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PRICE TWOPENCE

IF I WERE GOD.

COLONEL INGERSOLL was once asked what change he would commence with in the universe if he had control of it. "Well," he replied, "I would make health catching instead of disease." It was a splendid answer, going to the very roots of physical evil, which in the long run determines moral evil. There is enough in it to furnish material for whole volumes of criticism on theology. But every publicist is not an Ingersoll, and it is not exactly surprising that Mr. Richard Le Gallienne makes rather a poor mess of his new excursion into the territory of religion. Under the title *If I were God*—suggested by a line in Martin Elginbrodde's epitaph—this young poet follows up his former volume called *The Religion of a Literary Man*—a title, by the way, which suggests the question, Why may we not have "The Religion of a Pork-butcher," or "The Religion of a Chimneysweep" ? since literary men are not a special variety of human nature, with a naturally peculiar way of envisaging the problems of existence. But this is merely a passing reflection. Mr. Le Gallienne's first religious essay was not without merit. On the whole it was very unsatisfactory, but it contained some good passages, especially on the question of immortality. His new volume, however, is poor and thin, even in comparison with its predecessor. It is more or less graceful trifling. The sentences are carefully filed, but the thought is a feeble echo of the commonplaces of Christian divinity.

Mr. Le Gallienne's book is mainly a conversation between a young man and a young woman. They met by appointment "on a still summit of the Alps one August afternoon," and they "talked of God." In such a romantic situation it is a pity they had not something better to talk about. The young man is one of the worshippers of beauty. He has suffered a great grief, and "the blow had driven him away from God, broken-hearted and blasphemous." The young woman has suffered too, but sorrow had only brought her nearer to God. What an interesting conjunction! But instead of mutual consolation, there is nothing but a theological debate.

As the young man sat there with the sweet, good young woman, the "old philosophy" came "very appealingly" to the door of his heart. Of course it did. Since "gospel light first dawned on Bullen's eyes," that sort of thing has been common enough. And equally of course the young woman gets the best of the discussion. The Roman philosopher could not argue with the master of forty legions, and how can a young man win in debate with a pretty young woman? He might stop her mouth with a kiss, if he had the right to do so; but short of that she is bound to have the last word, and the man is finally silenced. And if his arguments cause her "pain," what on earth can he do but draw them as mildly as possible, or let them go to the devil altogether?

Mr. Le Gallienne's young man met Mr. Le Gallienne's young woman apparently at one of Mr. Lunn's religious picnics in Switzerland. She and her companions all had a certain expression. On her face it was particularly bright. The young man called it, half playfully, "the *Early Christian* look." We are not told what it was precisely. Perhaps it was the look sometimes to be seen at prayer meetings, and as often in lunatic asylums. At any rate, these people believed in prayer:—

"Yes! there were people in the world who still went
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on praying, in spite of a literary criticism that had long since relegated God and His saints to the museums of mythology, in spite of a scientific criticism that had proved their cosmogony a child's dream of the world—unconquerable idealists whom no theories of the dust might dismay.

"Accustomed so long to bring all experience to the test of the senses and the everyday reason, it was strange to mark them, in all their speech, in their simplest acts, implying an invisible reality, a transcendental responsibility. Could it be possible that they had not heard!—not heard that this faith of theirs was all a dream, a beautiful dream faded and fled at the daybreak of science?

"O yes! they had heard all that—and they smiled to themselves sweetly, indulgently, a little sorrowfully, a little humorously, as they thought of it. You see—they *knew*. By some grace of God, of nature if you will—but still of God—it had been given them to see. It was but natural that those who had not seen should deny the Vision, but the Vision was none the less real for that."

This is really amusing in face of the recent prosecution of the Peculiar People. Not one of these Swiss-picnic religionists with "the Early Christian look" has raised a voice against the harrying of those sincere believers in prayer. They indulge in "Oh's" and "Ah's" and exclamatory sentences terminating with big notes of admiration, but they go no further, they stake nothing on their faith, and they have no sympathy with those who do.

"Intellectual criticism," says Mr. Le Gallienne, either personally or on behalf of his young man, "was clearly irrelevant, impertinent here." The young woman saw with other eyes than his, and then "it must be something worth seeing that made her face look like that."

The young man worships beauty, and the young woman goodness. Let them join, and the result should be perfection. Instead of that, they jaw and jaw and jaw, on that romantic Alpine summit. She says that the message of beauty is the goodness of God, and he replies that the world is ugly as well as beautiful. This affords Mr. Le Gallienne an opportunity for a bit of dainty writing, though rather fantastic and not too sincere.

"Behind the green mask of the spring, is there not a lonely monster gnashing his teeth, with beauty for his snare; and all this green so delightful to our eyes, what is it but the vivid green of a gigantic grave, the plague-pit into which humanity has been thrown century after century? The green world! Yes! the beautiful green grave of humanity, kept tidy by the sexton sun, and prettily set out with those tall daisies we call stars."

"You are sad," the young woman says gently; "your soul is sick." But instead of asking her to play the doctor he sneers at "the green world"—which is green indeed to afford a good market for Mr. Le Gallienne's philosophy. She replies that God knows the meaning of sorrow, and therefore he smiles, and his smile is beauty. "If we knew why graves grow green," she says, "we should know the beautiful meaning of death." What exquisite absurdity! Graves grow green because grass spreads over them, and it doesn't matter to the grass whether it is the grave of a man or a dog, a saint or a murderer. It is a way grass has—a way it had before man existed on this planet.

The rest of the conversation is really too absurd for comment. The young woman recommends prayer, the abnegation of reason, and trust in mystery; and the young man thinks if he were God he would create more such

women to make men believe in him. He returns to his own people, the lovers of beauty, but they were not satisfying.

"Sometimes he found himself wishing to be back once more among those gentle, humorous people, with the kind ways and the happy, lighted faces. Sometimes he craved to hear again those quaint childlike turns of phrase, to listen to their strange little stories of answered prayers, to heal his heart with their wise simplicity. Sometimes—he—almost—prayed."

This is a doddering conclusion. The very language is tipsy. The reeling words have to be fastened together with hyphens. Yet after all the young man only "almost" prayed. He didn't lose his reason altogether. Let us hope that by this time he is fully recovered.

Mr. Le Gallienne's book is dedicated to "Sister Lily." Is this one of Mr. Price Hughes's young women, one of the heroines of "The Atheist Shoemaker" story? If so, we understand Mr. Gallienne's aberration.

G. W. FOOTE.

THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL.

ON November 28 the Rev. J. P. Bannin preached at St. Peter's Italian Chapel on "What does Secularism Offer?" I did not hear Father Bannin, but am told his answer was: "The World, the Flesh, and the Devil." The familiar phrase runs glibly. Let us look at its items.

The World. Yea, verily, Secularism stands for the world, and means to make the best of it. Here we are, and this world is awhile our home; and it is real. A poor hut gives more shelter than a castle in the air. Better to dig for coal than seek to transmute the mountains of the moon into gold. We gain by concentration on the actual. Performance of the duty nearest hand is the best guarantee that other duties will be met as they arise. One world at a time. Here are sufficient motives for our aspirations, and scope for all our energies. Had the devotion spent on another world been given to this, we might lament less over our "vale of tears," which, with all its drawbacks, is improvable.

Is it so small a thing
To have enjoy'd the sun,
To have loved light in the spring,
To have loved, to have thought, to have done;
To have advanc'd true friends, and beat down battling foes;
That we must feign a bliss
Of doubtful future date,
And, while we dream on this,
Loss all our present state,
And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose?

Perhaps by "the world" you mean only the struggle to crush down others in a mad rage for pride or pelf. Surely that is not the best use of this world. To gather possessions and divide ourselves from our fellows, to think more of place and position than honor and self-respect, to prefer a hoard of gold to the smiles of children, is as paltry a worldliness as that of your Church, which, pointing above, has ever taken care to grasp the earth beneath; with its priests in gold-embroidered garments, and its worshippers in rags; with images bejewelled, and beggars grovelling before them; with wealth and art lavished on a god who needs them not, and the people kept hungry and ignorant. We look forward to a world where the vain worship of God shall have given place to the needed service of man; and already the billtops are gladdening in the dawn.

The Flesh. Yes, gravely, the flesh. 'Twere absurd to accept the world and deny that whereby life lives. We have bodies; let us respect them by facing the fact and putting them to the highest use.

Let us not always say:
"Spits of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground
Upon the whole."
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry: "All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more
Now, than flesh helps soul!"

Perchance you mean by "flesh" the despoiling and degradation of woman for the sensual gratification of man. Then, assuredly, I do not mean what you mean. Oh, fie! I, who am not a wee bit shocked to know that all of us are naked under our clothes, yet think foul scorn that any

son of woman dare deem that the best use of this world! We are the product, not simply of epidermal contact, but of the tender devotion of countless mothers, the fidelity and care of countless fathers. Passion without love, like your celibacy, leads to extinction; that is its sufficient condemnation. The truth is so simple and obvious it might pass unsaid, but that priests and hypocrites decry the body and stigmatize its most sacred function, compelling the retort that the history of sacerdotal celibacy shows how flesh can have its revenges. Those who put aside love may succumb to lust, the body stunted in its finer issues run to heavy jowl and paunch, and celibate ears itch for the confidences of the bride, or delight in pruriently probing the pure longings of the maiden on her knees at the confessional.

The Devil. No, priest, decidedly we have no Devil! A bogie to frighten women and children, and sanctimonious sinners lying on their death beds, belongs exclusively to your black business. The Secularist offers facts, not fictions. We love the world, reverence the flesh, and deride the Devil. Now, have you not heard that your scapegoat is defunct?

Il est mort! disent tous les moines
On n'achètera plus d'agnus.
Il est mort! disent les chanoines;
On ne paiera plus d'oremus.
Au conclave on se désespère:
Adieu puissance et coffre-fort!
Nous avons perdu notre père.
Le diable est mort, le diable est mort.

Dead did I say? Nay, ascended into heaven. You may read the record in *The Breviary of the Brave*. 'Tis as true and as inspired as your sacred books. Since 'tis likely to be on your *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, I will tell it:—

"Cloyed with honeyed anthems, Jesus was a-weary in heaven. Angels, tired of unheeded adulation, moulted and moped. A shriek from hell had pierced the skies. A saintly mother sobbed, 'My child, my child!' The heart of Jesus filled with tender yearning. In his eyes there shone a strange delight. He descended into hell. The asbestos gates flew wide at his approach, and all the little devils scuttled out. Penetrating the lowest depths, calling the foulest fiends, he spoke: 'Brothers, you have been cruelly used. Suffer no more. 'Tis I must bear your woe. The doors are open. Satan, go you first, and take my place.' The rebel stood silent, proud. Jesus said, 'I will bear eternal torment so that you be free.' Satan did not budge. Jesus wept. The angels above burst into tears, which, dropping, put out all the fires. Jesus said, 'Hell is no more. Brother, let us ascend.' And they arose together, the Savior and the saved."

