good life on earth, followed by eternal happiness or eternal forgetfulness. He does not want the liberty to believe in, and preach, eternal suffering after death, because he has that privilege already.

Liberalism is the result of the tyranny of the old Churches in power. New Churches and small Churches are liberal enough in their views. But the big, old Churches are as tyrannical as any monarchy on earth.

Human nature is the same both in religion and politics, and the man who would enslave the mind would also enslave the body.

The fact that a man who is an Infidel may live happily with a wife who is a Christian, or that a mother never wishes to torture her children because they do not believe in her religion, proves that Liberalism is possible where people really love and respect one another.

The best way to make people liberal is to make them friendly. And the best way to make them friendly is to make them intelligent.

As a rule, a man is narrow-minded or broad-gauged according to the amount and variety of his reading and thinking.

Reforming the world is a long, perhaps an endless, task; but it can be improved, and, unless it is reformed by science, it will certainly be deformed by superstition. Eternal vigilance on the part of Liberals is the price of Liberalism. Tyrants never sleep, or at least never cease seeking power. And if Liberals ever weaken, they will be attacked and torn to pieces by ignorant victims of superstition.

There are still enough knaves in the world to preach monarchy and Theism, and there are still enough fools on earth to listen to their words.

There is no king who can rule the American people with an iron rod, and there is no God who has ever tried to take away freedom from the human brain.

People can't suffer without nerves, and they could not long have nerves in any such nerve-destroying place as hell. Therefore the fear of eternal torture in a lake of fire and brimstone is a foolish fright. But if it were not foolish it would not be Christian preaching. "For after that, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. i. 21).

In man's future ideal world there is no death. This proves that death is generally considered a curse. Man is saddened not only by death, but also by the fear of demise. Perhaps a world where eternal life reigned would be much more satisfactory than our world. Nevertheless, if we had to live always, we might grumble because we could not die. Such questions could be settled only by experience, and there is no way of getting experience in such matters.

Liberals should not try to destroy the hope of immortality; they should only wish to see it put among the wild ideas where it properly belongs. This hope doubtless gives some pleasure to some people, and if it did not develop from hope to belief, and then to lunacy, it would be a blessing instead of a curse to the world.

A Materialist is a person, generally a man, who does not believe in any kind of ghost, either holy or common. Women are too artistic to be philosophical, therefore they are more interested in the beautiful than in the true. Men and women are about equally interested in the reformation of the world, but they expect to bring about this reform in different ways—men by prose, and women by poetry. Man is by nature a Materialist, and woman a spiritually-minded creature. The world would be too dreary without poetry, and too fanciful without prose.

Atheism is the doctrine that the universe gets along somehow without a boss; that it runs itself to the best of its poor ability. An Atheist sees much around him to excite disgust, such as the prolific nature of dogs and cats, especially polecats; but he sees nothing to inspire awe. He believes that man is the awfulest of all beings, as well as the highest of all intelligences.

Christianity is the doctrine that an infallible God made man in his own image; that this living likeness fell from grace through the influence of a talking snake; that the human race became so wicked that their maker repented of

his work, and decided to destroy the whole family; but, repenting of this repentance, the Lord saved Noah and wife and their three sons and their three wives; that the Lord, failing to reform the race through Noah, then for the third and last time tried another plan; he sent his only begotten son to preach to a part of the world for three years, and also to leave in his place many other preachers who could increase and multiply as long as people could feed them and clothe them, and find time to listen to them talk. Christianity is also whatever the preachers say it is to those that believe. Thus it is Catholicism to the Catholics, and Protestantism to the Protestants. It is a mass of nonsense to some other folks.

If there is a road from earth to heaven, people ought to have the same amount of proof of it as they have of the existence of a railway from Waco to 'Cisco. The railway companies of the world have proven the existence of their lines so plainly that people could not help believing in them, even if otherwise disposed. Some of us fail to see why the Lord should want people to buy tickets to heaven over a way that commences nowhere except in the human head, and ends at the same place. If there is any such place as heaven, there ought to be a line of balloons ascending and descending all the time, so that we might know that there is such a town, just as we know there is such a city as London, England.

There would be no trouble in getting explorers to ascend to heaven, and to relate, by photographic views and phonographic music, all the wonders of the Celestial City. It is wrong to require people to believe in a road to any place when there is not even a cow-trail in sight leading that way, or in a water way when there is not even a mud-hole in that direction, or in an aerial passage to heaven when there is nothing in the way of a station after leaving the world nearer than the moon—and this planet is two hundred and forty thousand miles distant.

