

The Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

[Sub-Editor, J. M. WHEELER.

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HOW LIES GROW.

EVER since the days of Paul the Christians have been wonderfully fond of lying for the glory of God. The pastime has afforded what is thought a legitimate exercise of the imagination. It has also deceived millions of ignorant, indolent, and credulous people, and immensely increased the power, influence, and profits of the Church.

It is a mistake to suppose that truth has an inherent advantage over falsehood. Nothing is more obvious to the student of history than the fact that the multitude, in all ages and nations, have been gulled with astonishing facility and success. A combination of the professors of imposture, aided at times by temporal authority, has been known to maintain a lie for a thousand years. During all that time the truth has only been half-recognized by a few sagacious and penetrating minds.

Colonel Ingersoll says that the truth often enters the field weak and defenceless. It meets a mature, vigorous falsehood, dressed in strong armor, and the truth gets licked. Ingersoll adds that nothing on earth has as much vitality as a good, sound, healthy religious lie. A similar sentiment, at least to a certain extent, must have been in the mind of George Eliot, when she said that human beings took to the absurd as asses took to thistles, as an excellent aid to digestion. Was it not Lord Bacon who said that "A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure"? His lordship found in human nature "a natural, though corrupt, love of the lie itself." "Doth any man doubt," he asks, "that if there were taken out of men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things, full of melancholy, and indisposition, and displeasing to themselves?"

Look at the pious stories that continue in circulation about the death-beds of great Freethinkers, like Voltaire and Thomas Paine. What is the reason of their longevity? They have been refuted every year since they originated. Long ago their death-warrant was signed by Evidence, and countersigned by Reason. But it is never executed. They flourish almost as vigorously as ever. It seems likely that they will never die except from sheer inanition. And what is the explanation of their obdurate vitality? It is not enough to say that these stories serve the turn of their inventors and perpetuators. Of course they do. But why are they so greedily swallowed by the Christian multitude? A jest's prosperity lies in the ear of the hearer, and a falsehood's prosperity must lie in the mind of its recipient. What then is it, in the mind of the orthodox Christian, which makes him welcome these ghastly stories of infidel death-beds? Why this. He has been taught, and he believes, that death is a terrible thing without Christian consolations. Men who die without those consolations *must* be miserable. That is as clear as daylight. Besides, if they *were* not, the orthodox Christian would be wrong; and that is a mortal affront to his vanity.

My object, however, at present, is not so much to show how lies prosper, but how they grow; how they career along, like a rolling snowball, gathering size as they proceed; and how the imagination which gives them birth, like the mother bear with her cubs, licks them afterwards into shape. Of course I cannot, in a single article, trace the rise, progress, and development of a dozen lies; but what I have to say about *one* story will throw light upon all the rest.

No. 813.

Many of my readers, I daresay, have seen a lecture on the Bible by a Yankee anti-infidelist, the Rev. H. L. Hastings—a fellow who considers it a Christian duty to slander Colonel Ingersoll. In the course of this lecture he tells a story of two infidels, father and son (we believe, but we have not the lecture by us), who were travelling in the wild and woolly West. They found shelter one night in a rude dwelling, and after retiring to their room they were alarmed by sinister sounds in the next apartment. The son looked through a crevice, and saw their host reading a book. It was not the *Age of Reason*, but the Bible. That was enough. They felt quite safe, and went to sleep in peace and security. Had the host been reading Paine or Voltaire or Shelley, or any other Freethinker, the two infidels would, of course, have been obliged to sit up all night, with their hands on their revolvers.

Now I have discovered that this story is fairly ancient, although its older form is not so dramatically rounded—not having yet been *licked* into proper shape. I have been looking through an old debate, between "Iconoclast" (Charles Bradlaugh) and the Rev. T. D. Matthias, held at Halifax, in October, 1859. It was a five nights' discussion on "The Credibility and Morality of the Four Gospels," conducted with excellent good temper on both sides. Mr. Matthias had quite a Sunday-school teacher's notion of debate. In his last speech he told some anecdotes, which he evidently regarded as splendid arguments. One of them was as follows:—

"I may tell you of another instance—of a sceptic who was travelling at one time, in the backwood settlements of America. Benighted, he sought a refuge in some cabin from the wolves and bears of the forest, and found it in the log hut of a lone and solitary woman, whose looks were aught but hospitable. The man of the house soon came in, and if the looks of the woman had terrified him before, the man seemed much more rough than his partner. He had a considerable amount of property about him, and dreaded sleep lest his property should be taken from him and his life lost. What was his terror to see the old man place two pistols on the table! He thought it was all up with him. He was asked to go to bed, but this he dared not do; he said he would sit up. 'Well, then,' replied the old man, 'the dame and myself generally have a chapter of the Bible and prayer together. He was not afraid of the pistols now.'"

Mr. Matthias did not say where he found that story. It was worthy of his own invention, but I suppose he borrowed it. Perhaps it was of American origin. Anyhow, it is delightfully adapted to orthodox silliness. The traveller has a lot of property on his person, but he has no pistol, while the other man, with little to protect, has two pistols. He places them upon the table, perhaps to frighten the wolves and bears, but more to help out the story. Then the old woman, though so good a Christian, has a terrifying countenance; and the old man is still more frightful. Nothing short of robbery and murder could possibly be in the wind, until the blessed Bible comes to the rescue, and oil falls upon the troubled waters, and the raging seas of fear lie still.

Such is the story as told thirty-eight years ago by Mr. Matthias. It is more dramatic as told by Mr. Hastings. The one sceptic grows into two infidels; the old woman, as far as I recollect, is eliminated; the two infidels are in mortal terror in their own room, one looking through a crevice in the partition; and then, at the climax of fear, they see their host reading his Bible.

This is how stories grow. An inventive genius starts one, and more critical minds improve it; and at each stage it is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Could we see the very first Christian document, and all its successors, until the settlement of the New Testament Canon, we should know exactly how the Life of Christ was manufactured. But the Christian Church was wise. It destroyed the traces of its operations, and criticism has to painfully eke out the paucity of evidence.

G. W. FOOTE.

PIONEERS OF EVOLUTION.*

(Concluded from page 98.)

THE most important part of Mr. Clodd's interesting and instructive volume is that dealing with "Modern Evolution," in which he relates the services and adjusts the claims of Darwin, Wallace, Spencer, and Huxley, excellent portraits of each of whom accompany the volume, and in themselves make it precious. With many, Darwinism and evolution are the same thing; but theories of evolution had been put forward before *The Origin of Species* appeared. Robert Chambers, in his anonymous *Vestiges of Creation*, has suggested it with regard to the formation of worlds, and Herbert Spencer had even laid it down as the substratum of his lately-completed system of Synthetic Philosophy. But it was the laborious, patient researches of Darwin which brought home to men's business and bosoms how fruitful was the doctrine of evolution as a habit of thought wherewith to study our environment, and how things have come to be as they are.

Although Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace put forward simultaneously similar views of the origin of species and the perpetuation of varieties by natural selection, formed quite independently of Darwin, the popular mind has instinctively given, as did Mr. Wallace himself, the first place to his great contemporary. Indeed, the fact that Mr. Wallace refuses to allow that natural selection applies to man's spiritual and intellectual nature, fully justifies Mr. Clodd's remark that he kept not his first estate, and dropped out of the ranks of Pioneers of Evolution.

Mr. Clodd, by the way, makes a slight digression on Mr. Wallace's spiritism, instancing the case of the impostor, Eusapia Paladino, as showing how easily even eminent men may be gulled when they refuse to recognize that modern spiritism is but savage animism "writ large."

The clue to the theory of natural selection, be it said, was furnished by the much-maligned Malthus, who showed the rapid rate of human multiplication but for the positive checks of war, disease, and famine, and their elimination of the unfit. Both Darwin and Wallace expressed their obligations to the author of *The Principle of Population*.

Dr. Whewell remarked that every great discovery in science has had to pass through three stages. First people said, "It is absurd"; then they said, "It is contrary to the Bible"; finally they said, "We always knew that it was so." Thus, says Mr. Clodd, it has been with evolution. It is calmly discussed; even claimed as a "defender of the faith" at Church Congresses now-a-days. It was not so when Darwinism was in its infancy. Then, as ever, the serpents of theology sought to destroy the young Hercules. Cardinal Manning declared Darwinism to be a "brutal philosophy—to wit, there is no God, and the ape is our Adam." Protestant and Catholic agreed in condemning it as "an attempt to dethrone God"; as a huge imposture; as "tending to produce disbelief of the Bible," and "to do away with all idea of God"; as "turning the Creator out of doors." Bishop Wilberforce declared the principle of natural selection to be absolutely incompatible with the word of God, and as "contradicting the revealed relations of creation to its Creator." Mr. Clodd very candidly says: "If by 'revealed relations' and the 'word of God' the Bible is intended, the evolutionist is in agreement with the bishop."

Herbert Spencer, as Mr. Clodd aptly says, was a Darwinian before Darwin. His words, "We have to deal with man as a product of Evolution; with Society as a product of Evolution; and with Moral Phenomena as products of Evolution," give, as it were, the groundwork of his system,

the plan of which was sketched out in 1867, in which he applies the doctrine of development in the cosmos, universal life, and human institutions.

Mr. Clodd has high appreciation for the services of Huxley, whose works he reviews and appraises in one of the best portions of his book. As was said of Luther in relation to Erasmus, Huxley hatched the egg that Darwin laid. For, in the *Origin of Species*, the theory was not pushed to its obvious conclusion, and it was a dozen years before *The Descent of Man* was written. Meantime Huxley had breasted the torrent by lecturing to working men on "The Relations of Man to the Lower Animals," and by publishing his *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature*. Of this work Mr. Clodd says: "If the propositions therein maintained are unshaken, then there is no possible reconciliation between Evolution and Theology, and all the smooth sayings in attempted harmonies between the two, of which Professor Drummond's *Ascent of Man* is a type, and in speeches at Church Congresses, of which that delivered by Archdeacon Wilson is a type, do but hypnotize the 'light half-believers of our casual creeds.'"

The slight indications I have given may suffice to show that Mr. Clodd is ever clear and direct. There is no beating about the bush. He is always well-informed, and there is not a dull page in the volume. In conclusion, I must mention that this notable work is admirably got up, and at a very reasonable price. Many would gladly pay the five shillings for the four splendidly engraved portraits of Darwin, Wallace, Spencer, and Huxley, which are done in the best style of photo-engraving. Mr. Grant Richards, the publisher, evidently knows his business, and we look forward to his taking the too long vacant place of Nicolas Trübner, who made the business of Barrabas not merely the machinery for money-making, but also the vehicle for encouraging the worthy literature of advanced thought.

J. M. WHEELER.

THE LACK OF CHRISTIAN HARMONY.

WHOEVER desires to obtain a practical knowledge of the internal weakness of the Christian system needs only to read carefully the religious papers that are issued weekly in this country. While professing to believe in one uniform faith, these self-styled followers of Jesus are constantly condemning each other for teaching, in the name of Christianity, error for truth, and also for attributing to Christ doctrines which he never taught. To the unprejudiced observer, these mutual recriminations within the "Christian fold" do not appear to favor the orthodox notion that the popular faith is harmonious in its nature, or that it is clearly understood even by those who avow their adherence to it. Not only are Roman Catholics and Protestants bitter in their denunciations of each other, but the members of the Establishment are equally as severe towards the various Dissenting sects, accusing them of putting false constructions upon the teaching of the "revealed word." With a house thus "divided against itself," which we are told "cannot stand" (Mark iii. 25), Christians should be less vehement in their reckless charges against Freethinkers as to divisions that are said to exist among them. And here it is necessary, in the interests of truth, to point out that our orthodox accusers ignore the following important fact. The differences which obtain in the Freethought ranks refer only to questions of policy, not to fundamental principles; whereas the disagreements that are so prevalent within the Churches refer both to acts of policy and also to some of the cardinal doctrines and precepts of their faith.