"Blasphemy!" you cry in horror—you who doom all outside your pale to endless woe. Blasphemy! Must I remind you of the human bodies burnt under pretence of saving souls from hell; of the women—aye, and children—put to death because alleged to be in league with the Devil. A poor celibate can hardly be expected to recognise the essential impiety of abusing the world with all its promise and potency of life, of contemning our godly tabernacle, the body, with all its joy and anguish, or of—worse than all—putting out the eyes of the mind of little children with incredible creeds begotten of fear, instead of teaching them the natural foundations of human love.

J. M. WHEELER.

THEOLOGICAL DELUSIONS.

CHRISTIAN theology is based upon, and supported by, delusion. Its expounders seem to be impressed with the mistaken idea that they have the intellect of the world upon their side; and in the preaching and debating they are constantly taunting Secularists with being unable to produce the names of great men who have worked in the Freethought cause. Even if such an allegation were accurate, it would not prove that Christianity was true, or that Secularism was false. Names of great men of the past can be cited in favor of the most palpable errors that ever deluded the human mind. Take, for instance the belief in witchcraft, in the earth being flat, and in the existence of devils in the human organization as the cause of disease. For centuries these delusions were entertained by the greatest men both in and out of the Christian Church. They taught that these delusions were

sanctioned by the teachings of the Bible. But to-day no one but suitable candidates for a lunatic asylum would be found endorsing such gross errors. Besides, men may be great upon one subject, and at the same time no authority whatever upon others. An opinion is only valuable in proportion as it has been formed after careful and unbiassed study, and in so far as it can be supported by facts.

There is no subject upon which great men's opinions are of less value than that of Christian theology, for this reason: they have either been induced from the morning of their lives to give it merely a passive acceptance, or they have been too indifferent to investigate its claims. Moreover, it does not follow, because eminent persons have allowed themselves to be regarded as Christians, that they have therefore permitted the Christian faith to influence their actions in daily life. It should be remembered that, when the Church was in full power, it was almost impossible for an avowed disbeliever in the Christian faith to have his genius acknowledged either in philosophy or in science. At that period, if a man were known to be sceptical, he was denounced by the Church, and ignored by the "powers that be." Still, in spite of all ostracism that has been enforced by professed Christians, Sceptics have appeared and left an impress of true greatness upon the age in which they lived. This was evident to the observing mind of J. S. Mill, who, in his work *On Liberty*, wrote: "It is historically true that a large proportion of Infidels, in all ages, have been persons of distinguished integrity and honor.....Persons in greatest repute with the world, both by virtues and attainments, are well known, at least to their intimates, to be unbelievers.....It can do truth no good to blink the fact, known to all who have the most ordinary acquaintance with literary history, that a large portion of the noblest and most valuable moral teachings has been the work, not only of men who did not know, but of men who knew and rejected, the Christian faith." This is quite true, for some of the noblest men and women who have adorned the history of their times, and given to the world a record of the most useful deeds, have been unbelievers. Lucretius, Spinoza, Goethe, Humboldt, Dr. Priestley, Newton, Voltaire, Paine, Robert Owen, Lyell, Clifford, Darwin, Tyndall, Huxley, and Harriet Martineau, are prominent in the Pantheon of the world's reformers; and these were all unbelievers, from the orthodox standpoint.

Christians, who delude themselves by supposing that the use of the names of great men enhances the value of Christianity, should note the fact that it is exceedingly difficult to ascertain the exact attitude which many of those men assumed towards the Christian religion. It is unfortunate that, through the persecuting conduct of Christians, the possession of genius has been found not incompatible with an evasive manner concerning views upon religious questions. This avoidance of candor and outspokenness was felt to be necessary, inasmuch as a frank avowal of disbelief in Christianity would probably have entailed the infliction of penalties by the pious followers of "the meek and lowly Jesus." The same evil obtains at the present time to a large extent. Although many eminent men in the scientific, political, and educational world will not allow any theological teachings to interfere with their useful work; still, they are compelled in many instances to refrain from proclaiming their disbelief in the Christian faith, knowing that, if they avowed their opinions, their public services would be impaired. It has ever been so, more or less, since the inception of the Christian Church—a fact which is a standing disgrace to the Christian party.

True, in all ages there have been found a few men and women who were able to show the courage of their convictions, and thus defy the power of the Church and the malice of the priests. The names of Bruno, Vanini, Descartes, Spinoza, Voltaire, Paine, Kant, Volney, David Hume, and, more recently, Carlile, Watson, Southwell, Hetherington, Holyoake, and others, recall to our minds a muster-roll of brave Sceptics who labored outside of Christianity in vindication of the principles of personal right and mental freedom. These Freethought pioneers, be it remembered, emphasized the fact that disbelief in traditional faith has generally been followed by progressive results. Martin Luther disbelieved in the mysteries and mummeries of Roman Catholicism, and the result was what is called the Protestant Reformation. Copernicus and Galileo disbelieved in the Bible cosmogony, with its theory of the heavens and this scepticism gave birth to

correct views upon the great science of astronomy. Modern geologists reject the Bible story of creation, and the consequence is a more extensive faith in Nature's records. In philosophy the same thing has occurred. Thus the Christian delusion, that the Church since its advent has monopolized all the great men of the world, has no foundation in fact. On the contrary, unbelievers have been the promoters of improvement, while theologians have been persistent upholders of superstitious conservatism, which eschews advancement, frowns down new discoveries, and keeps its anchor firmly fixed in the errors of the past.

The theological delusion, that the belief in Theism is necessary to good character and to the performance of moral actions, prompts its believers to exclaim: "Where are the Atheists among the great men whose deeds are recorded in the pages of history?" Now, the truth is that nearly every man mentioned above was an Atheist to the Christian's God, and therefore their deity is not required to ensure intellectual greatness and ethical conduct. Besides, all scientists, as such, are Atheists, for, as the Bishop of Carlisle admitted, "science is Atheism; all physical science, properly so-called, is compelled by its very nature to take no account of the being of God." Then take Buddha and his more than 400,000,000 followers, all of whom were practical Atheists. *Chambers' Encyclopaedia* says: "Contrary to the opinion once confidently and generally held, that a nation of Atheists never existed, it is no longer to be disputed that the numerous Buddhist nations are essentially Atheist." And Max Müller, in his *Science of Religion*, writes: "As regards the denial of a Creator, or Atheism in the ordinary acceptation of the term, I do not think that any one passage from the books of the canon known to us can be quoted which contradicts it, or which in any way presupposes the belief in a personal God or a Creator" (p. 139). "Buddhism..... which, in spite of all its merits, culminated in Atheism and Nihilism" (*ibid.*, p. 133). Yet allied with this Atheism were greatness of intellect and sublimity of character which have never been surpassed. Max Müller also says that the religion of Buddha possesses "a vitality which has made its branches to overshadow the largest portion of the inhabited globe" (*ibid.*, p. 35). Again he remarks: "One hardly trusts one's eyes on seeing Catholic and Protestant missionaries vie with each other in their praises of the Buddha; and even the attention of those who are indifferent to all that concerns religion must be arrested for a moment, when they learn from statistical accounts that no religion, not even the Christian, has exercised so powerful an influence on the diminution of crime as the old, simple doctrine of the Ascetic of Kapilavastu" (*ibid.*, p. 132).

CHARLES WATTS.

INGERSOLL'S LATEST.

(Concluded from page 774.)

THEN I studied geology—not much, just a little—just enough to find in a general way the principal facts that had been discovered, and some of the conclusions that had been reached. I learned something of the action of fire, of water, of the formation of islands and continents, of the sedimentary and igneous rocks, of the coal measures, of the chalk cliffs, something about coral reefs, about the deposits made by rivers, the effect of volcanoes, of glaciers, and of the all-surrounding sea; just enough to know that the Laurentian rocks were millions of ages older than the grass beneath my feet; just enough to feel certain that this world had been pursuing its flight about the sun, wheeling in light and shade, for hundreds of millions of years; just enough to know that the "inspired" writer knew nothing of the history of the earth—nothing of the great forces of nature—of wind and wave and fire, forces that have destroyed and built, wrecked and wrought, through all the countless years.

And let me tell the ministers again that they should not waste their time in answering me. They should attack the geologists. They should deny the facts that have been discovered. They should launch their curses at the blaspheming seas, and dash their heads against the Infidel rocks.

Then I studied biology—not much—just enough to know something of animal forms, enough to know that life existed when the Laurentian rocks were made; just

enough to know that implements of stone, implements that had been formed by human hands, had been found mingled with the bones of extinct animals, bones that had been split with these implements, and that these animals had ceased to exist hundreds of thousands of years before the manufacture of Adam and Eve.

Then I felt sure that the "inspired" record was false—that many millions of people had been deceived, and that all I had been taught about the origin of worlds and men was utterly untrue. I felt that I knew that the Old Testament was the work of ignorant men—that it was a mingling of truth and mistake, of wisdom and foolishness, of cruelty and kindness, of philosophy and absurdity—that it contained some elevated thoughts, some poetry—a good deal of the solemn and commonplace—some hysterical, some tender, some wicked prayers, some insane predictions, some delusions, and some chaotic dreams.

I gave up the Old Testament on account of its mistakes, its absurdities, its ignorance, and its cruelty. I gave up the New because it vouched for the truth of the Old. I gave it up on account of its miracles, its contradictions; because Christ and his disciples believed in the existence of devils, talked and made bargains with them, expelled them from people and animals.

This, of itself, is enough. We know, if we know anything, that devils do not exist—that Christ never cast them out, and that, if he pretended to, he was either ignorant, dishonest, or insane. These stories about devils demonstrate the human, the ignorant origin of the New Testament. I gave up the New Testament because it rewards credulity and curses brave and honest men, and because it teaches the infinite horror of eternal pain.

Having spent my youth in reading books about religion—about the "new birth"—the disobedience of our first parents, the atonement, salvation by faith, the wickedness of pleasure, the degrading consequences of love, and the impossibility of getting to heaven by being honest and generous, and having become somewhat weary of the frayed and ravelled thoughts, you can imagine my surprise, my delight, when I read the poems of Robert Burns.

I was familiar with the writings of the devout and insincere, the pious and petrified, the pure and heartless. Here was a natural, honest man. I knew the works of those who regarded all nature as depraved, and looked upon love as the legacy and perpetual witness of original sin. Here was a man who plucked joy from the mire, made goddesses of peasant girls, and enthroned the honest man. One whose sympathy, with loving arms, embraced all forms of suffering life, who hated slavery of every kind, who was as natural as heaven's blue, with humor kindly as an autumn day, with wit as sharp as Ithuriel's spear, and scorn that blasted like the simoon's breath. A man who loved this world, this life, the things of every day, and placed above all else the thrilling ecstasies of human love.

I read and read again with rapture, tears, and smiles, feeling that a great heart was throbbing in the lines.

The religious, the lugubrious, the artificial, the spiritual poets were forgotten, or remained only as the fragments, the half-remembered horrors of monstrous and distorted dreams.

I had found at last a natural man, one who despised his country's cruel creed, and was brave and sensible enough to say: "All religions are auld wives' fables, but an honest man has nothing to fear, neither in this world nor the world to come."