A Liberal is one who believes in free speech, because truth has a great deal to gain and nothing to lose by disputation. He is generally Materialist, Spiritualist, Agnostic, or some other man in the minority. Most men believe in not only bodily, but mental, slavery, provided they can be the masters. As a rule, only the slaves and those who can't be slave-holders are opposed to slavery. People ought to be morally sublime enough to love those who differ from them on matters so purely speculative as religion and politics; but man, as a rule, is not specially in love with any kind of opposition.

If we were all born and bred alike, we would all think alike; but some people are naturally so sceptical that they require more proof of God and immortality than Christianity can give, and some are so credulous that they are surprised that everybody does not believe in God and immortality. Therefore the necessity of Liberalism.

Human cussedness is not the result of Christianity. But Christianity is the result of human depravity.

Our preachers doubtless preach for money, but then they would preach for food and old clothes and glory, as they do in India, if they could not get any higher price for their talk.

The fact that so many believe in baptism by immersion shows that people are more easily scared into the water with their clothes on than chickens or turkeys. Naked savages should not object to this kind of sacrament; but the inhabitants of cold countries should go down into the water only in diving bells. They can be buried under the water more safely and deeper thus than in any other way.

Anyone superstitious enough to believe in baptism by immersion is too superstitious to be happy. If such an one should see the new moon through brush or over the left shoulder, he would be unhappy for a month.

—Independent Pulpit (Texas). E. L. MERRILL.

How to Help Us.

- (1) Get your newsagent to take a few copies of the *Freethinker* and try to sell them, guaranteeing to take the copies that remain unsold.
- (2) Take an extra copy (or more), and circulate it among your acquaintances.
- (3) Leave a copy of the *Freethinker* now and then in the train, the car, or the omnibus.
- (4) Display, or get displayed, one of our contents-sheets, which are of a convenient size for the purpose. Mr. Forder will send them on application.

ETERNITY.

WHERE is Eternity? More mischief is done by the use of vague, unmeaning terms and phrases than by almost anything else. All quacks understand this, and act upon it. The word "eternity" is one of them. How many millions of millions have the holy quacks not realised in solid cash by using the words "time" and "eternity" in contrast! We are now in time, say they; very soon we shall be in eternity. The humbugs! We were never out of eternity, and shall never be in eternity any more fully than we are at this moment. Time is one, duration of things does not change; time is eternity unbounded, and eternity is time.

Two poor men joined the East Indian army and went to the East. One of them died there, and the survivor, on his return to England, called on the aged parents of his dead comrade. They asked for their son, of whom they had heard nothing since he left.

"Ah, poor fellow!" replied the survivor, "he's gone to eternity."

"What place is that, John?" inquired the wife of her husband.

"I suppose it's some place in the East Indies," replied he.

I heard this anecdote in early life told as an illustration of the dense ignorance of people as regards spiritual things. But, in truth, the reply of the old man was as good a reply as the old woman could have obtained from Dr. Carr, Dr. Goe, or the very wisest man in all the world. Eternity is nowhere, for eternity never existed. It is mere time that never began, and will never end. But that is nothing to us; we began, we shall end. It is nothing to the fish whether the ocean be infinite or not, nor to the bird whether the atmosphere is the one or the other. To us it matters not whether time may end in a thousand years or continue without end, for we shall never reach its limits.

If people would reflect upon this and kindred subjects, the clergy would lose half their power for mischief, and none of their power for good. The people require to emancipate themselves from the wicked witchery of churchy words and phrases, the bewildering, cheating jargon that forms the stock-in-trade of Pulpit Quack and Co.

—Liberator.

J. S.

FROM BABES AND SUCKLINGS.

THE teacher of the infant class at the Sunday-school, to interest the little ones, had begun to tell the story of the fall of man, when a mite of a girl was heard to exclaim, half aloud, "Oh, I'm so tired of that story about the Adamases."

Little Freddy (to his elder brother for the seventh time)—"Are you asleep, Tom?" Tom—"If you don't shut up, I'll lick you good. How the Dickens do you suppose I can say my prayers when you are yelling at me all the time? You've got as much sense as a last year's bird nest."

Mamma—"How thankful you should be, Johnnie, that you live in a peaceful era. The early settlers in Massachusetts always took a gun with them when they went to the meeting-house." Johnnie—"And did the minister make his sermon real short, so's they wouldn't shoot?"

Mother—"Bobby, the minister is coming to take tea this afternoon. You must behave yourself at the table." Bobby—"All right; but if you don't give me the biggest piece of pie I'll tell the minister that dad went fishing last Sunday and didn't have no cold."