If any of our readers doubt what is here stated as to the lack of amity among Christians, let them read an article which appeared in that pious paper, the *Rock*, dated February 5. The article is headed "The Religious Outlook," and throughout it is a wail of despair at the present depressing and inharmonious aspects of the religious movement in this country. The reasons given by the *Rock* for considering the religious outlook so gloomy and discordant are as follows: The prominence of false worship within the Churches; the subordination of what it terms the "spiritual" to worldly interests; the increased favor that is being shown in every direction to Roman Catholicism; and finally, the neglect manifested towards evangelical Christianity, which, in the opinion of the *Rock*, is the true

* *Pioneers of Evolution, from Thales to Huxley.* (London: Grant Richards, 9 Henrietta-street, W.C.; 1897.)

form of the Christian faith. In reference to the last object of regret, it is admitted that "there are doubtless among them [the Evangelicals] some who deserve little or no consideration or sympathy, as there are in every party." We believe this is so, and this very fact should convince orthodox believers that their faith has no unique power upon human conduct, and, further, it should induce them to refrain from censuring other systems because some of their adherents may "deserve little or no consideration."

Observing the condition of "our own Church," the *Rock* remarks: "While there is much to cheer and inspirit us, there is also much to distress, if not to alarm, us. The old danger of formality in religious worship always must confront us, but it is gaining in strength now very rapidly. Attendance at church services and at Holy Communion is, in some quarters, becoming popular because it is considered meritorious, and because it falls in with certain tastes. There is such a thing as a worldly religion—a religion of music and dress and ceremonies and traditional laws—which, in the majority of cases, does not help devotion, but hinders it—which is carnal and sensual, and not spiritual, and so not holy." This is an admission of a truth which we have long recognized and frequently expressed—namely, that the Christian profession is not based upon "spirituality," whatever that term may mean; neither is it the outcome of acting upon the precepts of the New Testament. Christianity, judging by the conduct of its avowed followers, is professed merely for the sake of worldly interests, and from a desire to pander to the fashion of the time. The "spirit of Christ" is a theoretical expression, not a practical existence. This much was acknowledged, so far as the House of Commons is concerned, by the *London Daily Chronicle* in its issue of February 10 last, where it was stated (in its leading article upon the Parliamentary debate of the previous day on the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church in England and Wales) that the majority of members of Parliament "have little or no genuine belief in the religion they profess, in the sense of acting up to its plain precepts." But these acknowledged facts prove that Christianity owes its present existence, as we have often pointed out, to secular agencies, and not to any "divine" or "spiritual" force. Hence the *Rock* fails to see wherein the discharge of "Church duties, the element of unworldliness, comes in."

The *Rock* specifies as "another danger—the destructive element of false doctrine as regards real spiritual religion. True worship must be on the lines of revealed doctrine. Men must know, believe, and do the truth." Here we have the old orthodox platitudes of "true worship," "revealed doctrine," and "the truth." These phrases have no logical meaning in the sense in which they are used by the *Rock*, for the Churches, up to date, have not even reached any approach to agreement as to the real meaning of any one of the phrases above-mentioned. The members of the many Christian sects are still disputing among themselves as to what doctrines are "revealed"; and what is regarded as true by one Church is denounced as error by another. The adherents of the Church of England accept the "Thirty-nine Articles" as truth, while the great bulk of the Nonconformists look upon them as containing much that is positively false. As to "true worship," which of the numerous and conflicting forms now existing in our midst deserves that designation? The Roman Catholics allege it is to be found in their Catholic Church; but the *Rock*, speaking on behalf of Protestants, denies this, and says: "We submit that the Church of Rome is not the Catholic Church, though she claims to be it exclusively; nor is she Catholic at all, for she is 'Roman.' Our Homilies teach that, if there be a place where the Church is not, it is at Rome; and from our formularies we gather that Rome is Babylon, and the Pope the Man of Sin. In what sense can we work with the Apostacy, as our fathers esteemed the Church of Rome to be, in the extension of the Kingdom of God? The very proposal of such a policy is a betrayal." This is another specimen of the way Christians obey St. Paul's injunctions to exercise that charity which "thinketh no evil," and to "Let all your things be done with charity." Where, in the hurling of harsh invectives against each other, which has now become so prevalent among professed Christians, do we find the true spirit of the "brotherhood of man" exemplified? In this one particular, of abusing those who differ from them, the followers of Jesus appear

to vie with each other in their endeavor to emulate their master.

Freethinkers are sometimes reproached for their continued attacks on theological error, and yet the *Rock* seems to pride itself upon "the aggressive attitude of Christianity" towards other religions. Hardly a week passes but in its columns are to be found indiscriminating onslaughts upon the Roman Catholic faith. Now, if an "aggressive attitude" is defensible in Christian propaganda, where is the consistency in condemning a similar policy in the work of Freethinkers? So long as priestcraft exists, and theology is found to be a means of mental degradation and an incentive to persecution, so long will it be a duty devolving upon Secularists to be aggressive. It is through the successful attacks that have been made, time after time, upon the old strongholds of superstition that we are in the possession of such mental freedom as we now enjoy.

CHARLES WATTS.

THE CREDIBILITY OF THE GOSPELS.

THE GOSPEL MIRACLES.

APART from the sayings and discourses ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels, the stories related of that personage in those books are little else than a series of extraordinary or supernatural occurrences, which, to say the least, do not happen now. I am not, however, here going to discuss the question of the possibility of miraculous occurrences, for such a discussion is unnecessary. The upholders of the Gospel miracles tell us that Jesus performed the wonders attributed to him by the power of God, and that "with God all things are possible." This assertion simply begs the whole question by assuming the Gospel narratives to be true. Science knows nothing either of the existence of God or of the omnipotence with which he is credited. These questions, in the last resort, must be decided by evidence, and this is also the case with the miracles ascribed to Christ. Hence, no rational person can be expected to give credence to these stories without good and sufficient evidence. This evidence, too, must be of the most cogent and unimpeachable character, and far more conclusive than would be deemed necessary to establish an ordinary occurrence; for it is obvious that the more unusual the event, the stronger should be the evidence supporting it.

If, for example, I am told by a friend that he had seen that morning a man over seven feet in height, I can easily believe his statement; but if he tells me that he had witnessed a case in which the sight was restored to a blind man by merely anointing his eyes with clay, I should naturally require some corroborative evidence; for it is possible that my friend might have been deceived. Renan, who is so often cited by Christian apologists for his unwarranted admissions respecting the date of the Gospels, says in his *Apostles* :—

"It is an absolute rule of criticism to give no place in historical documents to miraculous circumstances..... Facts of that kind can never be verified. All the pretended miracles that we can study closely resolve themselves either into illusions or impostures.....The condition of the miracle is the credulity of the witness. No miracle is performed before those who might discuss and criticise it. To this rule there is not a single exception."

The same critic says again in his *Life of Jesus* :—

"No miracle ever occurred in the presence of men capable of testing its miraculous character.....In our days have we not seen a large number of respectable people dupes of the grossest frauds or puerile illusions? Marvellous facts, attested by the whole population of small towns, have, thanks to a severe scrutiny, been exploded."

In considering, then, the miracles recorded in the Gospels, it is necessary to know, in the first place, whether they underwent any scrutiny by persons able to test their miraculous nature; whether, in fact, the alleged occurrences were examined and verified at the time by any competent authorities. Information upon this point is indispensable; yet Christian writers, one and all, skilfully evade the question. The reason for this evasion is not far to seek. We have no evidence that any of the miracles recorded in the Gospels was ever witnessed, much less investigated, by a single person. The evangelists simply took their accounts

from an older pre-existing Gospel, whose author is unknown; and we have not even the testimony of that author to the actual occurrence of the wonders he narrates. The probability is that he merely committed to writing the stories which were related of Jesus in his day, the originators being unknown. Hence, those who believe the Gospel miracles do so without a particle of evidence that those miracles ever really occurred; they accord them credence for no other reason than that they find them recorded in the Gospels. Rationalists have, then, but to ask themselves which is the more probable: that a number of fictitious stories ascribing miraculous power to Jesus were invented by pious Christians several decades after Christ's death, or that the observed order of nature, which in later times is found to be invariable, was upon numerous occasions in the years 29 and 30 A.D. suspended? The answer cannot for a moment be doubtful. To decide in favor of the latter alternative we require strong and convincing evidence, and we have not the smallest scrap. Christian apologists, without exception, ignore this fact. They find it easier to make ridiculous and unwarrantable assertions.

Thus, Dean Farrar, in an apologetic work from which I have twice quoted, says (p. 73):—

"Yet Christ—surrounded as he was by the 'immense publicity' of furious Jews, and haughty Romans, and sneering Greeks—not only claimed to have worked miracles, but his claim was undisputed by his deadliest enemies. Neither the Pharisees, nor the multitudes, nor Caiaphas, nor Herod, nor Celsus, nor Porphyry, nor Hierocles, nor Julian, dreamt of denying that he had wrought deeds apparently supernatural."

This grandiloquent assertion, it will be seen, is based upon the assumption that the Gospel accounts of the ministry of Christ are true in every particular; for nowhere but in those books is Jesus represented as performing miracles in the presence of people who might be able to detect imposture. But what evidence have we that the historical Jesus worked miracles before "furious Jews, and haughty Romans, and sneering Greeks," and that "neither the Pharisees, nor the multitudes, nor Caiaphas, nor Herod," denied the fact of his having performed such works? We have none whatever. We have not the testimony of a single person to the truth of either of these alleged facts. We have but three versions of a number of stories taken from a book of anecdotes the author or originator of which is unknown, and to which are added some additional stories copied from some other documents whose authors are also unknown. These are the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We have, further, a fabricated Gospel which is ascribed to the apostle John. Dean Farrar's pretentious assertions are thus seen to be silly and gratuitous assumptions.

It is true that Celsus, Porphyry, Hierocles, and the Emperor Julian did not deny the Gospel miracles; but for this fact we can assign two good reasons: (1) That at the time when the earliest of these opponents of the Christian religion lived (A.D. 177) it was too late to investigate the miracles attributed to Christ; (2) that in the days of all these opponents miracles were believed to be possible by the agency of invisible demons or by magic.

According to Farrar's luminous method of reasoning, because the three Synoptists (copying the account of some unknown writer) state that Jesus miraculously fed five thousand persons, we have therefore the testimony of those five thousand persons to the genuineness of the miracle. These five thousand form part of "the multitudes" who, Mr. Farrar asserts, did not deny Christ's power to work miracles. But a child can see that they have no existence save in the story, which in all probability is a fabrication. Professor Max Müller tells us that a story of Buddha feeding five hundred brethren with one loaf existed in writing in the first century B.C. As a matter of fact, we have not the testimony of a single person to the alleged Gospel miracle.

Of this great feat of conjuring, the apologist Thomas Cooper says:—

"They all ate and were filled. It was no deception of their senses. They were not magically made to feel as if their hunger was appeased. Nor could bread have been bought suddenly in a desert place.....The disciples could not be deceived.....The multitude could not doubt that they had witnessed a miracle."

Thus, if the story is true, there was no deception. But suppose the original writer of the anecdote invented the story for the glorification of his Lord, just as a certain

pious presbyter fabricated the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* "for love of Paul." How about the disciples and the multitude being witnesses of the miracle then? Christian apologists talk like veritable babes.

Again, in considering the question of the reality of the miracles attributed to Christ in the canonical Gospels, we must not shut our eyes to the fact that a large number of undoubtedly fictitious miracles were related of him in other Gospels now called apocryphal, and also that the writers of these lying wonders were Christians, who, like the forger of the Fourth Gospel, believed that the end justified the means. "Many other signs," says the pseudo John, "did Jesus in the presence of the disciples but these are written that ye may believe" (xx. 30). This was, of course, the main purpose for which the Gospel miracles were fabricated.