I read Byron—read his *Cain*, in which, as in *Paradise Lost*, the devil seems to be the better god—read his beautiful, sublime, and bitter lines—read his *Prisoner of Chillon*—his best—a poem that filled my heart with tenderness, with pity, and with an eternal hatred of tyranny.

I read Shelley's *Queen Mab*, a poem filled with beauty, courage, thought, sympathy, tears, and scorn, in which a brave soul tears down the prison walls and floods the cells with light. I read his *Skylark*—a winged flame—passionate as blood, tender as tears, pure as light.

I read Keats, "whose name was writ in water"—read *St. Agnes Eve*, a story told with such an artless art that this poor common world is changed to fairy land—the *Grecian Urn*, that fills the soul with ever eager love, with all the rapture of imagined song—the *Nightingale*, a melody in which there is the memory of morn, a melody that dies away in dusk and tears, paining the senses with its perfectness.

And then I read Shakespeare, the plays, the sonnets, the poems—read all. I beheld a new heaven and a new earth. Shakespeare, who knew the brain and heart of man—the hopes and fears, the loves and hatreds, the vices and the virtues of the human race; whose imagination read the tear-blurred records, the blood-stained pages of all the past, and saw, falling athwart the outspread scroll, the light of hope and love. Shakespeare, who sounded every depth, while on the loftiest peak there fell the shadow of his wings.

I compared the Plays with the "inspired" books—"Romeo and Juliet" with the Song of Solomon, "Lear" with Job, and the Sonnets with the Psalms—and I found that Jehovah did not understand the art of speech. I compared Shakespeare's women—his perfect women—with the women of the Bible. I found that Jehovah was not a sculptor, not a painter, not an artist; that he lacked the power that changes clay to flesh—the art, the plastic touch, that moulds the perfect form—the breath that gives it free and joyous life—the genius that creates the faultless.

The sacred books of all the world are worthless dross and common stones compared with Shakespeare's glittering gold and gleaming gems.

Up to this time I had read nothing against our blessed religion except what I had found in Burns, Byron, and Shelley. By some accident I read Volney, who shows that all religions are, and have been, established in the same way—that all had their christs, their apostles, miracles, and sacred books—and then asks how it is possible to decide which is the true one. A question that is still waiting for an answer.

I read Gibbon, the greatest of historians, who marshalled his facts as skilfully as Cæsar did his legions, and I learned that Christianity is only a name for Paganism—for the old religion, shorn of its beauty—that some absurdities had been exchanged for others—that some gods had been killed, a vast multitude of devils created, and that hell had been enlarged.

And then I read the *Age of Reason* by Thomas Paine.

The *Age of Reason* filled the hearts of those who loved their enemies, with hatred, and the occupant of every orthodox pulpit became, and still is, a passionate malinger of Thomas Paine.

No one has answered—no one will answer—his argument against the dogma of inspiration—his objections to the Bible.

He did not rise above all the superstitions of his day. While he hated Jehovah, he praised the God of Nature, the creator and preserver of all. In this he was wrong, because, as Watson said in his Reply to Paine, the God of Nature is as heartless, as cruel, as the God of the Bible.

I read Voltaire—Voltaire, the greatest man of his century, and who did more for liberty of thought and speech than any other being, human or "divine." Voltaire, who tore the mask from hypocrisy, and found behind the painted smile the fangs of hate. Voltaire, who attacked the savagery of the law, the cruel decisions of venal courts, and rescued victims from the wheel and rack. Voltaire, who waged war against the tyranny of thrones, the greed and heartlessness of power. Voltaire, who filled the flesh of priests with the barbed and poisoned arrows of his wit, and made the pious jugglers, who cursed him in public, laugh at themselves in private. Voltaire, who sided with the oppressed, rescued the unfortunate, championed the obscure and weak, civilized judges, repealed laws, and abolished torture in his native land.

I read Zeno, the man who said, centuries before our Christ was born, that man could not own his fellow man.

I compared Zeno, Epicurus, and Socrates—three heathen wretches who had never heard of the Old Testament or the Ten Commandments—with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—three favorites of Jehovah—and I was depraved enough to think that the Pagans were superior to the Patriarchs, and to Jehovah himself.

My attention was turned to other religions, to the sacred books, the creeds and ceremonies of other lands—of India, Egypt, Assyria, Persia, of the dead and dying nations.

I concluded that all religions had the same foundation—a belief in the supernatural—a power above nature that man could influence by worship, by sacrifice and prayer.

I found that all religions rested on a mistaken conception of nature; that the religion of a people was the

science of that people—that is to say, their explanation of the world, of life and death, of origin and destiny.

I concluded that all religions had substantially the same origin, and that, in fact, there has never been but one religion in the world. The twigs and leaves may differ, but the trunk is the same.

The poor African that pours out his heart to his deity of stone is on an exact religious level with the robed priest who supplicates his God. The same mistake, the same superstition, bends the knees and shuts the eyes of both. Both ask for supernatural aid, and neither has the slightest thought of the absolute uniformity of nature.

Long before our Bible was known, other nations had their sacred books.

The dogmas of the Fall of Man, the Atonement, and Salvation by Faith are far older than our religion.

In our blessed Gospel—in our “divine scheme”—there is nothing new, nothing original. All old, all borrowed, pieced, and patched.

Then I concluded that all religions had been naturally produced, and that all were variations, modifications of one; then I felt that I knew that all were the work of man.

Then I asked myself the question, Is there a supernatural power—an arbitrary mind—an enthroned God—a supreme will that sways the tides and currents of the world—to which all causes bow?

I do not deny. I do not know.

Is there a God?

I do not know.

Is man immortal?

I do not know.

One thing I do know; and that is, that neither hope nor fear, belief nor denial, can change the fact. It is as it is, and it will be as it must be.

We wait and hope.

THE RELIGION OF SHAKESPEARE IN THE LIGHT OF HIS SONNETS.

“With Wallace, Raleigh, Sidney, Vane,
All to the axe's bloody stain.”

—JAMES THOMSON.

THERE have been many guesses, founded mainly on passages in his plays, concerning the speculative belief of our greatest poet. But such guesses generally turn out to be akin to the religion of the guesser. Atheist, Monotheist, Tritheist, Polytheist—each can quote proofs in favor of his views; for the simple reason that Atheist, Theist, and the rest are to be found among Shakespeare's numerous creations. No doubt Shakespeare's own belief is there among the many other beliefs; but who shall identify it beyond dispute? So, also, pessimist, optimist, and meliorist are there; but which of the three can establish an undisputed claim to Shakespeare's subscription to his creed?

Had we only his plays to turn to, it were perhaps futile to be assertive as to Shakespeare's speculative opinions. Luckily, we have a clearer source from which the Swan of Avon's views on the destiny of mankind can be drawn. His sonnets, up to number 126, are the most intimate self-expression we have of Shakespeare's. In them he unlocks the “inmost citadel of his soul,” and through them runs an intensity of emotion almost unparalleled in the wealth of its imagery, and a beauty of thought unsurpassed in our mother tongue. To whomsoever these 126 sonnets were addressed they breathe a passion so absorbing, so pure, and so “straight from the heart to the heart”; so supernal in its power, and so almost idolatrously tender, that their very height of beauty saddens and thrills, while it enchants us, in such a way as we are enchanted, saddened, and thrilled, with a “yearning half kin to pain,” by some masterpiece of Greek statuary, some master sonata by old Beethoven. Many questions have these sonnets raised; perhaps one they may lay—the question of their author's belief. Throughout the whole series, in which love and death and fame are the themes, we find no mention, direct or indirect, of any of the Christian Gods—Jehovah, Mary, Jesus, Satan, the Holy Ghost. No mention of Christian dogma of any kind! The only God mentioned is Eros. Heaven is the presence of his loved one; hell is absence from the loved one.

Sad sonnets there are, as where death is invoked in sonnet 66:—

Tir'd with all these, for restful death I cry,

and terminating with the lines:—

Tir'd with all these, from these would I begone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.]

Or as in the one beginning:—

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell.

Neither for himself, nor for his Love, does he suggest any immortality, other than that through children:—

And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence,
Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.

And again:—

Be not self-will'd, for thou art much too fair
To be Death's conquest, and make worms thine heir.

Or again:—

Then what could death do if thou should'st depart,
Leaving thee living in posterity?

It is true, one other qualified immortality—of fame—does our poet promise his Love, and promise it repeatedly; but never with a sadder loveliness than in this sonnet:—

Against my love shall be, as I am now,
With Time's injurious hand crush'd and o'erworn,
When hours have drain'd his blood, and fill'd his brow
With lines and wrinkles; when his youthful morn
Hath travell'd on to age's steepy night;
And all those beauties, whereof now he's king
Are vanishing or vanish'd out of sight,
Stealing away the treasure of his spring;
For such a time do I now fortify
Against confounding Age's cruel knife
That he shall never cut from memory
My sweet love's beauty, though my lover's life;
His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,
And they sha'l live, and he in them still green.

This is a mere notelet on a subject which has often recurred to me. Let those who care go to the sonnets, and see what they can make of Shakespeare's religion from the one intimate and unperplexed revelation of himself which he has made to us. Let them, then, consider that all around him Christians were burning each other, or joining to burn those others who differed in speculative belief from Christians; that any openly-expressed Atheism or Naturalism would have meant a fiery death (was not Shakespeare's poet-brother, Marlowe, threatened?) amid a howling crowd of the brutal ignorant and a gloating circle of official priestly murderers. Then let him consider how this greatest Englishman, who emptied his most inmost utterances of all supernaturalism, can be considered as other than our greatest Atheist—a man who would have grasped old Omar's hand in a g'orious fellowship, and have heartily endorsed the great Persian's line:—

God, Devil, Heaven, and Hell are all in thee.

D. M.

THE JEWISH FAITH.

THE language of the Jews was the same as that of the other inhabitants of Canaan, and it seems probable that their religion also was originally the same. This view appears more likely and more consistent with analogy than the supposition that the Jews, having set out with tribal monotheism, fell away from it to fetishism, idolatry, and to the worship of the powers of nature, with sensual rites. We are told, in fact (Joshua xxiv. 2), that the ancestors of Abraham served other gods. How, or by what influences, whether those of individual reformers like the prophets, or of general circumstance, the nation rose from fetishism and nature-worship to tribal monotheism of an eminently pure and exalted type, seems to be a historical mystery. Higher than tribal monotheism it did not rise; at least, it advanced no further than to the belief that its god was supreme in power as well as in character to all other gods, and thus Lord of the whole earth. He was still the God of Israel, and the Jews were still his chosen people. Judaism, therefore, never reached the religious elevation of some chosen spirits among the heathen world, such as Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus; although the Jewish belief was more intense than that of the philosophers, and extended not only to a select circle, but to a portion, at least, of the people.

—Professor Goldwin Smith.

All the long years of Christianity have come to this—All the preaching and the prayers and the psalm-singing of centuries have come to this—All the rapt outpourings of the soul to God, and hidden yearnings of ages, to this?—The Church is dead. Snow covers the ground. Snug in their firelit homes, with closed shutters, and surrounded by every luxury, the wealthy, the pious, and the respectable sit—And without the people are dying of cold and starvation.—E. Carpenter, “Towards Democracy.”