"Why don't you ask a blessing at your house, Tommy? Don't you thank the Lord for what you eat?" "No, ma'am; we don't have to. We pay for what we get."

Child—"Do you think we will have a thunderstorm tonight?" Mother—"No." Child—"Then I needn't bother saying my prayers. I'm only afraid of thunder."

Another child asked for a light in her bedroom. She was told that God would take care of her. "Well, God or no God, I'm afraid," was her reply.

Dr. Cuyler tells the story of a little boy, the son of Presbyterian parents, who was asked the catechism question, "What is the chief end of man?" and gave this answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and annoy him for ever." And the dear Lord is so easily annoyed.

Sunday-school Teacher—"You knew your lesson perfectly this time, Tommy." Tommy—"Yes'm. Pa said he'd let me go fishing this afternoon if I didn't miss any of it."

Mamma—"Well, dear, did you enjoy yourself at church?" Charlie—"Oh, yes?—and papa shut his eyes and prayed through his nose the whole time."

NEW DISCOVERIES AT BABYLON ARE AGAINST THE BIBLE.

THE United States minister at Constantinople has recently reported to our Government that he has examined into the results of the recent scientific explorations at Niffer, in Mesopotamia, the town being on the site of ancient Babylon, the place where the people undertook to build a circular stairway so high that they could just walk right up into heaven and get some golden slippers and a harp and go to plunking it, without having to die and wait for judgment day; and they came so near doing it that the Lord had to come down to stop their scheme by changing their language. Originally they all spoke Hebrew, but the Lord fixed it so that they could not understand each other, and when a brick-mason yelled "more mort" the hod-carrier thought he wanted a chew of tobacco, and pulled out some Kentucky "long green" for him.

The result was that the contractors threw up the job, like the whale did Jonah; and, with their new languages, they scattered everywhere. The Irish all got to be policemen, the French started dancing schools, the Dutch opened beer saloons, the Yankees made wooden nutmegs and sharpened shoe pegs on both ends to adulterate threshed oats, while a lot of them that were overlooked, and did not get any new language, still talked Hebrew and opened clothing stores.

The remains of this old city of Babylon were found sixty feet down under the present surface of the ground, and enough writings in Hebrew, Mandic, Arabic, and Syrian have been found that are capable of translation to make sixty volumes in English; and a list of Babylonish rulers beginning 2838 before Christ is given.

The account says: "The religion, government, habits of life, and, to a great extent, the customs of men who lived 4,000 years before Christ, are revealed by the inscriptions." So that, if we accept Archbishop Usher's chronology of the Bible, the very first year Adam went into the gardening business he had to watch his water-melon patch with a shotgun to keep the boys and niggers from stealing them at camp-meeting time.

The account also says: "Many hundred vases, tops, weapons, instruments, and household objects in bronze, iron, and clay have been turned up, which illustrate the conditions surrounding the human race, in that part of the world, nearly 6,000 years ago." So that old gag about how Cain got his wife is easily answered, by saying he collected some of the old man's bills for vegetables and went to a fashionable watering-place, and, showing that he belonged to one of the first families of his part of the country, picked out his summer girl and married her like other young fellows do.

The account goes on to say: "Thus far, 20,000 inscribed tablets of clay and stone have been unearthed. On these are written promises to pay debts, deeds, contracts, and a record of all important public and private events." But the astonishing part, on the supposition that the Bible is true, is that we hear of no allusion to the famous story of the Tower of Babel; and these histories, written right there on the spot, that record ordinary public and private matters, say nothing about the most wonderful of all the stories recorded in the Bible.

We know the history of the origin of languages. We know, for instance, that the English language originated by William the Conqueror having tried to make his Saxon subjects talk Norman French; and any man of good sense and a fair education knows that that whole story about the Tower of Babel is a bigger lie than Joe Mulhatton's biggest; and yet there are thousands of intelligent men, who claim to be honest men, who make their livings by preaching that that Bible is true.

For the ignorant, who have not access to these sources of information, I have all sympathy; but your educated priests and preachers are the biggest liars on earth, and I want to see the day when they will be compelled to make their livings by some honest labor, or be put in gaol as vagabonds and vagrants.

If religion were simply a harmless superstition, we might stand it; but the shines that Christianity is cutting up in China and Armenia, and in Kentucky and Tennessee, and Georgia and Texas, by its murders of the heathen and the imprisonment of men like Harman and Wise and me, because we do not believe their superstitious stuff, make religion *hostis humani generis*, a snake in the grass, upon the head of which every honest man should put his heel.