Let us now look at some of the miracles ascribed to Christ. That personage, among other wondrous acts, cured Peter's wife's mother of a fever, healed a leper and a paralytic man, restored a withered hand, stilled a tempest, expelled demons, raised a dead girl to life, cured a woman with an issue of blood, and restored the sight of a blind man—all instantaneously, by speaking a word. What witnesses have we of these? Not one. Matthew, Mark, and Luke found the stories recorded in a primitive Gospel, and copied them.

Again, Jesus is represented as having turned water into wine, healed a nobleman's son, cured an infirm man, restored the sight of another blind man, and raised Lazarus to life after he had been dead four days—all instantaneously as before. What persons witnessed these marvels? No one. They were fabricated by the forger of the Fourth Gospel.

Once more, Christ is credited with instantaneously restoring a widow's son to life, curing a man of dropsy, and healing ten lepers. Who witnessed these wonderful cures? No one. They are related only by Luke, the writer of the fabulous "Acts of the Apostles," who did not even live in apostolic times. Need we inquire further? The reality of all alleged miraculous occurrences must be decided by evidence, and for those recorded in the Gospels we have no evidence whatever. We must place the latter, then, in the same category as the miracles in the apocryphal Gospels. They are all fictitious, and were all concocted by Christians for the glorification of their Lord and master, Jesus Christ. And of such pious forgers is the kingdom of heaven. ABRACADABRA.

A FAIRY TALE.

"Lord! what fools these mortals be!"

WE are in receipt of a shilling pamphlet issued by the Brotherhood of the New Life, entitled *The Divine Incarnation; or, the Supreme Divinity of the Lord Jesus*, by "Respiro." It is the second edition, "revised and enlarged," and is published by E. W. Allen, 4 Ave Maria-lane. The sender trusts that we may be able to raise our mind sufficiently above the material sphere to accept its teachings. This we are partly able to do, without any such extraordinary effort. For, put into simple language, it seems that the doctrine of "Respiro," which is the doctrine of the Brotherhood of the New Life, which is the doctrine revealed to Thomas Lake Harris, is that the story of the Divine Incarnation is essentially a fairy tale. We have long thought so.

Mr. Harris, *via* "Respiro," makes several wonderful revelations. First we are told:—

"The natural body, which the Lord took upon Himself in his Incarnation, was not that of a *Vir*, neither was it that of a *Mulier*, considered separately by themselves, but it was the dual body or *Homo*, in external appearance as a man. This arcanum has never before been set forth; wherefore it is now in order to speak of it in a more ample manner. Paternity and maternity, as shown in No. 372, are both the infinite attributes of the Divine Man."

Jesus thus was hermaphrodite, a fact which at once reminds us of the metamorphoses of Ovid, and of fairy changelings; but, as Sir John Falstaff says, "Heaven defend me from a Welsh fairy, lest he transform me to a piece of cheese." We are then concerned to learn of J. C. that

"He absorbed into Himself the universal virus of moral depravity in every man's breast upon the surface of the globe." This is alarming. We are, however, somewhat relieved when, a little further on, we read that—

"During states of natural waking the Divine Child consociated strictly with the various fay-races of the earth and of the universe. He lived thus in nature and in time with the incorporated sphere of innocence, unpolluted by the evils of the Fall. By means of His Respirations, He attracted the universal fay-race."

What the fay-race is we shall shortly see; but the reader will readily guess that they are allied to the fairies, sprites, and elves familiar to us in *Midsummer Night's Dream* :—

Elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves;
And ye, that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back; you demy-puppets, that
By moonshine do the green-sour ringlets make
Whereof the ewe not bites; and you whose pastime
Is to make midnight mushrooms.

Our new revelation tells us :—

"The birth of our Lord in the natural world was effected by means of a successive taking on of fay-souls.

"The Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ was three-fold; as a world-man, inworlded in the centre of the world-souls of the universe; as a sentient-man, in the centre of a family of sentient-men upon the natural Earth, for whose especial deliverance He descended; and as a fay-man, amidst the fay-souls whose orderly unfolding had been arrested, in consequence of the inversions of moral order, resulting from the introduction of evil."

These fay-souls are so numerous, we are told, that millions of them congregate together within the aroma of flowers. These fay-souls are not exactly fairies, but, as Oberon says, "spirits of another sort."

"A fairy is an ultimated fay-soul in a fay-body; man an ultimated fay-soul in the human body and in the adult will and understanding, where the moral freedom of the creature impinges and balances. The world-soul is the fay-soul insphered within the composite series of the vortical atoms of its own orb, each atom serving as the ovum of its own fay: so that the fay-form is the evolution of the fay-soul into its own simplistic body; while the human form is the evolution of the fay-soul, which serves as the primate of the body, into a composite organization, which, sin excepted, becomes a composite and unitary home of myriads of fay-men and fay-women, all cohering into one inseparable unity; and the world-body, in its essential, is neither less nor more than a vast universe of fays, each classified in the body of a distinct human intelligence; while, at the same time, the human intelligences repeat this dynastic order, gathered in series, according to the varieties of their especial use, into the greater body of the world-soul or Cosmic Man."

Now, by my fay, but this is wondrous strange. It is transcendently lucid, too. If you do not understand it after the following fuller explanation, benighted reader, you may rest assured that your spirituals are unenlightened, and nothing but prayer and fasting will avail :—

"He eliminated from each and every Throne Angel a Fairy Angel, one male and female for each of the myriadal attributes of sensation which pertained to Throne Angels: that these, absorbed into the ultimate degree of this visible manifestation, became in their complex organs the third degree of the Man-Image formed for the tabernacle of Jehovah God, and that He dwelt in that Man-Form, in its three degrees, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

"In this manner God, who is a Trinity in Unity, discreted from Himself a Man-Form, and organized it by causing to infold into its organs the universal series of the Fay Angels, abstracted from each conjugal pair of Throne Angels in the inmost Shekinah which is in the Heavens; so that the Form itself embodied in its Fay Angels a series of representatives from each and every Throne Angel of all."

With all former revelations we have had to complain that they reveal nothing. But "Respiro's" revelation is self-revealing. We can safely say to him, with Mercutio to Romeo, "O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you." And, moreover, the revelation reveals what we have so long suspected—that the big story told us in childhood is indeed a fairy tale.

For a jackass endowed with the power of speech, Balaam's did very little talking.

A FABLE NOT CUNNINGLY DEvised.

IN the New Testament itself may be found some evidence of what was thought of the Christian scheme at the time when it was put forward. Thus we learn that in the apostolical age there were those who denied that Jesus had come in the flesh. The writer of 2 John 7 says: "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an anti-Christ." On which the obvious remark is, that the writer need not have been abusive had he been in a position to produce the evidence. Then we learn from 2 Peter i. 16 that the early Christians were accused of following "cunningly-devised fables"; or, as the Greek has it, *σεσοφισμενοις μυθοις*, sophisticated myths. Now, how does the writer meet the charge? With a lie. He takes the glaring myth of the Transfiguration, and says: "For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount."

Every critic, even Dean Farrar, allows that the second epistle ascribed to Peter is not by him. Not only is its genuineness disputed by rationalists like Baur, Hilgenfeld, Reuss, and Davidson, but also by conservative theologians like Calvin, Grotius, Neander, and Weiss. Even Bishop Westcott says "it does not seem to have been generally known till the end of the thirteenth century." Renan says that among true critics it has not a single defender. The work was unknown to any of the early fathers, and Irenæus mentions the first Peter in his epistle in a way to imply that he knew no second. Indeed, the evidence is clear that the Church, in accepting and putting forward this second epistle of Peter, has received, and teaches as the word of God, a deliberate forgery. The monks writing in Peter's name were liars as well as forgers, and pretend that "we were with him in the holy mount." Then, as if knowing this was not satisfactory, they add: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy." The earliest specimens of Christian evidence were almost worthy of the modern Christian Evidence Society.

CELSUS.

FREETHOUGHT.

(AN ACROSTIC.)

FOR ev'ry breath we each a thought perceive,
Resultant of the present and the past;
Each thought exists, with ne'er a "by your leave,"
Ere time permits to fully grasp the last.
Though thought, as thought, is neither bond nor free,
How oft from slavish minds it vainly tries,
On verbal wings, to reach both you and me;
Untimely born, it there untimely dies.
Give thought expression! silence speaks of dread;
Have dread of nought but Fear!—the friend of lies—
Then Truth will grow, and Error soon be dead.

G. L. MACKENZIE.

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- (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.
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- (5) Distribute some of our cheap tracts in your walks abroad, at public meetings, or among the audiences around street-corner preachers.
- (6) Get your newsagent to exhibit the *Freethinker* in the window.

If you do your duty bravely and generously, you will gain the doing of it—the deed itself is the gain.—*Seneca*.

CURSING THE FIG-TREE.

STRAUSS is especially severe on the miracle of cursing the barren fig-tree. He says Jesus, in harmony with his precepts, should rather have given new life to a withered tree than have made a green one wither. For one to be irritated against an inanimate object, which does not happen to be found just in the desired state, is, with reason, pronounced to be proof of an uncultivated mind; to carry such indignation to the destruction of the object is regarded as barbarous, and unworthy of a reasonable being; and hence Woolston is not wrong in maintaining that, in any other person than Jesus, such an act would be severely blamed. Strauss says "it was wholly an unjust act, the cursing of the fig-tree," and even the fathers objected to it. Origen, in his commentary on Matthew, admits it might be urged against Jesus in Mark how he could with justice say to the fig-tree, "Let no man eat fruit of thee for ever." Augustine, in a sermon upon the words of the Lord, says: "What had the tree done in not offering fruit? What fault was there in the infecundity of the fig-tree?" In later times Strauss says: "Woolston's ridicule is not unfounded when he says that if a Kentish countryman were to seek for fruit in his garden in spring, and were to cut down the trees which had none, he would be a common laughing-stock." The miracle might encourage faith in the disciples, but it would more exemplify the harsh and intolerant character of Christ, and his succeeding violence, which was to be followed by that of his disciples, as in the instance of Ananias and Sapphira, who did not produce all the fruit they required, and were therefore withered and condemned to death.

The act is a striking illustration of the alleged "sweet reasonableness" of Christ; his humble and gentle demeanor; the noble human figure which his admirers find delineated in the Gospels. The whole story seems to me a libel levelled at Jerusalem, which Christ would destroy, as in season or out of season not answering to his demands upon it. This was the revelation of himself and Christianity to the Jews and to all the world.

The woes and denunciations and curses of Christ which he directed against the Galileans and the Jews of Jerusalem were here represented in a figurative manner, or by an acted parable. The curse descended in the history of Christianity, which in its persecutions has treated mankind as Christ did the fig-tree, never regarding whether it could or could not produce fruit, but only destroying whatever it met in opposition to its wishes.

W. J. BIRCH.

ACID DROPS.

OUR pious Government, which wants to, and probably will, give an extra six hundred thousand pounds a year to "voluntary" schools, conducted in the interest of religious denominations, and solely for the purpose of making children true believers in one or other of the various conflicting forms of Christianity—this same pious Government, be it noted, is unable to find money to complete South Kensington Museum. "The condition of the Museum," as the *Daily News* says, "is a scandal to the nation." But what does that matter, so long as the parsons get their subsidy?

What flunkeys are so many of the "classes" in England! When the great Nansen gave his first lecture in West London the applause was well-bred—that is to say, tame; but there was a hurricane of cheers when the Prince of Wales rose to make a little speech. The man who had done something was just a sight, a spectacle affording a momentary excitement; while the man who had done nothing, except being born a prince, was the obvious ideal of most of those "ladies" and "gentlemen." And this is a Christian country—so superior to countries like old pagan Greece and Rome!

The Church of England naturally works the "loyal" spirit for all it is worth. We read that Her Majesty's consent has been obtained to christen the new Church scheme for raising the wind, "The Queen Victoria Clergy Sustentation Fund." This scheme is intended to level up the incomes of the poorer clergy, without levelling down the high salaries of the bishops. Of course it is the laity who are expected to find the needful.