ACID DROPS.

THE London City Mission is making a "Special Appeal" for funds. "There never was a greater need for the work, nor has it ever been more signally owned and blessed by God," but the subscriptions are falling off. In 1891 the number of missionaries at work was 504; it is now only 470. During the past five years the expenditure has exceeded the income by more than £26,000. The deficiency has been met by the selling out of capital. Meanwhile the metropolis is growing, and the Committee sadly confess that "at least three millions of its inhabitants are reckoned never to enter a place of worship."

The Archbishop of Capetown believes there is no more promising field of mission work in the world than is to be found at the present time in Mashonaland. He evidently forgot England.

In the *Daily News* of one day last week there actually appeared the following advertisement: "Wanted, an earnest Christian Evangelical governess. Must be out and out for the Master, and thoroughly efficient," etc. We would have thought she ought to be "out and out for the mistress," or for the children; but perhaps the master (naughty man!) put in the advertisement unbeknown to the missus!

Perhaps after all we should be thankful and not disgusted at the absurd interfering attitude towards the re-marriage of divorced persons that clergymen are adopting. It will have a very beneficial result—many people will be obliged to be married at registry offices, and thus the fashion may spread, and the absurd barbaric fuss of a church ceremony be gradually given up.

Sada Bailey Fowler, a daughter, we believe, of Fowler the phrenologist, says in *Lucifer* that "the philosophies and religions of the world have been based on heisms." When woman comes to the front a masculine god will be dispensed with.

Dr. Horton thinks that the decay of the masculine element in religion, which is so marked in Protestantism, is partly due to "the loss of the prophethood in the Christian Church." We wonder what Dr. Horton would say if a prophethood arose in his church at Hampstead.

"England would be a beautiful country," says Herbert Casson, "if it were not for the English. It would be a prosperous place if it were not for business. It would be a noble country if it were not for the nobility; and a moral country were it not for the churches."

Now that the wretched "infidel-slayer," Walton Powell, is doing his fifteen months' imprisonment for "conspiring to procure" young girls for immoral purposes, we take the opportunity of stating that we were frequently asked, and often by Christians, to expose this fellow's abominable conduct, but we always replied that it was *their* business to expose him, and not ours, as it was their side that he was advocating—and disgracing. Fortunately the scoundrel is now caught, and it is scarcely credible that he will ever again be able to impose upon Christian credulity, at least in this part of the world.

It was the dirty imagination of this fellow Powell which invented that unspeakably filthy libel on the Freethought party in London. He started the libel with characteristic effrontery, and ran away from defending it with characteristic cowardice—for the fellow was a mere bully, who always showed the white feather when real danger was approaching. Another anti-infidel crusader, however, protested that the libel should be proved up to the hilt, but he also backed-down when the case came before a judge and jury, and the poor publisher was left to bear the brunt of the battle. This particular anti-infidel crusader, by the way, is almost as reckless and foul-mouthed as Powell himself.

Powell's recklessness was simply amazing. No doubt he felt that the average Christian Evidence audience had a big swallow and a powerful digestion. At Ryhope, where he spent some time and bled several well-to-do Christians, he solemnly assured the people that Mr. Foote was the author of a certain sociological work, which is half the stock-in-trade of anti-infidels, and which was actually published when Mr. Foote had only recently left his cradle. He also assured the people that Mr. Foote was living with another man's wife, besides other slanderous delicacies which will hardly bear repeating. Further, he openly advised them, if Mr. Foote came to Ryhope, to treat him with physical violence. Mr. Foote did go to Ryhope and faced the mob excited by this blackguard. They tried to howl him down,

and couldn't. Then they turned the gas out and put the hall in darkness. A lot of them waited outside, but as Mr. Foote walked straight at them, they showed their cowardice by parting like the Red Sea, and when they came together again "the infidel" was out of their reach in a hospitable miner's cottage.

We repeatedly warned the Freethought party against Powell. We advised them to let him severely alone, to refrain from attending his meetings, and to let him shout himself hoarse. This was because we knew his character. Many took our advice; but there are always some who are above advice (or below it), and they helped to swell the fellow's meetings and bring grist to his mill. When he first spoke in any place his audience was a handful, but as unwary Freethinkers opposed him he gradually got a crowd.

Mr. Justice Hawkins presided at Powell's trial at Bristol. His lordship called it "a filthy, wretched case," and the evidence was so clear that the jury only deliberated for a few moments.

So much for one "infidel-slayer." When he comes out of prison he will not be the only one who has "done time." It is to the credit of the Christian Evidence Society, of which Mr. Engström is secretary, that it never had any connection with these scamps; at least there was no connection that we knew of, and it is just as well to be fair, and if possible considerate, towards our opponents. But we are bound to say, on the other hand, that those whom the Christian Evidence Society feels bound to disown are precisely those who are most admired by the Christian mob up and down the country.

In reply to the assertions of the Victoria Scripture League, the electorates have returned fifty-one members dead against Bible-reading in schools, twenty-four nominally in favor (with about eight separate and irreconcilable "views" as to brand and method), and twenty who have not declared either way. Thus, so far as State authority goes, the youth of Victoria are safe from contamination by Onan, Lot, David, Mrs. Potiphar, and Co.—*Bulletin*.

The Rev. Charles Parnell—no relation to the Parnell—died at Brighton, leaving a fortune of over £100,000, the bulk of which will be devoted to the service of the High Church. This is the way that corporation thrives.

Bishop Walsham How, of Wakefield, left £135,000; Bishop Fraser, of Manchester, £85,000; Wordsworth, of Lincoln, £86,000; Jackson, of London, £72,000; Jackson, of Chester, £65,000; Baring, of Durham, £120,000; Sumner, of Winchester, £80,000; Auckland, of Bath and Wells, £120,000. For of such is the kingdom of heaven!

The Evangelical Alliance has again issued its invitation for a Week of Universal Prayer at the commencement of the year. Telephonic communication is to be established direct with the celestial court, and a shower of blessings is expected to follow.

Mr. Rouse sends a story to the *Literary World* anent the late Professor Robertson Smith in connection with Grant Allen's *Idea of God*. Smith is alleged to have said: "I can trace the development of religious thought among the Hebrews clearly enough, all except one thing. Where they got their idea of 'One God' from I cannot make out, unless it was really some kind of revelation." Did it need a revelation to tell that every family tribe and nation in a state of warfare had one chief?

Germany, where every Christian man must be a soldier and every soldier a Christian man, is vastly enlarging its navy to carry out schemes of *Weltpolitik*. This is the sort of Christian example it offers to the world, and of course the other Christian nations will speedily follow suit.

Emperor William's brother, who is perhaps as pious as the boss himself, has gone off in command of the German squadron in Chinese waters, and the Emperor is quite pathetic over the fact that he has taken leave of his wife and mother. It does not seem to have occurred to Emperor William that other sailors have done the same thing. In imperialist philosophy there appears to be something peculiarly poignant in the adieu and tears of royalties.

The world is moving. Here are the American Baptists, in Congress assembled at Chicago, giving up the necessity of baptism. A leading speaker parodied Paul and said: "To the unimmersed man who keeps the law of life unimmersion is reckoned immersion." So there's a chance of heaven yet without a prior sprinkling or ducking. But what will become of the holy Christian sacraments if such ideas prevail?

The Church is moving a little. Bishop Jayne, of Chester

allows Sunday tennis and golf, provided church is not missed, and here is the Bishop of London actually acknowledging that ignorance is not the best protection of purity, and admitting that "among all Christian denominations there is a conspiracy of silence," but they had now reached a time when silence was no longer possible. The Bishop, too, pointed to Jewish children as sent into the world protected by adequate knowledge, and said he: "The Jews led the purest lives."

The National Church Union represents the Broad Church party in the Established Presbyterian Church of Scotland. At its recent Conference in Glasgow a resolution was passed: "That this meeting resolves to bring the question of the modification of the terms of subscription required for ministers before the General Assembly, and remits to a committee to draw up the terms of an overture to the Assembly that might be submitted to the Presbyteries." Election, Reprobation, and Blazes are beginning to weigh heavy on the minds of the once Calvinistic Scotch. We know one well-paid Established Kirk minister who said the Westminster Confession could be interpreted as meaning anything you like. But the trouble is that the congregations begin to speak about the ministers swearing belief in creeds which they palpably neither preach nor believe.

Christianity, which thrives in contact with savage idolaters, generally by exterminating them, scarcely holds its own against the civilized faiths like Buddhism, Confucianism, Parseeism, Islam, or Judaism. In London the Moslems are bent on having a mosque and a propaganda of their own. The *Echo*, noticing a recent Mohammedan meeting, remarks: "It is well to remember that while Roman Catholicism has withered and is withering in Italy, the cradle and home of the Papacy; in France, which for centuries boasted to be 'the chief daughter of the Church,' and in Spain, now hopelessly declining, though for centuries the chief bulwark of the Church; though the Roman Church is losing ground in these and other nations in Christendom, the Mohammedan religion shows no signs of decay, and is as strong and as active as it has been for centuries."

The *Clarion* of December 4 has a stirring article on the missionary business. It says: "Here in our own country, while we are sending armies of missionaries to lie to the blacks, here in our midst we have slavery and murder and immorality, and we have them legalized and accepted by the Church, the State, and the better classes."

Our Catholic friends are much disturbed that the Freemasons should have had a field day at St. Paul on the bicentenary of its opening. The *Weekly Register* has an article on the subject. It sneers: "Very various and curious would have been the replies made to any Catechism questions addressed to that motley congregation of Masons." At least the Masons know the master-word, which the Church has forgotten—Fraternity.

The publication of Mr. Wilfred Ward's bulky *Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman*, in which he gives a very different version of many affairs to that in Mr. Purcell's *Life of Cardinal Manning*, reminds us that we have heard that the latter book has been bought up wholesale by Catholics in order to be destroyed. Those with copies should carefully preserve them. Mr. Ward's book is described in the *Times* as a tissue of polemics and apologetics.

Despite Vaughan's bounce, it looks as if Catholicism was stationary. Out of every 1,000 marriages in England and Wales, forty-one are Roman Catholic, the same number as ten years ago. The number has been as high as fifty-one in 1853, while so lately as 1881 and 1882 it was forty-five; for the last ten years it ranges between a maximum of forty-three and a minimum of forty—a very narrow limit, which seems to indicate that Roman Catholicism, if it holds its own, does not do anything more.

The Pope, it is said, is anxious not to die before he has canonized Joan of Arc, and the proceedings are being hurried with, after four hundred years' delay. The priests in one age gave her over to be burnt as a witch whom another is ready to acclaim a saint. But it is France, and not the Papacy, that can rightfully claim the Maid of Orleans.