—Blue Grass Blade.

C. C. MOORE.

The best provision for a happy life is to dissect everything, view its own nature, and divide it into matter and form; to practise honesty in good earnest, and speak truth from the very soul of you. What remains but to live easy and cheerful, and crowd one good action so close to another that there may not be the least empty space between them.—

M. Aurelius Antoninus, Med. xii. 29.

BOOK CHAT.

THE New York *Sun* (Jan. 4), noticing Hierophant Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves*, is particularly struck by a picture "Representing the Partial Evolution of the Double." It says: "The partial evolution of a double consists, as well as we can make out, of the explosion in somebody's pockets, and in his hat, and all about in the immediate vicinity of his person, of a large number of the most animated sort of fire-crackers. Mr. M. A. Oxon, the devoted gentleman who is undergoing the experience with his double that is indicated in this picture, will receive, we are sure, the keenest sympathy of every beholder. His own impression must have been that the volcanic disturbance at Krakataua was being repeated for his benefit, and we are confident that every humane person will hope that he had on an asbestos overcoat."

* * *

The Theory of Human Progression, by Patrick Edward Dove, which has been reprinted in America, anticipated nearly half a century ago the views of Henry George as to the single tax. Dove was a sort of broad Christian, but he finds the foundation of all error to be superstition, and those countries in the worst state where superstition abounds. He says: "According to law in England, the Episcopalian Church is the true Church; truth, according to law, is in the Thirty-nine Articles; the bishop is not only a churchman, but a legislator, a member of the supreme Parliament, and a ruler in the State. But, in another part of Britain, the Church of England is not the true Church; it is a scandalous hierarchy, because, of the northern part of Britain, the Presbyterian Church is the true Church; truth, according to law, is the Confession of Faith, and the bishop, so far from ever being entitled to reverence, is a vile intruder on the equal rights of his brethren."

* * *

February *Free Review* opens with an article on "The Outlook in France," by an English Radical, who argues in favor of graduated income-tax, which is *sur le tapis* there. He thinks Socialism will go on gaining ground in France, as it is doing in Germany. G. E. Macdonald, writing on "Queen Victoria's Grandson," displays the irritation naturally excited by the insolence of William of Germany. "Some Reminiscences of Stepniak," by R., being a testimony to character, would have been better signed in full. Mr. Wheatley continues his exposure of "Salvation Army Charity," which looks very much like the exploitation of the poor in the interest of the huge trading firm of William Booth. "M. Secundus" writes a very able paper on Sabbatarian Tyranny. Allan Stephens reviews Thoreau and Edward Carpenter, under the title of "The Return to Nature," and F. Rockell has a long paper on "False Modesty and Free Love."

* * *

We much regret to hear that Mrs. Olive Schreiner is in bad health. This has postponed the appearance of her new story, which was to run through a serial, and then to appear in book form. The secret of its intended publication has been well kept until now. The book has long been finished, but Mrs. Schreiner has apparently had misgivings about it.

* * *

Messrs. Longmans and Co. announce a new, and doubtless important, work by Professor W. E. H. Lecky, on *Democracy and Liberty*.

* * *

Mr. Zangwill has a sofa stuffed with Press cuttings. He is thus able, whenever he pleases, to sit on the critics.

* * *

M. Henri de Varigny has been writing on Huxley in the *Revue Scientifique*. He contends that "his general essential conception was, in reality, that of Descartes, 'Not to receive anything as true that I have not proved to be so.' A Cartesian to the marrow, Huxley proclaimed what can never be too often repeated, that Truth alone is beautiful, Truth alone is good. In this faith he lived, in this faith he died. Posterity will not forget him."

* * *

Messrs. D. Nutt & Son issue a neat and compendious *Introduction to Folk-Lore*, by Miss Marian Roalfe Cox, of the Folk-Lore Society.

The Era of Man.

I NOTE that the American Freethought papers adopt the year 1600, the date of the death of Bruno, as the Era of Man. The present year is therefore, with them, 296, a slight alteration from the absurd Christian era, which occasions no confusion. I should like to know if this change has the approval, or otherwise, of English Freethinkers. If approved of, could not the subject be brought before the International Conference to test the views of our continental and colonial *confrères* in the matter?

NOHINI.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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

LONDON.

ATHENÆUM HALL (78 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, Charles Watts, "A Plea for Unbelief."