It seems impossible to deny that the Church of England is gaining upon the Nonconformist bodies. The number of communicants has risen from 1,778,361 in 1894-5 to 1,840,351 in 1895-6. Free sittings in churches have risen in five years from 3,578,505 to 4,200,086. According to the *Year Book of the Church*, the Sunday-schools and adult Bible classes show a marked increase in attendants. What have the Nonconformists to show against this? And why are their churches growing feebler? Because they have given up the principle of the secularity of the State, the only one which really divides them from the Established Church.

Cardinal Vaughan is determined to make charity itself subordinate to the interests of the Romish Church. He invites the Catholics of England to make special collections for the Indian Famine Relief Fund. The money thus realized will be forwarded to the Catholic Bishops in India and distributed among the native Catholic population, who are said to number three hundred thousand. Cardinal Vaughan naively or cynically reminds the faithful that a starving man is a good subject for conversion, if you only feed him as well as preach to him. That is true, and doubtless accounts for nine-tenths of the Christian conversions in India.

Nothing is sacred to a sapper, says the French song; and nothing is sacred to the British burglar. The other night one of this fraternity broke into St. Matthew's Church, Prince's-square, St. George's-in-the-East, and carried off silver chalices, silver communion plates, and the contents of the collection boxes, which no doubt consisted largely of copper. There does not seem to be any heavenly watch kept over these Bethels. Surely the angels cannot all be so occupied that one of them is not available for each gospel-shop in the kingdom. A thousand angels used to dance upon the point of a needle; if they do so still, let them separate, and protect church plate against sacrilegious burglars.

A correspondent of the *Echo* asked in its "Notes and Queries," What is the difference between Agnosticism and Atheism? The Rev. S. Fletcher Williams, the popular Broad Congregationalist minister, undertook to solve the conundrum in a letter a column long. An explanation by an Agnostic or an Atheist would probably be as unsatisfactory as the differentiation of Tweedledum and Tweedledee; but the Rev. S. Fletcher Williams, in his long letter, simply demonstrates his inability to understand any philosophical position.

Mr. Williams told the readers of the *Echo* that Herbert Spencer "is but partially Agnostic." For himself he said, "I do not believe that there is any real Atheism"; and of the person who calls himself an Atheist he says, "In most cases he still believes in deity as much as ever." Mr. Williams apparently has access to occult sources of information. He tells us that the accusation of Atheism "means that those who are accused of it have higher ideas of God than those who accuse them."

Further, this very liberal Christian says: "When men began to deny the doctrine of the Substitutionary Atonement, it seemed Atheistic; but further thought showed that the Atheism was rather in the idea that God was so degraded as to demand the death of His dearest Son before He would forgive His own children for sins which they did not commit. The Atheism is not so much in the modern ideas of divine inspiration in all ennobling thought and pure feeling, as in the former idea of inspiration confined to a few men. The Atheism is not in the idea of God infinite and ever living in all just men, but in the idea of God living in only one Man and put to death in Him."

Mr. Williams is "partially Agnostic" in that he allows that God is incomprehensible. Yet he speaks of Him, with a capital H, as a person; which to most people must imply that "He" is of the masculine gender, though he says that "personality in God must be something far higher than any meaning which we can give the term." Is not this saying, in other words, that no meaning can be attached to an infinite person? The anthropomorphic God which Mr. Williams repudiates is at least intelligible. But of this personality, which is far higher than any meaning we can "give to the term," we can only say, "Ye worship ye know not what."

The *Literary World*, in reviewing the anonymous book already dealt with in our columns, entitled *Evil and Evolution*, says that the writer does not approach a solution of the question, "Who made the Devil?" The author's position with regard to the problem of evil seems to be, "We don't know, and we can't find out." "It would be quite unfair to him," our contemporary says, "to suggest that he has intentionally set forth a cogent and popular argument for Agnosticism; yet that, so it seems to us, is the real outcome of the work."

There is a good deal of bogus "sacrifice" on the part of Churchmen in subscribing towards their "voluntary" schools. In a vast number of places they keep out School Boards, and thus save School Rates. Indeed, the Archbishop of Canterbury reminds them of this fact. "Were the Voluntary schools given up," he says, "because the subscribers would no longer maintain them, those subscribers would have to pay additional rates to build, as well as to maintain, the schools that must take their place." Canon Nunn is no less candid. "The landowners and clergy," he says, "support the schools freely, knowing that,

if they do not, a rate must be levied upon them for the purpose."

Dr. Lyman Abbott, of Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, has raised a storm in a teapot by calling the story of Jonah "the Pickwick Papers of the Bible." He now says the reporters misrepresented him, and all he meant was that the story was not history, but a satire levelled at the narrow-mindedness of certain religious teachers of Jewish people, and intended by the author to provoke a laugh at their expense. That his own congregation laughed when he made the statement, in almost exact scriptural phraseology, that Jonah composed a song in the belly of the great fish, he considers evidence that his view is correct.

Colonel Ingersoll was interviewed on the subject, and said: "About the Jonah business I agree with Dr. Lyman Abbott that the story is unreasonable. It grows out of an old myth of a sun-god. Nobody believes that Jonah was actually swallowed by a fish and afterwards thrown out on the land. I mean anybody who thinks—anybody who has a remnant of reason left in his brain. Why should the citizens of Nineveh have cared about the prophecies of this Jonah? They cared nothing for Jonah, and if Jonah had gone to Nineveh and made his proclamation it would have excited no more interest in that city than would be excited in this city by the declaration of some tramp that New York was about to be swallowed by an earthquake." The Colonel was asked his views concerning the laughter which the remarks of Dr. Lyman Abbott had caused in Plymouth Church. "I don't think," he replied, "that it is sacrilegious to laugh at anything that is really laughable. As a matter of fact, the preachers of absurdity have always insisted on solemnity. Superstition detests a smile. Theologians keep straight faces under circumstances which would seem to make it impossible. Whenever they talk about there being no conflict between Genesis and geology, and quote Joshua as an authority on astronomy, how is it possible for them to keep from laughing? I say, let them laugh. The more the better."

A writer in the *Atlantic Monthly* relates a conversation he heard between the poet Tennyson and the Rev. F. D. Maurice. Tennyson remarked that the book of Ecclesiastes was of the earth, earthy, and utterly pessimistic; and he wondered how it had been admitted into the Canon. Maurice replied that the last two verses set all to rights, by inculcating the fear of God and the keeping of his commandments as the whole duty of man. Tennyson is said to have declared that he would think over the matter from that point of view. But the point of view is really an impossible one, for most critics admit that the pious conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes is not the work of the original author, but an addendum by a later orthodox hand.

Père Jourdain is the latest miracle-worker in Paris. Patients have in the first place to take a pound of loaf sugar with them to this shop. This sugar is necessary to abstract the healing power, which, according to him, resides in a fluid contained in his body. The sugar not only absorbs the fluid, but it also preserves it longer than anything else. The essential thing is faith.

In the case of William Lionel Price, charged with the murder and mutilation of his little sister at Avonmouth, the Crown Prosecutor said he had attended Sunday-school, and also found pleasure in reading the Bible, and in picking out such parts therein where wombs, and her portions of the bodies of females, were described. In conversation, too, he would make use of expressions relating to women, and say that he should like to rip them up. This person's mania, for demented he probably is, seems to have been inflamed, if not caused, by the savage books which so many are anxious shall be preserved in our schools.

The Rev. W. J. Dover, rector of Rodmarton, has levanted, leaving his wife and seven children to face his liabilities, which he is unable to meet.

Benjamin Tree, a beach preacher at Hastings and an active worker in the Congregational Church, is charged with embezzling poor rates of which he was collector.

The Rev. John Smithson Barstow, rector of Aslacky, Lincolnshire, has been fined £5 and costs for leaving his cattle in the depth of winter without food or shelter.

The police-court at La Roche-sur-Yon has condemned Philomene Hervonet, the maid-servant of the Abbé Girard, curé of Saint Philibert de Bouaine, to one year's imprisonment, for concealing the birth of her child, which she declared was still-born. She confessed that the curé was the father of the child, and that he had given her drugs in the attempt to avoid scandal.

A Christian sky-pilot, the Rev. E. E. Dry, has just died at Bladlow, in Buckinghamshire. For thirty years he lived in abject penury, only going out of an evening, and never seeing his wife and children. According to report, he has left £30,000 to the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge—probably to manufacture true believers as much like himself as modern civilization will permit.

The inmates of Carlisle prison have been regaled by a lecture from the Bishop of Barrow on "St. Paul's Shipwreck," which was illustrated by slides manipulated by the Bishop's wife. What a pity there are no animated photographs, showing all the Bible miracles exactly as they were done, to the confusion of all sceptics and unbelievers.

Captain A. R. Monro writes in the *Lindsey and Lincolnshire Star* on "Foreign Missions," confirming the observations of Mr. Cherry in that paper. He says: "There are no Turkish prostitutes, no drunken Turks to be seen in the streets of the many Turkish towns I have visited. Neither have I ever known a case of Turkish bankruptcy, and, what is more, I have never fallen across anyone who has. The Turk to-day is simply what his religion has made him—a Fatalist and Fanatic." "So much for the Turk," says Captain Monro; "now for the Foreign Mission. From personal experience extending over two years in the South Seas, I pronounce it a fraud. I have seen the John Williams Missionary Schooner landing grog at Honolulu, Otaheiti, and other places in the South Seas. Everything supplied to the natives is charged far more than full value, and the missionaries receive the profits and live like princes." Captain Monro points out that the Christian nations are eminently notable for drunkenness.

In the debate on the Bill for the Sunday Closing of Public-houses, which was rejected by 206 votes against 149, Mr. Sharpe, moving the rejection of the Bill, observed that the Celtic population are a spirit-drinking people. Mr. Davitt, putting the assertion in another way, interposed the correction, "A spiritual people." Which kind of spirits is most dangerous?

Dr. Lees, the veteran temperance advocate, lecturing at Beechen-grove Baptist Chapel, Watford, is reported in the *Herts Leader* as saying: "They could not find in the Bible a single passage of any kind connecting the approval of God with strong drink." What does the Doctor make of Deut. xiv. 26, "And thou shalt bestow that money.....for wine or for strong drink"? This passage is by no means alone, as anyone can see on referring to Mr. Foote's *Bible and Beer*. But it will do to begin with.

Bida has been captured in another of our "little wars." The "savages" there are grossly ignorant of Christianity, and perhaps it is as well they should remain so. This is Dr. Harford Battersly's account of them, taken from the *Daily News* of Friday, February 12:—"Bida is a most interesting town. It is difficult to believe that such a place should exist in the centre of Africa. The people are highly intelligent, and for the most part even cultured. Even among the slaves I found people who could read and write. Once I went into a native house and found a man giving a lecture on law. He was discoursing to his hearers on the laws of evidence. Bida abounds in schools. The mallams or scribes collect round them numbers of boys and teach them to read and write. Being Mohammedans, they attach much value to works of charity. A prominent feature in Bida is an institution for the blind. This home consists of a large compound inside the town. Here the blind are well looked after and sent out into the streets to beg. The whole institution is presided over by a man known as the King of the Blind. The inmates make ropes, which in point of quality compare very favorably with those turned out at similar institutions at home. The leather work and the manuscripts of the Bida people are, I should say, not to be surpassed."

Dr. Battersly says the Bida people are superstitious. They believe, for instance, in paper charms. But how many Catholics wear a scapular! And what is the difference, in reason, between magical paper and magical rags?

The *Newcastle Daily News* (Feb. 13) has an excellent article on the Corporation's accepting Alderman Stephenson's offer of a library, on the condition that it should never be opened on Sunday. We are pleased to see there is to be a public meeting on the question. The *Daily News* suggests that the vexatious condition should be withdrawn. "First, because we believe that, if a vote of the district were taken, there would be an overwhelming majority against it; secondly, because its being dropped would save the donor from the reproach which many of the present generation, and many more of the next, would cast upon him of being 'a narrow-minded bigot.'"