At a Conference of the Evangelical Free Churches of Durham, Northumberland, and Cleveland, held at Stockton, the education question was largely discussed. The feeling was expressed that recent legislation had dished the Non-conformists in favor of the Church, and the Rev. J. H. Clarke, M.A., indicated a solution of the problem. He said the religious training of the children of those who were in their churches laid in their hands, but they could not expect the State to do that work for them, and they must face the question in a far broader way than they had done heretofore,

and must do their utmost to hasten the day when they would have the State doing its own work in its own way, and the Church doing its work. This, if it means anything, means secular education.

The Rev. R. T. Talbot, vicar of St. Thomas's, Sunderland, said that some years ago, when going through Consett Iron-works with some friends, they were shown the puddling furnace, so fierce, hot, and blinding that they could scarcely look at it. "That, sir," said a puddler, "is hotter than the place you preach about." The man of God repudiated having a hell half as hot.

The well-advertised new *Sunday Special* has a decided Semitic flavor. Three columns are given to a letter of Mme. Dreyfus, and over six columns to money matters. Mr. Louis Zangwill has a well-written column and a-half on "The Beth Book," and the suppressed cartoon in the *Kladderadatsch* satirizing the Emperor William saying, "He who is not a good Christian cannot be a good soldier," is reproduced. Evidently the *Sunday Special* is not one of the new papers to be run in the interest of the German Emperor, of which we have heard so much and seen so little.

Mr. Bernays, in his "Humors of Clerical Life" in the *Cornhill*, tells of a vicar who, soon after his arrival in the parish, placed a new cloth upon the altar, upon the centre of which was embroidered a large cross. Such strong opposition was raised to this Pagan Christian symbol that the vicar gave way before the storm and had the initials I H S substituted. A parishioner who was not at all in favor of the change, on being asked the meaning of the letters, replied: "Why, do't you know what it means? It means, 'I Hope you're Satisfied.'"

Macmillan notes a number of amusing press errors which occasionally arise. Thus, in a newspaper, the late Sir Robert Peel was described as "with a party of fiends shooting peasants in Ireland." Nor is this the only occasion on which the "r" in the word "friends" has accidentally dropped out with some injury to the sense. It is not many years since the readers of an obituary notice were startled to find appended to it the note, "Fiends will please accept this intimation."

Some errors are the result of faulty construction, as in the case of the reverend gentleman discoursing of the evils of intemperance, who said: "It was only last Sunday that a young girl fell from one of the benches of this church, while I was preaching in a beastly state of intoxication." Others arise from mixes. Thus an Irish journal's description of the labors of Roman Catholic missionaries in Central Africa ended by saying: "They are accustomed to begin their work by buying heathen children and educating them. The easiest and best way to prepare them is to first wipe them with a clean towel, then place them in dripping pans and bake them until they are tender. After which cut them in slices and cook for several hours."

A writer, reviewing a "South America" book, wrote: "The countless attractions of virgin forests are considerably discounted when they are found to be swarming with a thousand varieties of insects and animals." The compositor set up "priests" for "forests."

In our own experience we have come across a few blasphemous and many amusing misprints. An old sermon was printed "Sins of the Creator." It should have been "Creature." A restaurant once put on its bill "Fried God," and in the *Ironclad Age* we once read that Zoroaster was an obscene (obscure) writer.

A respected D.D. wrote an account of his holiday tour to an Edinburgh newspaper. During part of his journey he told that he had the company of "a very agreeable person, a lighthouse keeper." He was horrified to find his companion printed down as "a light housekeeper."

A Presbyterian church in the north of Scotland was reopened after having been gutted out and reseated. The local newspaper is reported to have said that the infernal (internal) arrangements of the church were now all that could be desired by any Christian congregation.

A writer in *Science Siftings* repeats the assertion of "A Bostonian Professor of Theology," that the great fish that swallowed Jonah was "one of the larger sea-dogs." True, Jesus is reported as calling it a whale (Matthew xii. 40); but, then, Jesus did not speak Greek, and it is uncertain what word he did use or what sea-monster he meant. Perhaps he intended to convey that it was the *Canis Carcharias* which accommodated the prophet with temporary lodgings.

The writer says: "Blumenbach, the eminent German

zoologist, in his *Manual of Natural History*, is authority for the statement that sea-dogs have been taken weighing five tons, and that a horse has been found whole in the stomach of a sea-dog." After this, who can have any doubts as to the literal accuracy of the Bible story?

Dr. Wilkinson, the Catholic Bishop of Newcastle, who is an Anglican convert, introduced "God Save the Queen" into the musical accompaniment of a religious procession in St. Mary's Cathedral, Newcastle. This, it appears, is condemned by old Roman Catholics as a covert attempt to introduce into their Church the Anglican doctrine of the Royal Supremacy. It is declared to be a case of a bishop, who is a convert from Anglicanism, still clinging to one of the cardinal tenets of the heresy that he has formally abjured.

We see that at the trial at Gratz, on December 6, of Dr. Bruno Wille, a well-known Berlin Freethinker, charged with having, at public meetings in Vienna and Gratz, attacked the Christian and Jewish religions, an attempt was made to exclude the public from the court, which was overturned by the counsel for the defence. We shall probably have to call our readers' attention further to this case in our next number.

Captain Wm. Hooper, a United Methodist Free Church local preacher, closed the chapel service at Meragessey, Cornwall, on Sunday with a prayer and benediction. He then fell forward and died in chapel. Now, the simple Cornish people are inquiring if it is "of the Lord."

Anthony Comstock's prosecution of Meyer Chinsky for putting forward the Hebrew version of *The Jewish Life of Christ* did not turn out exactly as the agent of the Vice Society desired. One version of the passage about Miriam and Pandera, made by Comstock's agent, made it highly indecent. Another translation was offered by the defence which was less objectionable than the first chapter of Matthew. The judge ordered an impartial translation to be made, and peremptorily ordered Anthony of the Vice Society to "sit down."

Catholics and Orangemen are loving each other like true Christians at Wigan. Mr. David Hyslopp, Church Association lecturer, had to be escorted from the market-place by the whole available police. One of the instruments an opponent hit him with was an iron bar, warranted to send any good Christian to heaven, hell, or purgatory, if it only lighted on the proper spot. Very amusing, is it not? Only, at the same time, it is so melancholy.

Miss X., the alleged clairvoyante friend of W. T. Stead, writes in the final number of *Borderland*: "I have never been to a professional seance that was not dull or vulgar, or both. I have seen tricks which one would not have supposed could deceive a schoolboy. I have never seen or heard any so-called phenomena which I thought convincing of anything but an impudent faith in the weakness of human nature, and a melancholy experience of its follies: I do not particularize further than by saying I have made it my business to interview most of the prominent professional mediums accessible to me."

The Rev. Leonard Klamtorowski, rector of Chedburgh, Suffolk, did not gain much by suing Mr. W. Ambrose Cooke, the chairman of the Parish Council, for libel. It was all over ten shillings which the man of God distributed to the poor, but which Mr. Cooke properly contended should have gone through the hands of the trustees. The clergyman sued for libel, and the jury gave him a farthing damages. As the defendant had paid £5 into court, judgment was entered in his favor for £4 19s. 11½d. with costs.

At the St. Pancras coroner's court a juryman drew attention to the fact that in two of the cases infants had died from pneumonia after being taken to church to be christened. He thought that in the case of very young children mothers ought to be cautioned against taking their infants out into the cold for such a purpose. Foolish friends sometimes think that cold water sprinkling is good for the soul, when it certainly is not good for the body.

William Booth's Farm Colony at Essex suffered much from the recent gale and tidal wave. A quarter of a mile of railway embankment, running from a wharf on the river side to the extensive brick fields of the Colony, was swept away. Horses and other live stock were drowned, and hundreds of pounds' worth of movable plant destroyed. Hundreds of acres of crops were washed out, and the sea wall was broken, besides serious damage being done to buildings.

Christian Life, known among advanced Unitarians as "Christian Strife," begins a recent leader by saying: "The immediate and startling collapse of the Secularist move-

ment throughout England, which followed immediately upon the death of the late Mr. Bradlaugh, and shows no prospect of being reversed, is a significant sign of the times." This is on page 583. On the opposite page is a photograph, entitled "Our Closed Chapels—Prescot." The cream of the joke, however, is that the Rev. Robert Spears, the editor of "Christian Strife," said exactly the same kind of thing about the Secularist movement when Charles Bradlaugh was alive.

The *Sydney Bulletin* thinks it a pity the cinematographe was not invented earlier, in order that we might have had cinematographic views of the Creation; or, for that matter, of the chaos which was before the Creation.

If those who have a poetical picture of Jesus and his disciples in mind could get their real photographs, they might be astounded.

The *Christian Herald* recently had a yarn of an Infidel lady who yet constantly attended church. She was taken ill, but recovered sufficiently to go and hear an Infidel lecture. This so affected her that she went home and died, calling out "Heaven! Hell!" A correspondent wrote to the *C. H.* asking for names, etc. Although he enclosed a stamp, no reply was given.

The winter number of the *Methodist Recorder* has a tale of an old Yorkshire Methodist who "often in Huddersfield and elsewhere debated with Atheists. On one occasion the Infidel was so beaten and confounded that he could do nothing but 'burst into a fit of crying.'" This may be taken as conclusive proof that Christ sent devils into pigs.

An odd story about Prince Bernadotte of Sweden and his wife (who was Miss Ebba Munck) has reached the *Daily Chronicle* from Stockholm. They are said to contemplate devoting their lives to missionary work in Africa. I advise them to stay nearer home, and be really useful.—*African Critic*.

Professor Mahaffy was once travelling in England, and in the same compartment with him was a melancholy gentleman dressed in black, who inquired of the doctor if his soul was saved. "Yes," was the answer; "but it was a very narrow squeak, and I don't like talking about it."

The *Missionary Review* says: "An honest man pays his debts. Jesus worked a miracle to pay his taxes!" We have been told time out of mind that "Jesus paid it all," though, as a matter of fact, not one cent of a man's debts has ever been known to be paid by Jesus. Considering, however, what an easy thing it was to create enough money to pay his own taxes, one would think that, if Jesus really wished us to believe in his existence, he would perform just one little miracle to-day to pay our taxes, even if our debts are too big to be settled in this way.—*Secular Thought*.

Don Carlos, it seems, is ready to find his opportunity in his country's disaster, and Mr. Cranstoun Metcalfe and the Marquis de Ruvigny write on him as the coming savior of Spain in the current *Fortnightly*. That he has the support of "the clerical party" will be no commendation to enlightened Europe.

Not only is the old gospel worn out and inoperative, but the old gospel methods are equally out of date. They used to preach "Christ and him crucified"; Hell-fire; the Judgment Day; the blazing earth and sea and sky; the resurrection of the dead; the wailing of the swarms and shoals of the damned, and the howling of the devils; the anti-phonetic shouts and triumphant mockery of the saints, etc. Now the clergy have dropped all this heavenly apparatus, and go in for music, theatricals, sensational stuff of the music-hall types, "Christian Endeavor" and "Pleasant Sunday Afternoons," with now and then a Judge or a travelling Labor Leader to give them a speech, *à la mode*. It will not be long ere they ask some Atheist to give them a helping hand, pleading as an excuse that "all things are the Lord's." There is nothing—short of honest candor—the clergy will not resort to in order to keep their trade going; and I do not feel at all sure that they would not even employ truth and candor both for the same ends, if they ever found one or the other necessary. We are all things to all men, ladies and gentlemen, is their constant attitude, if not their cry. And seeing that all their tricks and dodges are for God's glory *alias* their own advantage, we may be sure they will never be called to account for it. As they have no conscience, except their purse, and nothing to fear in a fabled future state, they are not likely to drop their nefarious trade so long as the gulls will support them.—*Liberator*.