BRADLAUGH CLUB AND INSTITUTE (36 Newington Green-road, Balls Pond, N.): 7.15, Touzeau Parris, "Some More Bible Symbols." Tuesday, at 8.30, social party. Wednesday, at 8.30, R. Forder, "The Signs of the Zodiac—Lecture IV., Aries the Ram."

BATTERSEA SECULAR HALL (back of Battersea Park Station): 7.45, H. Snell, "Charles Bradlaugh, Atheist and Reformer" (with limelight illustrations). Tuesday, at 8.30, dancing.

CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, Editor of the *Jerusalem Star*, "Shall we Live Again?"

ISLINGTON (Wellington Hall, Almeida-street): Tuesday, at 8.30, H. Snell, "Charles Bradlaugh, Atheist and Reformer" (with limelight illustrations).

KINGSLAND (Ridley-road): 12, meeting at the Bradlaugh Club and Institute, 36 Newington Green-road.

PENTON HALL (81 Pentonville-road—Humanitarian Society): 7, Joachim Kaspar, "The Roman Catholic Idolatry."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Surrey Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 11.15, Sunday-school; 7, G. Spiller, "The Poor ye have with you Always."

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Westminster Town Hall, Caxton-street): 11.15, Dr. Stanton Coit, "The Evolution of Religion."

WEST HAM SECULAR ETHICAL SOCIETY (61 West Ham-lane): 7, F. J. Gould, "Life of Charles Bradlaugh."

WESTMINSTER BRANCH N.S.S. (42 Vincent-street): 8, members' half-yearly meeting.

WOOD GREEN (Club and Institute, 4 Lawn-villas, Stewart-crescent, opposite Wood Green Church): 11.30, business meeting; 7.30, social for members and friends.

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 12, F. Haslam will lecture.

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30 and 3.30—lectures, weather permitting.

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM (Alexandra Hall, Hope-street): 7, E. J. Sale, "Out of Darkness into Light."

BLACKBURN (Venetian Hall, Darwen-street): Thursday and Friday, Jan. 30 and 31, at 7.30, O. Cohen will lecture. Sunday, Feb. 2, business meeting at secretary's house. Wednesday, Feb. 5, G. W. Foote, "The Curse of Creeds."

BRISTOL (Shepherds' Hall, Old Market-street): 7, social.

GLASGOW (Brunswick Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12, discussion—W. Reid, "Labor's Prayer"; 6.30, J. P. Gilmour, "Socialistic Fallacies."

HECKMONDWIKE (Lumbard's Coffee Palace, Market-place): 2.30, a meeting.

HULL (Cobden Hall, No. 4 Room, Storey-street): 2.30, Captain Monro, "The Bible God"; 7, H. Percy Ward, "Charles Bradlaugh, Atheist."

IPSWICH (Co-operative Hall): Monday, at 8, Charles Watts, "Christianity: its Nature, its Origin, its Influence." Tuesday, at 8, "Secularism and Modern Thought."

LEICESTER SECULAR HALL (Humberstone Gate): 6.30, W. Heaford, "God and Morality."

LIVERPOOL (Oddfellows' Hall, St. Anne-street): 11, G. W. Foote, "What has Become of the Devil?" 3, "The Sign of the Cross"; 7, "How and Why was Jesus Born?"

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, W. Simpson, "The Population Question under Individualism and under Socialism."

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE (Northumberland Hall, High Friar-street, near Grey's monument): 11, O. Cohen, "French Revolution—The Night"; 3, "Lucretius, the Poet of Atheism"; 7, "Freethought and Morals."

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 3, Ernest Evans, "Science in England and Germany"; 7, "Volcanoes and Earthquakes, and the Light they Throw on the Interior of the Earth" (with lantern illustrations); tea at 5.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, King-street): 7, business meeting; 7.30, J. Bowie, "Springs." Tuesday, at the Sailors and Firemen's Union Hall, Coronation-street, C. Cohen, "Is Christianity True?"

STOCKTON-ON-TEES (32 Dovecote-street): 6.30, G. Nicholson, "Bees."

Lecturers' Engagements.

O. COHEN, 12 Merchant-street, Bow-road, London, E.—February 2, Newcastle; 5, Chester-le-street; 9, Newcastle; 12, Chester-le-Street; 16, Newcastle; 19, Chester-le-Street; 23, South Shields. March 1, South Shields; 8 and 15, Glasgow.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Oredon-road, Rotherhithe, London.—March 1, Balls Pond.

TOUZEAU PARRIS, 32 Upper Mall, Hammersmith, London, W.—February 2, Balls Pond.

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