A curious conversation took place recently in the Plymouth County Court. William Petherbridge was suing the trustees

of the Westlake and Waldron estate for wages due to him. On a point of law a judgment was given for the defendants, whereupon the plaintiff remarked: "I have read from the Book of Genesis to Revelation, and can find nothing which says that a workman shall not be paid for his hire." Judge Edge replied: "I am very sorry: but neither of those books is in the statute laws of England." Begging his lordship's pardon, but they are. The Bible is included as God's Word in the Blasphemy Statute (1694) of William III.

Erith and District Labor Notes is a lively little publication. It pillories certain local employers of labor, all of whom attend church, and one of whom is a churchwarden, for professing Sabbatarianism and working their men on "The Lord's Day." The writer hints that employers generally patronize Christianity because it "makes them contented with their wrongs here by telling them they will get justice in heaven." Exactly so. That is what we have been saying all along. We are glad that the workers are finding it out for themselves.

The Rev. Cortlandt Myers, a Baptist, says wealth should not be spent for pleasure, and adds: "I defy any man to find one statement from the lips of God to the contrary." "Lips of God" is good. Quite Biblical in its anthropomorphism.

German Protestants have been celebrating the fourth centenary of Melancthon's birth. He was the best of the Reformers, just because he was Humanist as well as Reformer: but he did not get beyond his age, though in following Luther he somewhat softened the rigor of his views. He endorsed the treatment of Servetus by the Genevan Pope, Calvin.

"Peter Lombard" says that Welsh translations of Luke xxiii. 32 read "two other wicked doers." This occurs in the earliest Welsh version (1567), and is repeated in Bishop Perry's version, which may be called the Welsh authorized translation, and reads "two other malefactors." This is indeed fulfilling prophecy and numbering Christ with the transgressors.

The dramatization of Marie Corelli's *Sorrows of Satan* having proved tolerably successful—for England, as Carlyle said, contains thirty millions of people, mostly fools—the lady is going to "try the dramatic capabilities of the theme of the incarnation of souls." That's the style. Nothing pays like ministering to the bump of wonder.

The *Daughters of Babylon*, Mr. W. Barrett's new play, says the *Academy* critic, may be a religious play, but it is not a moral one. "Two people are condemned to death, and are let off because somebody arrives to remind their judge that he, too, in his youth was guilty of their offence. They are really innocent, but the judge believes them to be guilty all the time; consequently the moral lesson is that two blacks make a white. I am no theologian, but I know enough of ethics to affirm with confidence that this is not a good moral lesson."

The *Methodist Times* offered prizes for essays on the oft-discussed question, "Why the Working Classes do not Go to Church." The prize-takers, in the words of the *M. T.*, "frankly admit those reasons for neglect of public worship which are rooted in the depravity of human nature. Working men, like other men, are naturally disposed to various forms of self-indulgence inconsistent with regular attendance at the house of God." The influence of our fallen nature is largely responsible, but the formality and tameness of services are also at fault.

The *M. T.* says: "The newspaper census of recent years has revealed that the immense majority of the working classes do not attend any places of worship. In some densely crowded parts of artizan London not more than five per cent. ever enter a Christian sanctuary. We have no doubt that statements almost as appalling could be made with respect to provincial cities, towns, and villages." The trouble is that making the services, like the Salvationists, into a cheap entertainment, only repels the people with some refinement and cash.

There is a fine row going on in the Wesleyan Methodist Connection because of some of its leading laymen being connected with the liquor traffic. Hugh Price Hughes is wrath because these men are being shown up. Of course the good Methodists would not allow such sinners as publicans to become class leaders, etc. But in the case of the brewer, to whom the house is tied, and who has a big house of his own in which he can entertain the sky-pilot, that is a horse of another color. A man with £5,000 worth of brewery shares, with his name written on brewery share scrip (but not over his door), is considered a *saint*, because only Somerset House knows the secret; but if he is only a

poor beerhouse keeper, he is considered a *devil*, because the public knows he is a publican.

Whoever heard of the Church reproving for drunkenness a man with £1,000 a year? It is the wretches with poor homes who are always preached at for frequenting the gin-palace. 'Tis an old tale. "Plate sin with gold, and the strong lance of justice—hurtless—breaks. Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw doth pierce it."

Reports in the Spiritist press for a long while have sung the praises of the wonderful materializing medium, Victor Wild, whose pretensions have been endorsed by some of the eminent luminaries of the cause. The South London Spiritists invited him to Camberwell, where he gave the public specimens of his amazing clairvoyance at half-a-crown a head. He described the name, age, and address of a number of spirits perceived by second sight, but was reticent about their personal appearance. The audience were not satisfied, and the chairman pledged himself to investigate. This he did, with the result of having to tell the faithful that every single "description" given by the "clairvoyant" was represented by an obituary notice which had recently appeared in the London papers.

Professor Crookes, the eminent scientist, who was awfully fooled by Florrie Cook, the mejum, said, in a recent address to the Psychological Research Society, that there was a widespread delusion among believers that spirits would be in shape and size similar to their earthly bodies. That was mere prejudice. Spirits may be of any or of no shape and size. The old schoolmen used to argue how many angels could dance on the point of a needle. According to Professor Crookes, myriads may be in every cloud of tobacco smoke, and perhaps take the shape of the pipe itself. It is a strange world, my masters.

The late Dr. Nevius, an American Protestant missionary in China, believed in the existence there at the present day of possession by devils, and wrote a book on *Demon-Possession in China*, which the American medical journals have been laughing at. Dr. Nevius was very much in earnest, but he drew all his evidence from native Christians—a most untrustworthy class of witnesses. The funny thing is how good Christians laugh at a modern belief, while quite prepared to credit that such things took place a long way off and a good while ago. According to Dr. Nevius, demon possession now only occurs a long way off; but, as a matter of fact, all the symptoms taken as implying possession may be found in any lunatic asylum at home.

A writer in the *Oldham Evening Chronicle* points out that at a town's meeting, called by the Mayor to consider the Indian famine, not one of "The clergy of all Denominations" was present. He says: "They are toasted at the Mayor's banquet, and do not fail to respond. Here was an appeal to Christian charity; but no clergyman of the Church of England was present, no Roman Catholic priest, and no Dissenting minister. They were unanimously absent. Christian unity sate on empty chairs. Only the cotton-industry showed itself in any force."

Mrs. Nicholls, the wife of a journeyman plumber at Hampstead Heath, has given birth to three children at once—or to "triplets," as the newspapers say, in defiance of grammar and common sense. Not more than others she deserved, but God hath given her more. We hardly imagine, though, that she is grateful. One favor at a time, in these matters, is as much as any woman desires. When "Providence" sends three children to a woman in one consignment, it ought to select as recipient a duchess or the wife of a millionaire.

Rossetti and Carlyle, who had no esteem for each other, used to live close together in Chelsea. One day, when a visitor called on Rossetti, he found him in great excitement. It was at the time when the Salvation Army was just beginning its crusade, and in walking up to the house the visitor had noticed a group of members. "Have you seen those wretches who came here to annoy me?" said Rossetti, who had, of course, never heard of the Salvation Army. "I am sure they were sent by Carlyle. They stood under my window and began to sing, 'Come to Jesus!' I was so furious that I rushed to the door, and cried out to them, 'I'll be damned if I will!'"

We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breath;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.

—Bailey.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, February 21, Athenæum Hall, Tottenham Court-road, at 7.30, subject, "The Crescent and the Cross in Crete."

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

- MR. CHARLES WATTS'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—February 21, Liverpool; 23, Paisley; 24, Greenock; 25, Motherwell; 26, Dunoon; 28, Glasgow. March 7, Athenæum Hall, London; 14, Athenæum Hall; 21 and 28, Camberwell. April 4, Sheffield.—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, S.W.
- A WESLEYAN says: "The Wesleyan connection, before trying to purify public-houses, should purify itself by expelling all its laymen from official positions who are brewers and brewery shareholders," and he asks: "Is it true that the eminent Wesleyan minister, Rev. Charles Garret, the world-wide teetotaler, has a liquor trafficker for his chapel steward at Pitt-street Wesleyan Chapel, Liverpool?"
- CHILDREN'S PARTY.—Mr. Forder acknowledges: George Anderson, £3.
- S. HARTMANN, honorary treasurer, National Secular Society, acknowledges the following:—T. Gorniot, 5s.; A. Sumner, 10s.; H. Snell, 5s.; C. Cohen, 5s.
- A CORRESPONDENT sends us an advertisement of a lecture at Edmonton on "The Madness of Atheism," and appears to consider it a good opportunity for Mr. Foote, as discussion is invited. The President of the N. S. S., however, does not think it either his duty or his wisdom to devote an evening to this particular infidel slayer. Others are quite capable of dealing with him.
- MR. FOOTE'S LECTURE SCHEME.—Collected at Mr. Cohen's Glasgow lectures, £1 7s. 5d.
- T. P. BARRON.—Learn decency first. Being a Christian does not excuse vulgar insolence. Your communication, intended for the *Freethinker*, has gone into the waste-basket.
- J. CHERRY.—The King John referred to in the *Literary Guide* was monarch of Abyssinia—not King John of England, who reigned nearly nine hundred years ago. No doubt the date 1880 is right, but we cannot stand sponsor for the accuracy of statements in other journals. Why not write to the editor of the *Literary Guide* yourself?
- E. H. S.—(1) Solomon is not censured for having so many wives, but for marrying foreigners, and giving way to idolatry. You forget that David had several wives. (2) Man is not the only being that laughs and cries, and if he wore it would not upset Darwinism. (3) Mr. Holyoake's letter does not impugn our criticism; quite the contrary, as it seems to us.
- R. UFFERN and T. J. HART.—Too late for this week. In our next.
- C. STOCKER.—The delay last week was not Mr. Forder's fault. It occurred at the printers.
- E. A. BAILEY.—Shall appear.
- G. KERSLEY.—Practical schemes will always be welcome at the N. S. S. Conference, and always command attention. But the worst of it is, they are so seldom presented. Many see defects; few have the originality to devise a remedy. The lecturer you mention certainly deserved a larger audience, for he is a man of very considerable ability; but the particular instance you cite only shows the evil of carping at the only organization which is really carrying on an effective propaganda of Secularism.
- T. J. HEAD.—We reproduced it from an American exchange. The writer is on the staff of the *Boston Globe*. Thanks for the enclosures.
- S. D. (Plymouth).—Useful cuttings are always welcome.
- C. T. BROOKS.—Mr. Foote will try to visit Edmonton again this winter.
- ATHEISTIC SCIENTIST.—Not at all angry. Pleased to have your criticism. Of course *fauna* is a misprint, and a very obvious one. How it escaped correction is a puzzle. But the Bible was once printed with the "not" left out in the seventh commandment, and Christians were told "Thou shalt commit adultery."
- W. JOHNCOCK.—Would have inserted it, but "Abracadabra" has answered his critic himself.
- DOUBLE-U-TEA.—The verses are hardly up to our standard. No doubt our propaganda might be carried to Lincoln. We should be glad to hear from any Freethinker there willing to assist.
- T. FISHER.—In our next.
- G. WALLACE.—Thanks for your letter. Mr. Foote hopes to visit Bolton, and other Lancashire towns, again shortly. Pleased to hear you liked Mr. Cohen, also that it is now easy to obtain this journal in your district. Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam is still published by Quaritch; it is also included in the three volumes of Fitzgerald's works, edited by Dr. Aldis Wright, and published by Macmillan. James Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night* is published by B. Dobell, 77 Charing Cross-road, London, W., a gentleman who has sunk time and money in bringing Thomson's works before the public.
- PAPERS RECEIVED.—Isle of Man Times—Lindsay and Lincolnshire Star—Sydney Bulletin—Watford Observer—Truthseeker—Progressive Thinker—Club World—Blue Grass Blade—Freedom—Echo—Herts Leader—Folkestone Programme—Liberator—New York Public Opinion—Secular Thought—Newcastle Daily News—Morning Leader.