There is an old saying, that "the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." Since a thing has grown so plain that even fools can understand it, it must be plain indeed.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, December 12, Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, at 7.30, subject, "The Evolution of the Idea of God." January 2, Birmingham; 9, Manchester.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS.—December 12, Camberwell Hall, London. January 23 and 30, 1898, Birmingham; 25 and 26, debate at Birmingham. April 29, Glasgow.—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.

ABRACADABRA thinks Dr. Hardwicke a trifle too sharp. In writing that the Holy Ghost was "misnamed the spirit of truth" Abracadabra was referring not to the words of the text, but to the effect on those who are said to have been inflated by the ghost, judging, of course, by the samples of this inspiration which we possess—the New Testament, and more particularly the Gospel narratives.

NORTH LONDON FREETHINKER.—The accident at Wood Green arose through Mr. Foote not having been personally apprised of the date and subject of his lecture. Mr. Moss kindly took his place on that occasion. Mr. Foote has given the Wood Green Branch another date, Thursday, January 13, when he will lecture on "Man's Origin and Destiny."

H. G. BARNES.—The financial result of the South Wales lectures will enable you to judge of the colossal fortune which certain fools and rogues represent Mr. Foote to be making by Free-thought propaganda. It is gratifying to learn that his lectures have "created a great stir amongst the working classes at Porth and Pontypridd," and that the "saints" are all anxious for another visit.

A. E. E.—There is some justice in your criticism, but the matter is hardly worth recurring to after such an interval. Thanks for the copy of your leaflet on Christian Foreign Missions. It is lively reading, and should do good locally.

E. PARKER.—We agree with you that it is time the West Ham Secularists tried to reorganize themselves. Those who are willing to take part in forming a new Branch of the N. S. S. there should send their names and addresses to Miss Vance, N. S. S. Office, 376-7 Strand, W.C. The old Branch was broken up a few years ago by a few cantankerous malcontents. They were going to do wonders apart from the N. S. S., but it all ended in smoke—the usual fate of secessions.

JOSEPH MAY.—Buddhism, as originally taught by its founder, is rather a philosophy than a religion. Buddha's teaching was ethical. He turned away from the old doctrines and disputes about gods and supernaturalism.

J. ROTHWELL.—Why not try to form an active N. S. S. Branch at Oldham? That is the only thing we are interested in.

J. STICKWELL.—The paper you refer to is beneath notice.

THE HOOPER FUND.—T. Bellamy acknowledges:—Collected at Mr. Cohen's Birmingham lectures, 15s. 6d.; Manchester Branch, £1.

W. J. MACFARLANE.—Thanks for the Ruskin letter. It may be useful some day. Glad to hear you have tired out the fanatic who removed the *Freethinker* from the Club reading-room, and that the paper is now eagerly sought for by the readers.

N. S. S. TREASURER'S SCHEME.—Miss Vance acknowledges:—J. Unsworth, 5s. (p).

T. C. BLANCHARD.—Secular lectures ought not to be delivered in public-houses.

We have received another letter ostensibly from Dr. John Clifford, but as it is not in his handwriting we have written to ask whether it is really his. If it be so, it will appear in our next issue.

THOMAS MACLEISH.—Glad to hear you have obtained another situation, though sorry you have to come South for it, thus leaving your work for the cause in Glasgow, where your services will be missed. We shall always be glad to hear from you.

R. MELLOR.—Order for books or pamphlets should not be sent to Mr. Foote, but to Mr. Forder. Violation of this rule only causes trouble and delay. Mr. Foote was absent from London, and could not transfer your order to Mr. Forder until his return.

J. KEAST.—Thanks, though the report had already reached us through another channel.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Torch of Reason—De Dageraad—Isle of Man Times—Glasgow Herald—Birmingham Mercury—Two Worlds—Lucifer—Humanity—Free Society—Truthseeker—Chat—Mind—Progressive Thinker—Sydney Bulletin—Crescent—Liberator—New York Public Opinion—Zoophilist—People's Newspaper—Echo.

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 is due.

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

LECTURE NOTICES must reach 23 Stonecutter-street by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

The *Freethinker* will be forwarded, direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

ORDERS for literature should be sent to Mr. R. Forder, 23 Stonecutter-street, E.C.

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 23 Stonecutter-street, London, E.C.

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

SUGAR PLUMS.

MR. FOOTE lectured on Sunday evening at the Athenæum Hall on "Another Converted Atheist." It was a criticism of Alice Dale's new novel entitled *Marcus Warwick, Atheist*, which we shall have something to say about in the *Freethinker* shortly. Mr. Percy Ward occupied the chair, and opposition to the lecturer was offered by two courteous speakers, one a Theist and the other a Christian.

This evening (Dec. 12) Mr. Foote lectures again at the Athenæum Hall on Mr. Grant Allen's important new book on *The Evolution of the Idea of God*. No doubt there will be a large attendance.

Mr. Charles Watts had capital audiences in Manchester last Sunday, where he lectured three times. In the morning the gathering was good, in the afternoon much better, and in the evening the hall was filled. Friends were present from Bolton, Oldham, Hyde, and Accrington. Some questions were asked after each lecture, but no debate worth mentioning took place. It was pleasing to see so many ladies at all the lectures.

Mr. Watts speaks in the highest terms of the Manchester Branch of the N. S. S. The members are carrying on a vigorous propaganda, and the Branch appears to be in a better condition than ever it was. The hall has been renovated with great taste at the cost of over a hundred pounds. Its present condition is a credit to all concerned.

This Sunday evening, December 12, Mr. Watts lectures in the Secular Hall, Camberwell, upon his new subject "Christian Tactics Exposed."

The Roman Catholic, Dr. St. George Mivart, contributes some memories of Professor Huxley to the *Nineteenth Century*. He remarks: "He hated injustice and loathed insincerity." Can this be why he fell out with Dr. Mivart?

New Zealand, under Sir Robert Stout, and with several Freethinking members, among them friend Collins, has been the first of the Colonies to pass an Act for Old-Age Pensions.

From the last number of the New York *Truthseeker* to hand we see that the Freethought Congress at New York has passed off successfully. It was held in Hardman Hall. The ladies laid their hands upon the place and trimmed it up tastefully. National colors predominated on the stage in honor of the cosmopolitan character of Freethought. In the centre was a large photograph of Samuel P. Putnam, draped with the Stars and Stripes. The Secretary's report referred to the visit of Messrs. Foote and Watts from England as "one of the grandest events in the history of Freethought." "We have added," Secretary Reichwald went on, "thousands of new members to our list." Letters were read from Mr. Foote and Mr. Watts, and one from Colonel Ingersoll, who said: "Of course my sympathies are with the Secularists. Secularism is the only true religion. It is for this world, and embraces everything that touches the welfare of human beings." All the old officers were re-elected, and the new President to succeed Putnam is John E. Rensburg, of Atchison, Kansas, of whom an excellent portrait is given in the *Truthseeker*. We did not have the pleasure of meeting Mr. Rensburg last year, but we know from his writings that he is a man of ability, and we wish him all success in his new office.

Friends of education may rejoice at the inauguration of a Moral Instruction League. Despite the wet weather, a large, earnest, representative, and unanimous meeting was held in St. Martin's Town Hall on December 7. Mr. Allanson Picton, one of the three members of the first London School Board who voted against Bible reading, presided. Miss Zona Vallance detailed the steps taken in the movement. The chairman, Mr. Stanton Coit, the Rev. J. Page Hopps, Mrs. C. Swann, Mr. G. W. Foote, Mr. Paul Campbell, Mr. Standing, and Mrs. Adams, the new member for Greenwich, each spoke from their respective points of view. Mr. Foote said that as a Secularist he rejoiced at the prospect of a citizen's party as distinct from a church party or a chapel party, and engaged that, if true to their principles, the League should have the support of Secularists. We shall write further on the matter next week.

Some of our older readers will doubtless remember the verses that used to be contributed to the *Freethinker* years ago by "Ex-Ritualist." We have just heard from this gentleman again. He is recovering from a severe illness, during which he was face to face with death. He had no desire whatever for the "consolations" of religion, and no sort of apprehension as to the future. "This visitation," he writes, "has made me think seriously, and I don't think I can do better than enter the pale of the one true church"—to wit, the National Secular Society. He asks for a proposal form of membership, and promises twelve shillings annually to the new Treasurer's Scheme. He also sends some verses, which will appear in our next issue.

Mr. J. W. Cox is following up Mr. Foote's lectures at Porth. He discourses in the Town Hall there to-day (Dec. 12), morning, afternoon, and evening, and we trust he will have good meetings.

A handsome room in the Holborn Restaurant has been engaged for the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner on Monday, January 10, and the tickets (4s.) are now on sale. Branch secretaries and other friends who can help to circulate them are requested to communicate direct with Miss Vance, N. S. S. Office, 376-377 Strand, W.C. We hope to see a large assembly of Freethinkers at this function. Mr. Foote will be in the chair, and will be supported by Messrs. Watt, Wheeler, Forder, Cohen, Moss, Heaford, and other well-known colleagues.

The Birmingham *Weekly Mercury* gives a long account of a local Secularist meeting addressed by Mr. Percy Ward, who told them how he advanced from the Wesleyan pulpit to the Secularist platform. The reporter seems to have been much interested in Mr. Ward's discourse, and he describes the audience as "a little more reverent perhaps" than ordinary congregations.

Mr. Watts, having been out of town, did not see Mr. Engström's letter in time to reply to it in this week's *Freethinker*. He will do so next week.

Mr. Foote's pamphlet, *The Shadow of the Sword*, a special edition of which is issued by the Humanitarian League, is eulogized by Mr. A. E. Fletcher in the last issue of the *New Age*, in connection with the Sermon on the Mount! "I am bound to acknowledge," Mr. Fletcher says, "that many so-called Atheists have proved themselves to be far better Christians in their denunciation of war than have many of the professed followers of Jesus." This is of course well-meant, for Mr. Fletcher's sincerity and integrity are beyond question; but, after all, is it not somewhat absurd to claim avowed and reflective Atheists as unconscious Christians? Would it not be just as easy for us to say that Mr. Fletcher is an Atheist without knowing it, and that it is not his Christianity, but his humanity, which prompts him to champion the cause of the poor and the oppressed?