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

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

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

THE National Secular Society's office is at No. 377 Strand, London, where all letters should be addressed to Miss Vance.

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

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.

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.

SUGAR PLUMS.

THERE was a capital audience at the Athenæum, 73 Tottenham Court-road, on Sunday evening, when Mr. Foote lectured on "Earth, Heaven, and Hell." Opposition was offered by a Christian Evidence speaker from the East-end. Mr. Foote occupies the same platform again this evening (Feb. 21), taking for his subject "The Crescent and the Cross in Crete"—one that ought to attract a crowded meeting. Prior to the lecture, Mr. Foote will give a reading of Byron's "Isles of Greece."

Mr. Foote holds another debate with the Rev. W. T. Lee next week at Bristol, in the St. James's Hall, on the evenings of Tuesday and Wednesday (February 23 and 24). The subject for discussion is—"Christianity or Secularism: Which is the Better System?" We hope the Bristol Freethinkers will give this debate all possible publicity, and do their utmost to induce Christians to attend. Mr. Foote's debate with the Rev. J. M. Logan re-established the Bristol Branch, and this new debate ought to give the Branch a fresh impetus.

Mr. Foote is now pushing forward his scheme of an Incorporated Society, by which security may be afforded to those who wish to give or leave money for Secular purposes. He will have something to say on this subject in next week's *Freethinker*.

Last Sunday Mr. Charles Watts had two of the largest and most enthusiastic audiences in Leicester that he ever addressed in that town. There was a capital gathering in the morning, and in the evening the hall was crowded. An interesting discussion followed the night lecture.

To-day, Sunday, February 21, Mr. Watts lectures three times in Liverpool, and next week he gives four lectures in Scotland under Mr. Foote's Lecture Scheme, visiting Paisley, Greenock, Motherwell, and Dunoon.

Mr. C. Cohen is lecturing at Bristol to-day (February 21) in the St. James's Hall, morning, afternoon, and evening. We believe this is his first course of Sunday lectures in that city, and we hope the local "Saints" will see that he has good audiences.

Mr. Foote lectured before the Pioneer Club on Thursday evening, February 11, his subject being, "The Ethics of Imprisonment." The Pioneer is a ladies' club, whose quarters are at 22 Bruton-street, W., a building that was once occupied by the *roué* Lord Hastings. "What a change!" the walls might exclaim, if they could only speak. The Club was established, and to a very large extent conducted, by the late Mrs. E. L. Massingberd, whose recent death is a great blow to the institution. Lady Hamilton is the Club's secretary, and the entrance fee is three guineas, followed by an annual subscription of the same amount. Altogether the Club may be regarded as eminently "select," and some persons were a little curious as to how a lecture by Mr. Foote would be received.

Miss Honnor Morten occupied the chair. She is a most intelligent and pleasant lady, and her introductory remarks were exactly to the point, besides being delivered with agreeable fluency. The room was full of auditors, the great majority, of course, belonging to the fair sex. A small contingent of men were dotted about, and saved the assembly from appearing entirely Amazonian. Mr. Foote expressed a natural diffidence in addressing so many ladies, and hoped he would be able to conquer it as he proceeded:

whereat some of the ladies smiled encouragingly. While using judicious language, Mr. Foote did not disguise his principles or conceal his position. He repudiated the fallen-angel theory of human nature; also the orthodox ideas of free-will, sin, and punishment; and declared that crime should be regarded, not from a personal, but from a sociological, point of view. Our first duty was to lessen the causes of crime by social amelioration; our next duty to treat the criminal solely with a view to the protection of society and his own improvement. Our jurisprudence and our prison system were then criticized in this light, and found to be sadly in need of reformation. Mr. Foote advocated the lightest possible treatment of first offenders, short sentences rather than long ones, the establishment of a Court of Criminal Appeal, the classification of prisoners, the introduction of a thorough industrial and moral discipline in place of the present cell-torture, and the treatment of prisoners as human beings instead of mere things that had to be fed and clothed and, to some extent, occupied for a specified time. With respect to incorrigible criminals, afflicted with a congenital taint, Mr. Foote advocated a policy of restraint without cruelty, whereby they would be prevented from transmitting their evil tendencies.

Captain McNeile, a prison governor, was there by special invitation to open the debate. He evidently thought our prison system was in most respects admirable, although, of course, every institution was susceptible of some improvement. He objected to making prisons comfortable clubs, and denied that prisoners suffered as Mr. Foote alleged. He also denied that prisoners talk to each other in the exercise ground—which shows what prison officials really know of prison life. Captain Frederic, a naval officer, also joined in the discussion, and showed a more open mind than Captain McNeile. Mr. Thomas Shore made a brief, vigorous speech on the Progressive side. All the other speakers were ladies. Some agreed with Mr. Foote, some differed from him; and some agreed with and differed from each other. One lady said, a little loftily, that “those people”—meaning the criminals—must be “hard to deal with.” Another lady replied that the best of people often found *each other* hard to deal with. It was a hit, a palpable hit! And those who did not laugh looked conscious of its truth. On the whole, it was very pleasant to see the ladies' minds at work, sometimes on the subject, and sometimes on each other; but always with good breeding and good temper. They spoke rather better than their male friends, and without the men's tinge of pomposity. Several ladies shook hands with Mr. Foote afterwards, and expressed a hope that the ideas he had put forward would spread among the public. Altogether, it was far from being an unprofitable evening. The lecturer caught a glimpse of a fresh world—much like the old one, though, at bottom—and his audience had the benefit of being stirred up by honest speech, not without information, on a very important subject.

The *Academy* (Feb. 13), reviewing a book on *Ancient Ideals*, notes the author's views on the deluge as caused by impiety, and says: “Any writer who can thus speak about the ‘deluge’ in these days, when no one whose opinion is of any account regards it as more than some local inundation, if not altogether and utterly apocryphal, exhibits thereby an absolutely fatal incompetence as to matters of ancient history and religion.”

The *Watford Observer* has a good letter signed “Lucifer,” in reply to Dr. Lees, on “The Bible and Temperance.” “Lucifer” points out that the veteran teetotaler is not content to take the words of the old book as they stand. “It is God's word with Dr. Lees' interpretation.”

The Playgoers' Club held its Annual Dinner on Sunday evening at the Hotel Cecil. A fine orchestra discoursed music, and singers and actors contributed to the evening's entertainment. Mr. Charles Wyndham occupied the chair and made a witty speech. Another speaker was Mr. Clement Scott, the dramatic critic of the loyal and pious *Daily Telegraph*. Fancy such a festive gathering on Sunday! It is enough to make every hair on the head of Mr. Price Hughes stand on end. Twenty years ago no hotel would have dared to provide a public dinner on Sunday evening. Yes, we are progressing, even in conservative old England.

Open Court for February opens with a discourse on “The Centenary of Theophilanthropy,” by M. D. Conway. Two Buddhists deal with questions in connection with their religion, but the chief feature of the number is a well-illustrated article on “The Trinity Idea,” the editor supplying the text to eighteen well-chosen illustrations.

We are sorry to note from the *Liberator* that Mr. Symes has been extremely ill with influenza again. Rest and change would do him good, but these he seems unable to take. We hope that so valiant a fighter will not be forced to retire from the battle.

Heresy and profanity are spreading in America. Dr. Lyman Abbott, the successor of Ward Beecher, recently preached on Jonah, and this is how his sermon is referred to in the *New York World*:—“Mirth was rampant in Plymouth Church last night. The Rev. Dr. Lyman Abbott, who has been preaching sermons on the literature of the Bible, preached about Jonah and the whale. His remarks caused great laughter, and he was frequently interrupted by loud guffaws.”

The Ethical Library, opened by Mr. Leslie Stephen at Leighton Hall, makes a good start with about 2,000 volumes of advanced literature.

Distiller Dewar, the defeated Tory candidate for Walthamstow, was asked whether he would vote for Liberty of Bequest or the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws. He vouchsafed no reply. Mr. Sam Woods, the successful Liberal and Labor candidate, promised to do all in his power to promote Liberty of Bequest.

CHALDEAN TEMPLES.

AN interesting article on Chaldean Cathedrals appeared in the *Echo* of February 10. The writer says:—

“The relations which existed between the god, the city, and the temple are at the foundation of the study of the sociology of these ancient cities and empires. The city god was but another form of the tribal or family god, whose origin is largely to be traced to ancestor worship. Just as the first act of taking possession of a house or private property was the erection of a shrine to the ‘family god,’ and thereby dedicating the new property to him as ‘God of the Ground,’ so the first act of founding a city was the erection of a shrine for the ‘Civic God.’ The temple became his dwelling-place, and he identified himself closely with all the affairs of the city and its inhabitants. It is this close and personal connection which gave to the temple so great an interest. The important discoveries made by the American expedition working at Nippur have unearthed certainly the oldest form of the temple yet known, and its construction is probably to be ascribed to as remote a period as five thousand years before the Christian era.

“It is evident that, like the *Agora* of the city of Troy, it was the sacred Haram or enclosure of the city god, the holy ground surrounded with a ‘great taboo,’ into which only the purified could enter. It was, moreover, like the ‘Ohel Moed,’ the Tent of Assembly, or Tabernacle of the Hebrews, the place of meeting, the spot where the city god presided over the civic affairs, and here met the council of the primitive community composed of the *sibute*, or ‘grey-haired ones.’ It was this association of the god with all the affairs of the city that gave to the temple so important a secular as well as sacred position. The discoveries made by the American and French expeditions in Chaldea have brought to light many interesting features of the functions connected with the temple. In the temple attached to the shrine of the god Sigur, at Lagash, M. de Sarzec discovered more than thirty thousand tablets stored in the record chamber of the temple.

“Among the inscriptions discovered are a large number of tithe lists. The tithes being paid in kind, the lists give us a more interesting insight into the immense agricultural and pastoral wealth of the country. Two of these lists have recently been published by Dr. Hilprecht, and they contain the careful enumeration of hundreds of male and female asses, oxen, cows, sheep and rams, goats, and tame gazelles that were brought to the temple. The tithe was usually paid at the beginning of the year in the month Nisan, when the animals were driven into a great square near the temple—such a cattle-yard was found at Nippur, and there the animals were examined by the priests and the blemished ones rejected. Other animals were redeemed by their owners by a payment in silver, thus adding to the temple revenue. After this the animals were sent to the temple farms, being brought up as required for sacrifice.

“Still, the temple acted as a sort of relief fund in years of scarcity. The great grain stores were opened, and loans of grain made to the farmers, or wool to the weavers. Like the monks of old, the temple employed large numbers of artisans, and we often find orders for wool to the weaver, and to the apprentices, or iron and copper to the smiths, among the tablets. Indeed, the organization of one of these sacred edifices of three thousand years ago was very monastic in character. In another respect they resembled our cathedrals in being the local chancellories, where most of the legal business of the community was transacted.

“If a man died, his estate was administered by the widow and the eldest son; but if the family could not agree the estate was handed over to the priests of the local temple, who made a decree as to its division, and carefully reserved a portion, usually one-twelfth, as costs, which went to the temple treasury.”

MAN, WOMAN, AND PRIEST.

MAN.

GROANING, weary, heavy-laden,
Lo! I see a weeping maiden.
Sad and desolate she moans:
Such distress might move the stones.
Who has dared to blast this flower—
Made such cursed use of power?
Who has bound this maid in chains?
Conscience haunt him for his pains;
I will raise the drooping slave.
Woman, rise! Be free, be brave!
I thy galling chains will break,
And the consequences take.

PRIEST.

Stay thy hand! rash fool, beware!
An apostle placed them there;
God himself the burden laid
On the shoulders of the maid.
Cease! his vengeance, at a blow,
May this moment lay thee low.

MAN.

God! what god has done this deed?
Maker of the Hindoo creed?
Juggernaut, whose bloody rites
Feast his soul with rare delights?

PRIEST.

Scoffer, have you never heard
God's most holy, precious word?
Read his laws: they all declare
Woman must the burden bear.
Man is lord of all below;
Woman as he wills must go;
She in all things must obey,
God hath said; dare you gainsay?

MAN.

I your holy book have read:
Maiden, raise thy drooping head!
There's a holier book than yours,
Evermore its truth endures;
Universal bible it,
'Tis the only "holy writ";
Sky and earth and sea its pages,
Fit for children as for sages;
Freedom's name's on every line
Of this manuscript divine.
Let your Jewish fables go;
Error is the source of woe;
Nature to the world is preaching,
Listen to her truthful teaching;
Men and women equal, free,
Then the world's long Jubilee.

—Radical Rhymes.

WILLIAM DENTON.

BOOTH VERSUS CONFUCIUS.

DEAR "BULLETIN,"—I lately remarked in your columns upon the absurdity of the Salvation Army's expectation of extricating—as regards the Malay Archipelago—any considerable number of souls from the remarkably enduring grip of Mohammed; and since it now appears that the Corybantic Cult proposes, by extending its operations to Cathay, to encroach upon what has hitherto been regarded as the special preserve of the hysterically-evangelical Young Person, I should like to ask a few straight-out questions. First, has the Salvation Army the remotest idea that in the life of the average "China at Home" the so-called Christian virtues are very much more in evidence than in any ostensibly Christian community? Also, has the S. A. the faintest conception of the fact that the average Celestial intellect is vastly more comprehensive and acute than the average S. A. ditto? Again, what answer is the S. A. prepared to give to the intelligent Chinaman who will, to a dead certainty, put to the would-be proselytizer the following pertinent questions?

"What shall I gain by accepting from you a theory of things speculative which, while in no way less fanciful and visionary than my own, enters so very much less deeply into your daily life—translates itself so much less practically into your every-day conduct than the precepts of my theological teachers do into mine? Your Christ, you say, has commanded you, when smitten on one cheek, to turn the other to the smiter. Do you do it? Have you ever done it—individually or collectively? If you have obeyed this injunction, would you be to-day the offensively prosperous nation that you are—waxed insolently fat upon a policy of universal earth-and-man-grabbing? You say I don't live up to the standards of Confucius and the sages, and when I challenge you to deny that I live up to these standards

very much more closely than you live up to those of Christ you turn round and tell me that the teachings of Confucius are not of much account, anyhow! Why? How? Give me, not assertion, but proof!

"You cannot do it! In my commercial relations I am honest and more liberal than you are. In my social relations I am as complaisant as you are, much more courteous, and very much more sincere. I discharge my obligations more faithfully than you do. I give more of my substance to the poor; I live, upon the whole—heathen as you call me—a life which accords much better than yours with the moral standards by which you profess to be guided. What, therefore, shall it profit me to subscribe to your assertions that Three and One—God and Man—are identical? These things are to me vastly more absurd superstitions than any of the beliefs which you are so ready thus to characterize in my case. The question is simply one of intellectual superiority, and you proceed throughout upon the assumption that this of necessity rests with you. But you have so far done nothing whatever to prove this; nor, until you have done so, can you expect me to receive or respect your doctrines about things which cannot possibly be known.

"Meantime, my beliefs—upon antecedent evidence—are at least as likely to be correct as your own. While you say that I am necessarily wrong, I, in return, say merely that you are probably so; and to that extent I am wider than you are—and deeper. When you have learnt the humility which you are always preaching, and have got rid of your intellectual disease of gratuitous assumption, you may possibly not be confined for your record of 'converts' to that class of my countrymen which finds its best parallel in the ignorant enthusiasts of your Salvation Army."

Now, to contend intellectually with the man who will say this—and I have heard him say it better—an itching evangelism sends forth its green-witted girls—religious mountebankery, its bellowing nincompoops. "The humor of it!"

MACASSAR.

—*Sydney Bulletin*.

Stealing for the Glory of God.

John D. Rockefeller has made munificent donations to Church institutions, and stands at the head of the millionaires of the world in aid of his creed. His wealth, invested in churches and schools of learning, is protected by Government; but it does not pay any portion of the cost of such protection. It has just developed how the magnate manages to escape taxation for the glory of God and the upbuilding of his kingdom.

In an action brought against the millionaire by Rev. Dr. Potter, of the Tabernacle Baptist Church, to recover a back income of \$9,000, alleged to be due to the church, Rockefeller was put on the stand as a witness. Asked:

"Who was the real owner of the lease obtained from St. Mark's Church?"

"I was."

"But it was held in the name of the church; why was that?"

"The reason for that," replied Mr. Rockefeller, "was to escape taxation. If I had held the lease in my name, the property would have been taxed. If the Church held it, it was exempt from taxation."

It is by steals like these the Church prospers, as do its largest contributors.—*Progressive Thinker*.

Obituary.

I NOTICE in the *The Club World* an announcement of the death of James Davies, of South London, and formerly an active member of the late Peckham Branch of the N. S. S. As many South London Freethinkers do not see *The Club World*, I append a paragraph which will explain Mr. Davies's connection with our movement:—The late Charles Bradlaugh had no more devoted follower in his "Old Guard," as Mr. Davies proved by the prominent part he took, although a poor man, in assisting at the various Northampton contests, and the many meetings held in London previous to Mr. Bradlaugh's admission to Parliament. Mr. Davies was also chairman of the open-air meetings on Peckham Rye, and during those exciting times was always to the fore in circulating our literature. The Southwark Radical Club are raising a fund for his widow, who is left in needy circumstances.—R. FORDER.

You are a citizen of a country which is very great, and very famous for wisdom and power of mind; are you not ashamed of caring so much for the making of money and for reputation and for honors? Will you not think or care about wisdom and truth and the perfection of yourself? My excellent friend, virtue does not come from wealth, but wealth and every other good which men have, whether in public or in private, comes from virtue.—*Socrates*.

BOOK CHAT.

MR. GEORGE MEREDITH has just entered upon his seventieth year. He has almost entirely recovered from the effects of a recent operation, and is busy in revising the new edition of his works which is being issued by Messrs. Constable. We are much pleased to hear that a brilliant lecture on Comedy by Mr. Meredith, that was published in 1877 in a long-since defunct magazine, is to be reprinted in a permanent form. Such a splendid piece of work ought to be in the hands of all Meredithians.

* * *

The title of Olive Schreiner's new story (Fisher Unwin) is *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*.

* * *

Insanity in Prisons, by Bernard C. Molloy, M.P., is published as a penny pamphlet by the Humanitarian League (Reeves, 185 Fleet-street). Mr. Molloy gives statistics showing that our barbarous prison system is a direct cause of lunacy among the confined, and that the proportion of the insane has increased by leaps and bounds.

* * *

In *The Lawyer in History, Literature, and Humor*, Mr. W. E. Axon gives some interesting particulars of Sanctuaries and the mischievous working of this Church privilege. Between 1478 and 1539, at Durham, 283 persons took refuge who were, as principals or accessories, accused of homicide. There were sixteen debtors, four horse-stealers, nine cattle-stealers, and four house-breakers. One had been charged with rape, and seven with theft. One had been backward in his accounts, one had harbored a thief, and one had failed to prosecute.

* * *

The Church of St. John of Beverley possessed, it appears, a "Fridstool," or "Chair of Peace," to which it was declared "whatever criminal soever flieth hath full protection." The privilege extended to a radius of a mile round the minster, and the limits were marked by stone crosses. The penalty for laying hands upon one of the Church's criminal *protégés* was excommunication.

* * *

A section of the book is devoted to "Trials of Animals," upon which another volume has been recently published. It mentions the trial at Falaise of a sow which had torn the face and arms of a child, from the effects of which injuries it died. The sow was condemned to be mutilated in the head and one foreleg, and afterwards to be strangled, which sentence was executed in the public square of the town. This was in 1386. Three years later a horse was condemned to death at Dijon for having killed a man. In 1403 Simon de Baudemont, lieutenant of Meulan; Jean, lord of Main-tenon; and the bailiff of Mantes and Meulan, signed an attestation of the expenses incurred in the prosecution and execution of a sow that had killed and partially eaten a child. "Deodands," given over to God, which were only abolished in England about half a century ago, seem like a mild and modified survival of this absurd practice.

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Kindly allow me space to briefly reply to your correspondent, C. Harpur, whose letter appeared in your last issue.

Mr. Harpur commences by saying that in his opinion "many Freethought arguments are almost as weak as those in the *Catholic Times*," and then he cites an example—viz., "Abacadabra" argues that the three lists of the Apostles cannot be of independent origin, because they are all nearly in the same order." To the first charge I have nothing to say. I am not a reader of the religious periodical named, and so am unable to judge of the cogency of the arguments therein advanced. With regard to the second, however, the case is different; the argument is my own, and has never, to my knowledge, appeared in print before.

Now, without going over the same ground again, I will only say that Mr. Harpur has not, apparently, fully realized the fact that we might take 479,001,600 slips of paper, and write upon each the names of the twelve apostles, without any two slips having the names arranged in exactly the same order. Bearing this fact in mind, and supposing these slips to be numbered consecutively, the probability that three men should, independently of each other, write the twelve names in the order, say, of slip No. 41,307, would be so small as to amount practically almost to an impossibility. Further, the soundness of this argument is confirmed by the fact that the narratives common to the three Synoptics

(which include the names of the twelve Apostles) are subsequently shown to be interdependent.

Having pointed out "the weakness" of my argument, Mr. Harpur himself advances what he doubtless considers a strong one. He says that "if three lists of the ten chief towns of England," containing the names London, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Bradford, Nottingham, Bristol, and Newcastle, are found in the order here given (with the exception of one name misplaced in two of the lists), this identical order does not prove that they are three copies of one document. "Does it not rather show," he asks, "that [the writers of] all three were drawing on their knowledge of well-known facts?" To this I unhesitatingly reply: True, O king; three such lists undoubtedly show that the writers "were drawing on their knowledge of well-known facts"—viz., the size, importance, and number of inhabitants. These ten towns are, in fact, arranged according to population, beginning with the highest, London, and going down to the lowest, Newcastle; or, rather, they were intended to be so arranged. But the last census shows that, while the population of Liverpool and Birmingham has largely increased, that of Manchester has remained stationary, so that the last named now only ranks fourth—a fact Mr. Harpur appears to have been unaware of. It will thus be seen that the writing out these ten names involves no element of chance whatever. Anyone well acquainted with geography would naturally place them in the order given, bar one—Manchester.

But what has this to do with the names of the twelve apostles? The latter were supposed to be equal in every respect. We read, it is true, that the disciples once contended as to who should be the greatest, and also that James and John desired to occupy places next to Christ in heaven. But these unfraternal aspirations were immediately checked. The apostles, then, being on an equality, where is the analogy between them and the ten largest towns in England? But for Mr. Harpur avowing himself "no orthodox Christian," I should have imagined him to belong to one of the "Types of Religionists" so admirably portrayed by Mr. Wheeler—viz., the "Christian Evidence Man"—who neither understands, nor troubles his head about, what constitutes evidence.

Mr. Harpur asks again: "If three writers enumerate the Channel Isles as 'Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, and Sark,' would anyone accuse them of all copying one bogus document?" To this I reply that I, for one, most certainly would not. I should only say that the writers had not forgotten the order in which those islands are named in the geography books; for I learnt them, and should name them, in that order myself.

Says Mr. Harpur once more: "Cæsar or Vitruvius may just as well be forgeries of later centuries as Mark or Luke." Until I read this, I believed I had shown beyond all reasonable doubt that one of these evangelists, Luke, did not live in apostolic times, and was not particularly noted for veracity. But evidence appears to make about as much impression on Mr. Harpur's mind as water on a duck's back. I place the evidence before him; but I cannot do his thinking for him. I will only say, then, that if the alternative of eternal bliss or everlasting torments depended upon the authenticity of Cæsar or Vitruvius, those authors, though allowed to pass unchallenged now, would, like the Gospels, be subjected to the closest and most searching investigations, and would have to stand or fall upon evidence.

ABRACADABRA.