Mr. Fletcher "strongly recommends every Christian man and woman" to buy and read Mr. Foote's pamphlet—which we hope they will do, if only for the sake of the Humanitarian League. Mr. Fletcher calls it "one of the ablest expositions of the Christian doctrine on the subject of war," and "really a masterful commentary on the fourth beatitude." This is unstinted praise, but it is rather embarrassing. Mr. Foote put his head and heart (such as they are) into that pamphlet, but he didn't know that it would ever give him a place among the Christian commentators. However, we don't want to fall out with Mr. Fletcher, who is a man of admirable parts and character; only we should like him (as a Christian) to look at the following facts. This very pamphlet, *The Shadow of the Sword*, given by Mr. Foote to the Humanitarian League, has been studiously ignored by the very papers that have noticed the rest of the League's publications. And why? Simply because the writer is an Atheist. His work may be "able" or "masterly," or anything you will, but he must be ignored, for it won't do at any price to give any sort of credit to the "infidel." The same silence, for the most part, has been maintained concerning the essay on "Animals' Rights," which Mr. Foote contributed to the Humanitarian League's book called *The New Charter*. Not that he cares a jot personally; but how it accuses the bigotry or meanness of ordinary journalism! It is at least to Mr. Fletcher's credit that he scorns to participate in this despicable conspiracy. And, after all, manliness is of greater importance than mere opinion.

The *Secular Almanack*, issued by the National Secular Society, and edited by Messrs. Foote and Wheeler, is selling fairly well, but a good supply still remains in the publisher's hands. This is a publication which all Secularists should purchase and keep by them. It contains some readable articles and much other useful and interesting matter. Whatever profit is realized from the sale accrues to the National Secular Society.

THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES.

XV.—THE GOSPEL EVENTS UNHISTORICAL.

WE are told in the Gospels that Jesus went about from place to place working miracles wherever he went; consequently, there could be no excuse for the Jews not believing on him. It is also said that those people rejected him because his kingdom was not of this world, and that his rejection and crucifixion were both the subjects of prophecy. Needless it is to say that not one of these statements is supported by evidence. On the other hand, there are passages in the Gospels which plainly imply that Jesus worked no miracles at all. Such, for example, are the following:—

"Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of Jonah the prophet," etc. (Matt. xii. 38, 39). "The Jews therefore answered and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto us?.....Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John ii. 18, 19). "They said therefore unto him, What then dost thou for a sign, that we may see, and believe thee?" (John vi. 30).

Now, since the Gospels were made up from a number of independent stories pieced together, the foregoing passages, taken by themselves, clearly indicate that Christ's questioners had witnessed none of the marvellous cures which were attributed to him in some of the other stories. They might, possibly, have heard speak of some of those wonders, but they had not beheld any themselves. If such were the case, there was nothing unreasonable in their asking for a "sign." But Christ in each instance flatly refused to gratify them. Instead of performing one of his vaunted "mighty works" before them, he called them "an evil and adulterous generation," and mystified them by speaking of his body as a "temple." The only sign they were to have was that of "Jonah the prophet"—viz., they should see him alive three days after his death—which "sign" they never saw, for he only showed himself to his disciples, and that by stealth.

On certain other occasions, it is also said, the Jews asked for a sign "tempting him," or "in order to prove him" (Matt. xvi. 1; Mark viii. 11; Luke xi. 16). The Gospel writers in these cases imply that all the inhabitants of Palestine had witnessed Christ's miracles, and therefore knew perfectly well that he was a divine being. It is also implied that it would be undignified, if not positively wrong, for Jesus to work a miracle merely to convince doubters. Now, if we set aside the stories ascribing miraculous works to Christ—for, be it remembered, we do not possess the testimony of a single witness to the actual performance of one of them—we behold in these passages the sorry figure of a man who, while claiming to be the Messiah, refuses to give the people a sign by which they might recognise the long-looked-for Savior. He thus falls to the level of the various religious impostors who appeared in Judea in the first century.

It is, however, in the highest degree improbable that the historical Jesus to whom were ascribed the silly fictions in the Gospels laid any claim to the Messiahship, or that he professed to be able to work miracles. These were simply claimed for him by another generation. It is far more likely that the real Simon Pure was a harmless fanatic, who was known to few beyond the members of the sect to which he belonged (the Essenes), three of these members being his brother James, Cephas, and John the author of the "Revelation." And this being the case, there was no rejection of him by the Jewish nation, for the simple reason that the great majority of those people had never even heard of him. This view is confirmed by the fact that the Jews have no account of the pretentious miracle-working Jesus of the Gospels. They evidently knew nothing of such a wonderful personage until Christianity had been firmly established. Then, not being able to identify the real Jesus, or to disprove the stories related of him by a later generation of Christians, they invented the ridiculous story, which dates from the time of Celsus (A.D. 177), and is still preserved in the "Sepher Toldoth Jeshu."

In any case, the Gospel story of a great teacher and

healer of diseases being rejected and crucified by the Jews is, on the face of it, fictitious. It is beyond doubt that all four Gospel accounts of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Christ were taken from copies of an earlier document, each evangelist merely altering or adding to the narrative as he thought fit. The original concoctor of the story is unknown, and, we may safely say, will remain so. Could a sharp cross-examining counsel get hold of him, and press him closely as to his authority for the matters he has recorded, he would, I venture to say, pass a bad quarter of an hour, and would doubtless be forced to admit that his account was founded on mere hearsay stories, which had never been investigated by anyone.

According to this writer, the Jews, being subject to the Romans, were afraid to put Jesus to death themselves; they had to bring him before Pilate, and the latter had to go through the farce of a regular trial. But, as a matter of history, we find the Jews often took the law into their own hands, and, in a question relating to their religion, they would not have thought twice about stoning anyone whom they considered guilty of blasphemy. We are told in the Acts (vii. 56-58) that when Stephen, addressing the Jews, said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God," his hearers were roused to such a pitch of frenzy or righteous indignation that they "cried with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city, and stoned him." It does not appear to have entered their minds, even for a moment, to take the offender to the Roman procurator for trial; they settled the matter then and there themselves. This incident, whether historical or not, describes accurately the character of the impulsive and fanatical Jews in matters affecting their religion. Had Jesus really addressed the following words to the scribes and Pharisees of his day, as alleged, he would, beyond a doubt, have been stoned as a blasphemer and a calumniator:—

"If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I came forth, and am come from God.....Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning..... It is my Father that glorifieth me; of whom ye say that he is your God; and ye have not known him; but I know him; and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be like unto you, a liar" (John viii. 42, 41, 54, 55).

This language is ten times more blasphemous than that attributed to Stephen, besides being mendacious and insulting. If the Jews gnashed their teeth at the words of Stephen, they would have gone stick-stark-staring wild upon hearing these, and the result can easily be imagined. It is also equally impossible to conceive of Jesus uttering the following invectives without receiving summary chastisement on the spot:—

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves.....Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell" (Matthew xxiii. 15, 33).

We have no evidence that the scribes and Pharisees in the time of Christ were either "hypocrites" or "sons of hell," or even that any of them were such systematic perverters of the truth as the evangelist Matthew, who ascribes the foregoing libellous words to Christ. If we take Philo and Josephus as samples of educated Jews of the first century, the latter were immeasurably superior, both in intelligence and honesty, to any of the Gospel writers.

But, from the Jewish standpoint, Jesus was a false prophet and an innovator, who went about declaiming against the most respectable, the most influential, and the best educated of the nation, and was followed wherever he went by a multitude drawn chiefly from the lower classes. And this hostile demonstration continued, according to the Gospels, for two or three years. Now, if we read "Jesus" instead of "Theudas" in the following account by Josephus, we shall see that the whole of the Gospel narratives relating to the alleged public ministry of Christ are, as a matter of probability, entirely fictitious:—

"Now it came to pass, that while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain magician, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it; and many

were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them who, falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them, and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, and cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem" (*Antiq.* xx. v. 1).

The same unique method was employed by the Governor Felix when "there came out of Egypt to Jerusalem one that said he was a prophet, and advised a multitude of the common people to go with him to the Mount of Olives." Against this pretender Felix sent "a great number of horsemen and footmen," who "attacked the Egyptian and the people who were with him. He also slew four hundred of them, and took two hundred of them alive. But the Egyptian himself escaped" (*Antiq.* xx. viii. 6). Now, if Jesus really appeared in Judea in the time of the procurator Pilate, and, after proclaiming himself a prophet, chose twelve disciples with whom he went about the country orating, and was followed wherever he went by multitudes of the lower classes, there cannot be the smallest doubt that Pilate would have cut short both his ministry and his person with "horsemen and footmen." Moreover, the disciples would have suffered the same fate, as accomplices. We have thus presumptive evidence that the public ministry of Christ, as recorded in the Gospels, is pure fiction.

Again, where was Pilate when Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on an ass at the head of a shouting multitude? In Matthew's account we read (xxi. 2, 11):—

"And the most part of the multitude spread their garments in the way; and others cut branches from the trees, and spread them in the way. And the multitudes that went before him, and that followed, cried, saying, 'Hosanna to the son of David: blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord'.....And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, Who is this? And the multitudes said, This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

No Roman governor who was responsible for the order of the province committed to his care would have permitted any self-styled prophet to create such a disturbance. I therefore ask again, Where was Pilate? Josephus tells us (*Wars* ii. xii. 1) that the Roman cohort stationed near the cloisters of the temple "were armed and kept guard at the festivals, to prevent any innovation which the multitude, thus gathered together, might make." According to the Gospels, Jesus, upon entering Jerusalem, "cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers and the seats of them that sold the doves." This was an innovation with a vengeance, and the poor, spiritless Jews bore it like lambs. Those who, later on, pounded Stephen to a jelly because they did not agree with something he had said had now not a word to say for themselves. This occurred, too, but a few days before the Passover, when people were coming from all parts into the holy city to keep that festival. Assuming, then, that the Jews did not stone the aggressor "between the temple and the altar," as is stated of a certain Zachariah, where was the Roman cohort? We are told in the Acts (xxi. 32) that the officer commanding this band rescued Paul from the hands of the Jewish populace when they were about to kill him, because it was thought he had brought Greeks in the temple. Where was this cohort when Christ drove the people out of the sanctuary with his "scourge of cords," and set the whole city in an uproar? Where, too, were the high priest and his officers? And where, above all, was the procurator Pilate?

If this much-maligned Governor was at his post, as history asserts, then this story, like all the other stories related of Christ's alleged public ministry, is neither more nor less than a Christian fabrication.

ABRACADABRA.

The world is governed by law. From the tiniest mote that rides the sunbeam dancing on the waves of summer seas to the mightiest constellation that sweeps, in everlasting flight, the boundless fields of space, necessity reigns supreme.

On Friday, December 10, Mr. Ernest Bell, the treasurer of the Humanitarian League, will lecture in the Arbitration-room, 63 Chancery Lane, on the subject of "Christmas Cruelties." Professor B. Mayor will preside.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

RELIGION is the inherited fear of the world. It began in man being afraid of his own shadow. The religious man is a coward. His God is simply the object of his dread. Worship is the expression of man's fear. Ask a man why he worships God, and, if he is intelligent and honest, he will say, "Because I am afraid of something." Ask him what he is afraid of, and he must answer, "God." A religious person is a person who is afraid of God. Ask him what this God is that he fears, and he does not know. Ask him where he is, and he does not know. Religion is fear of the unknown. There cannot be a more ridiculous thing than religion.