THE FAMINE IN INDIA.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—It is not often I feel inclined to find fault with anything you write, but in your article, "Providence in India," where you change from the Providential view to the economic view, you simply "put your foot in it" and miserably fail. Almost at the bottom of the first column you state: "The result is that, as India is peopled right down to the level of subsistence, millions of people are brought face to face with starvation." This statement is incorrect. India is *not* peopled right down to the level of subsistence, and I shall not go outside your own article to prove it, for later on you write: "India is squeezed every year by Great Britain. Millions are drained out of her annually," etc. How do you reconcile that with "level of subsistence"? Where do the millions come from? I know you do not allow politics to be discussed in your paper, as your common plank or platform is Freethought; but I think you might now and then with advantage combine Freethought with a few economic truths. This is where the science of Socialism comes in. To apply it to India and the famine, suppose we allow the people of India to be well organized as regards industry and labor, and that they keep all or nearly all that they produce (instead of the squeezing process). Nature is so bountiful that, in spite of the rain which should fall and does not, one or two good years' crops would be more than ample to weather a famine such as is now going on; and, though at times nature is fickle

and topsy-turvy, so to speak, yet, with economically just distribution, there would be more than plenty for all this world's inhabitants. Let me here repeat a sentence I wrote to "Nunquam" some years back. What a blessing 'twould be if Freethought and Socialism went hand in hand—the one fighting superstition, the other the competitive system under which we sweat and groan.—Yours truly,

W. WILSON.

[This correspondent has not read our article with sufficient attention. The famine-stricken districts are peopled down to the actual means of subsistence. That is obviously the meaning of our expressions, and it is just as obviously true. If our correspondent imagines that taxes cannot be wrung from poverty, he has still something to learn.—EDITOR.]

FREETHOUGHT PROPAGANDA.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I can hardly understand the letter of T. F. Blanchard on "Freethought Propaganda." He says our methods are antiquated and want changing; that they are an "anachronism"; that "Secularism is not up to date"; that we are "fighting windmills"; that people are not as steeped in ignorance, superstition, and Bibliolatry as they were in Bradlaugh's time; that, even where Secularism has been destructive in its methods, it has been so "merely" on anti-theological lines, and that it should "extend" its destructive "action to all other fields of thought where abuses are to be met with"! A very fine programme indeed! and a nice happy family we should be if we adopted his advice. It takes us all our time to agree now in fighting one enemy, but if we had to "extend our actions to other fields of thought" I am afraid we should end in fighting ourselves off the face of the earth, like the Kilkenny cats.

Mr. Blanchard does not specify the "fields of thought" into which we should proceed to enter, and wisely so. The instant he does that the music will begin. Let him name them, and bring a hornet's nest about his ears. It is all very well to speak in vague generalities of what we should do, but let him come down to particulars. Would he have us turn our societies into Anti-vaccination Leagues, Temperance Lodges, Anti-vivisection Societies, Home Rule Clubs, Socialist Societies, or what? For my part, I think we have already gone a little out of our legitimate way in adding certain planks to our platform. Anything outside Freethought propaganda and what is strictly related to it is, in my opinion, entirely outside our province. Of course, questions like Disestablishment are properly within our scope, because they involve the principle of religious equality, which is a cardinal principle of Secularism, and on which all Secularists can unite.

When the National Secular Society ceases to be a distinctly Freethought and anti-theological Society, it will have no *raison d'être*; and, rather than there should be any doubt as to the proper work of the Society, I would call it the National Atheistical Society, and settle the matter, and then we should know where we are. Those who want it to be other than it is can find, by looking, that there are already societies in existence better able to do the special work they hanker after, but only *one* doing the special work we have at heart. And that that work is not yet completed, even Mr. Blanchard sufficiently admits, in spite of his complaint about our "fighting windmills." On the one hand, he tells us that our iconoclastic methods are obsolete, because there is no necessity for them; and, on the other hand, he says that, although the bulk of the educated and a large proportion of the non-educated classes are Freethinkers, they "cannot afford to be true to their convictions," to "jeopardize their prospects," and "must be careful not to disclose their real sentiments"! Need I say anything further, Mr. Editor? Mr. Blanchard sufficiently answers Mr. Blanchard as to the necessity and justification of still pursuing our anti-theological methods, which I hope we, as a Society, shall continue till no man shall be afraid to confess his opinions or hide his "real sentiments." When that time comes it will be opportune to talk about the National Secular Society extending its propaganda so as to "include in its range.....every kind of destructive criticism," on "noble" or any other grounds.

H. JONES.

Manchester.

SIR,—The sentiment to which Mr. Blanchard so ably gives voice in his letter, under the above heading, which appears in your last issue, seems to merit a little friendly, but still drastic, animadversion.

I, too, am a member of the N. S. S. of some thirty years' standing, during which period I have often met with brother and sister Freethinkers making very loud complaints anent the narrowness of the sphere of work undertaken by the N. S. S. But I have never yet found one of those good people who could, or at any rate would, explain what item of constructive polity they were prepared to tack on to the

avowed work of the N. S. S. as a means of increasing its efficiency.

When Mr. Blanchard speaks of the constructive side of Secularism, does he use the term constructive as the antithesis of the word destructive, as this latter term appears in connection with the anti-theological propaganda? If yes, I must plead inability to see the slightest reason for its use. What is the N. S. S. to construct to take the place of belief in witchcraft, devils, and gods, hopes of heaven, fear of hell, efficacy of prayer, the destruction of which is the special work of organized Secularism? If no, then it is self-evident that your correspondent uses the term construction to imply that he is one of those who would have the N. S. S. become a general dabbler in politics. I utterly fail to see where any general good to the public, or particular benefit to the N. S. S., would accrue thereby.

My experience proves to me that Freethinkers are very live politicians. I have found them in the political arena fighting and working for every phase of constructive polity, from nebulous anarchy to condensed Socialism. If, after thirty years' gallant efforts to organize avowed Freethinkers, we have to admit our complete failure to do so, in a way that is at all commensurate with our numerical strength, surely we can have no ground for hoping for success in any attempt that the N. S. S. might make to become the guiding genius in the world of general politics.

The moment we leave that great focus of Freethought energy, the anti-theological platform, as Freethinkers we leave that great bond of unity behind us to become Radicals, Liberals, Whigs, Tories, as the case may be. This much-decried anti-theological propaganda, which is the distinctive feature of the N. S. S., to my mind constitutes its chief claim to the earnest and hearty support of all Freethinkers. The service that it has performed in the onward march of human progress during the past three hundred years is as full of glory to those great men who labored therein as it is beneficial to us who now enjoy the liberty those brave standard-bearers won for us. Its work is not yet accomplished.

While the blasphemy laws remains unrepealed; while organized Freethought in the matter of bequest, as in many other respects, is outside the law; while any religious corporation enjoys one privilege that may not be equally enjoyed by a corporation of Freethinkers, our anti-theological propaganda cannot be said to have accomplished its work. While one of those legal anomalies obtains, the anti-theological destructive propaganda of the N. S. S. will be well worthy of the ungrudging sympathy and the undivided support of all who claim to be Freethinkers, be they members of the N. S. S. or not.

One fact I should like to drive right home—namely, that during my many years' membership of the N. S. S. I have never once found such membership any impediment to my taking a most lively interest in, nor to my doing my fair share of hard work in, any non-Secularist movement that, to my mind, has had the public good for its primary object.

T. J. THURLOW.

PROFANE JOKES.

"MAMMA, is God deaf?" "Why, no! What makes you think so?" "Oh, I have prayed every night that he would make grandmamma well right off, and she's not well yet."

A golfer, who was not in the habit of playing his "lofting iron" with any measure of success, managed on one occasion to send his ball particularly high, but very short. "That's a good loft," he remarked to his caddie. "Aye," rejoined the boy, "it's a gude shot if the hole had been in heaven!"

Sky-pilot—"All are born in original sin." Porphyry—"You are the very man to convince people on that point."

"Well, cook, how did you like the sermon?" "Oh, it was lovely, ma'am, and the text quite professional like." "What was it?" "Split peas and suet," replied Mary. Her astonished mistress discovered by reference to the Bible that the quotation should have been, "Seek peace and pursue it."

Mary had a little calf that would no bigger grow, and when she put the bloomers on she was a holy show.

Two old darkies down South were heard to hold this conversation: "Brudder Barnes, dere's bad noos agoin' round here." "What's dat, brudder?" "Why, de Lord am dead." "Den how's de worl' agoin' round if dat's true?" "Well, anyhow, dere's bin a preacher around sayin' de Lord—dat's Jesus—am dead." "Oh, de Lord Jesus! Dat's no matter—dat's on'y one ob de boys. I fort yer meant de ole man."

An old lady dwelling on the skirts of Dartmoor was asked, "What is the meaning of this yer Jewbilee?" "Well, my dear," she answered, "'tis this way: if you've been married to a man fifty year, and the man's alive, 'tis a Goulden Weddin'; if a's dead, 'tis a Jewbilee."

Hicks—"The Bible says, 'Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.'" Wicks—"It's clear, then, that our maid reads the Bible."

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

THE ATHENÆUM HALL (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The Crescent and the Cross in Crete."
BRADLAUGH CLUB AND INSTITUTE (36 Newington Green-road, Ball's Pond): 7.15, W. Heaford, "Our Heretical Archbishop."
CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7, Dance and Entertainment.
EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Libra-road, Old Ford): 7, E. Williams, "Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn Law Rhymist."
NORTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY, Athenæum, Camden-road, N.W.: 7, Mrs. Gilliland Husband, "The Ethical Movement and Religion."
NORTH LONDON ETHICAL SUNDAY SCHOOL, Leighton Hall, Kentish Town: 11, Lesson by F. J. Gould. Children invited.
SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY, Surrey Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road: 11.15, Sunday-school; 7, Dr. Stanton Coit, "William Morris."
WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall): 11.15, Dr. Stanton Coit, "Voltaire."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30 and 3.30, R. P. Edwards will lecture.

COUNTRY.

BRISTOL BRANCH (St. James's Hall): C. Cohen—11, "Secularism: Its Aims and Objects"; 3, "The Case Against Christianity"; 7, "Is the Belief in God Reasonable?"
OATHAM SECULAR HALL (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 7, Percy Ward, "From Wesleyan Pulpit to Secularist Platform."
GLASGOW (Brunswick Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12, Discussion Class—D. White, "Voluntary Socialism"; 6.30, Neuron, "The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."
LEICESTER SECULAR HALL (Humberstone Gate): 6.30, A. B. Moss will lecture.
LEEDS (Crompton's Hotel, Briggate): 7, Discussion, introduced by Mr. Youngman.
LIVERPOOL (Oddfellows' Hall, St. Anne-street): O. Watts—11, "The Christian's New Bible"; 3, "Moses and the Jewish Religion"; 7, "Sin and Secular Salvation."
MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, J. Barlow, "Railway Nationalization the Next Great Reform."
PLYMOUTH (Democratic Club, Whimble-street): 7, A business meeting.
SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): E. Evans—3, "The Cray Fish: A Study in Biology"; 7, "Plants that Prey upon Animals, and Animals that Visit Plants"—with lantern illustrations. Tea at 5.
SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, King-street): 7, Business meeting; 7.30, W. Cook, "Branch Federation"; 8, Lantern Illustrations.

Lecturers' Engagements.

O. COHEN, 12 Merchant-street, Bow-road, London, E.—February 21, Bristol; 28, Plymouth. March 7, Cardiff; 15 to 21, Manchester; 28, Bradford.

A. B. MOSS, 44 Oredon-road, London, S.E.—February 21, Leicester; 28, Bradlaugh Club. March 7, New Brompton. April 4, m., Hyde Park; a., Harrow-road; e., Hammersmith.

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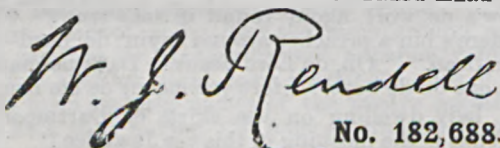
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