If religion were fear of what we know to be injurious, and worship was the effort to rid the world of these bad and evil influences, there would be some sense in being religious. But to be afraid of what we know nothing about is to be afraid of nothing. Religion is a product of darkness, ignorance. It came out of the shadows. One man got scared, and he scared another by telling him what he got scared about, and the perpetuation of this scare is seen in the religions of the world.

Religion dies just as soon as science is born. Man's cowardice flees when the sun of truth rises. Persons who have knowledge, who have courage, who are not afraid of their own shadows, are not religious. It is not necessary for the feet to surrender to the knees.

We do not deny but what there are things in nature which are enemies to human life, but such things we are not to worship; we are to evade or destroy them. If man is afraid of God, he had better get rid of him. Where there is no fear of God there is no religion.

—*The Boston Investigator.*

FERVOR OF LIFE.

'Tis given to us to live; to see the skies
Grand with huge, bounding, myriad, timeless worlds
That palpitate with life. 'Tis given to us
To love; thus in the rapture of creation,
Pressed to a lover, heaving with that heart
Build holly the life that is to be.
'Tis given to us to see the little children,
Each more delightful than a century's flowers,
Growing and shaping into higher forms,
More sentient, capable, as accumulate
The lores of things and idealities—
Thus ever mounts the race. Then, when our time
Grows over-long, we kiss our Mother Death
Upon her dusky, naked, swollen breasts,
And then we sleep.

—*William Platt.*

BOOK CHAT.

A SAMPLE of the Bible in "guid braid Scots" has been going the rounds. The specimen chunk is from the Song of Songs, which is not Solomon's: "Set me as the seal upo' thine hairt, as the seal upo' thine arm; for luv is straing as deith; jealousy as cruel as the grave; the coals theerof are coals o' fire bleezin' wi' a maist awfu' lowe. Mony watters canna slocken luv'; neither can the spates droon it; gin a man wad gie a' the haudin's o' his hoose for luv', they wad be a'thegither scorned." The *Sydney Bulletin* calls it the apotheosis of the Kailyard plague.

Those who know Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*—and everyone should know that genuine outburst of manliness—should be aware of his readiness ever to be the voice of the voiceless, the advocate of the despised and downtrodden. He is brave enough to write of *An Unknown People* (Bonner; 6d.), the so-called "Urnings," or men with feminine disposition, and females who are masculine in character. He shows they deserve study and sympathetic consideration. This he brings to all his touches. Yet are we constrained to say that the race must be continued by the men who are masculine and the women who are feminine; and from its standpoint androgynes are abnormalities of comparatively slight importance. Probably most of those set down as of the "Urnings" temperament are only people endowed with keener sympathies, enabling them to enter more readily into the thoughts and proclivities of the opposite sex.

Admirers of Browning can now get all his earlier poems, from "Paracelsus" to "Men and Women," in one good-sized

volume at a moderate price. The account of the poet's life, by Oscar Browning, makes the introduction.

An American religious book, entitled *The Mystic Book of God Unsealed; or, The Banished Angels and their Penitentiary*, by R. V. Millard, Bishop and Founder of the Church of Redeemed Israel, claims that we on this earth are the fallen angels who were driven out of heaven, and are now imprisoned in this purgatory or penitentiary until we shall be "redeemed" by Christ (who is Michael, the archangel who fought against the dragon). God lives in the Pleiades, and all the rest of the orbs of the universe are peopled with God's angels. The "redeemed" of this solar system will return to God in the seven stars when the end comes; but we poor unrepentant fellows will be burned up and annihilated, world, devil, and all. This is the latest revelation, and it induces the reflection: "You never know your luck."

Mr. Hodgson Pratt, the president of the International Arbitration and Peace Association, in a little pamphlet on *International Arbitration*, contends that this is quite feasible. The majority of international disputes can be settled without war, and a tribunal to settle such disputes can be erected. Its desirability should need no demonstration.

Humanity for December contains a good report of the lecture by Edward Carpenter on "Prison Methods: Now and in the Future." It also announces the formation of the Romilly Society, the purposes of which are stated to be: "To review the laws in force for the repression and punishment of crimes, misdemeanors, and offences of every kind; to abolish or modify antiquated, barbarous, or excessive punishment, or penalties; to provide for and secure fairness in prosecution, mercy in judgment, and all proper defence to the accused, and compensation to the innocent wrongly accused and convicted; to procure the creation of a Minister and Department of Justice; to obtain the right of appeal on matter of fact as well as law in all criminal cases; to improve the administration of prisons and penal servitude by improved regulations according to humane and merciful ideas, so that the reform of the convict, and not his punishment, shall be regarded as the most important object." *Humanity* also contains an account of the late E. Maitland, a report of Miss Greg's address on "The Cattle Trade," and two good letters on "Catholics and Vivisection."

Satan's Invisible World Displayed is an old theological witch-finding title adapted to a new social work. It is an exposure of the malgovernment of New York. Mr. Stead is so famous for his hectic sensationalism that we would fain hope his description of corruption is exaggerated.

In *The Journals of Walter White* he tells of Kingsley having once said: "Think of 15,000 clergymen having to stand up Sunday after Sunday with nothing to say. Ah! the Reformation has much to answer for." Turning to Carlyle: "You and your Puritans have much to answer for. Those men first started the notion that the way to heaven was by infinite jaw; and see what infinite jaw has brought us to." "Ay," said Carlyle, "'tis wonderful how men will go on talking with nothing to say."

The *Daily News*, noticing Captain Trotter's *Life of John Nicholson*, the Savior of Delhi, refers to the curious episode of Nicholson's elevation to divine honors. A fakir saw in Nicholson, the abolisher of anarchy, an incarnation of the deity. The new creed made its way; "the sect of Nikalsainis became an historical fact." Whereupon the god Nikalsain, rising in his indignation, thrashed his worshippers. But the more he whacked them the more they gloried in their martyrdom, and grew steadfast in the faith. We believe the Nikalsaini sect exists to this day.

Mr. Walter Welsh, in his *Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, says that "at present the Church of England is literally honeycombed with secret societies, all working in the interests of the scheme for the Corporate Reunion of the Church of England with the Church of Rome. These secret plotters are the real wirepullers of the Ritualistic movement." One of the most important of these is the Order of Corporate Reunion, which has had three of its members consecrated bishops by Roman, Greek, and Armenian bishops. One of them, the Rev. F. G. Lee, vicar of All Saints, Lambeth, is said to have *validly* ordained eight hundred Anglican Churchmen, so that a body is growing which the Pope would have to recognise. Another secret society, that of the Holy Cross, came into undesired notoriety twenty years ago by publishing *The Priest in Absolution*. A copy came into the hands of the late Lord Redesdale, who was horrified to find the extreme indelicacy of the questions put to married and unmarried women and children. He brought the matter before the House of Lords, and great excitement in ecclesiastical circles was the result.

Louis Becke, in his *Wild Life in Southern Seas*, which has just reached a second edition, says of the Pacific Islanders: "Taking their present condition and comparing it with their past, one cannot but regretfully conclude that civilization and Christianity have done them much physical harm, and but little moral good."

* * *

An Italian metrical translation of Shakespeare's *Venere e Adone*, by Professor G. Tirivelli, has been published by G. Bobbio, Director of the Printing Office of the Senate, Rome.

* * *

David Nutt publishes Sixty-four Sonnets from the Portuguese of Anthero de Quental, who is a Freethinker as well as a poet. They are translated by Edgar Prestage.

* * *

The *Academy*, in an article apparently from the pen of F. B. Jevons, joins in the onslaught on Mr. Grant Allen's *Evolution of the God Idea*, which appears to be rather too thoroughgoing for the exponents of orthodoxy.

* * *

Andrew Lang has lost no time in pitching into Mr. Grant Allen's heretical book, which will be noticed in our columns shortly. The work is a bulky one, and deserves careful attention.

* * *

The reviewer of the *Church Quarterly Review* has most thoroughly exposed in the *Guardian* the tactics of the S. P. C. K. in putting forward perverted renderings of the works of foreign critics like Maspero and Hommel.

* * *

Fisher Unwin issues *A Selection from the Poems of Mathilde Blind*, edited by Arthur Symons.

CORRESPONDENCE.

MORAL INSTRUCTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—“Moral Instruction,” as enunciated by the “Moral Instructionists,” in the person of your correspondent, Mr. Gould, seems to me to be of a piece with the would-be building up advocated by a small but not unimportant section of the Secular party. The idea that it is incumbent upon those who labor to destroy the huge superstitious imposition known as Christianity, to put something in its place, underlies and permeates both the Moral Instructionists and the above-mentioned section of Secularists. For Mr. Gould and his colleagues, personally, I have nothing but the most kindly feelings, because, while I feel quite sure that their policy is wrong, I am equally sure that their object is right. What I demur to is that they (the Moral Instructionists) invest their “morality” for our Board schools with a sort of superhuman sanctity, which, to my mind, will tend to make it as great a bone of contention among our educational authorities as is the religious embroglio to which they, in common with the Secularists, would fain put an end.

Speaking for myself, I have no desire to see our Board school teachers turned into a corporation of *moral parsons*. I am not so sure that they would be any improvement on present moral conditions as to make me enthusiastic for the change.

When Mr. Gould intimates that the present staff of teachers are not competent to impart this moral instruction to the children, I cannot but opine that he does his erstwhile colleagues scant justice. That those ladies and gentlemen know as much about teachable morality, and how it should be taught, as does Mr. Gould himself, I don't think that gentleman would deny. I would even go as far as to say ditto of the “man in the street.” Moral truths, as far as they are teachable, are the common property of mankind. Book or code morality, as the learned Mr. Buckle proves up to the hilt in his *Civilization in England*, is, and has ever been, the same the world over. Voltaire affirms that the ideas of justice and injustice in the child's mind are co-existent with its capacity to add two and two together to make four. We no more require schools to teach our children this than we do to teach them how to use their eyes, ears, hands, and legs.

Let me hazard the opinion that the real moral improvers of mankind are your inventors, the products of whose genius bring more and more within the reach of the ever-increasing masses of the people the possibilities of a nobler and more desirable life than was ever possible before. To those inventors we very largely owe the wealth that enables us to build and to efficiently support our Board schools. In all that we are better morally than past generations, we owe it to the cultivated intellects of our race. Let our Board schools, then, be devoted to the improvement of that faculty

to which we owe so much. Fertilize the budding intellect with all the useful knowledge of which it is profitably capable. This is the acme of our duty, as it relates to our efforts and the welfare of the children. Having done this thoroughly, we may safely leave them to work out their own moral salvation—that is, if it is needed.

T. J. THURLOW

THOSE GIRLS.

A LITTLE girl, four and a half years old, lately said: “Papa, who made Mary and Joseph?” “Why, God, of course.” “Oh, no, papa, that could not be; for, if Jesus is God, and Mary is Jesus's mother, how could God make his own mother?”

“Well, Edie, what did you see at church?” “A man came in with his nightgown on, and he was so 'shamed he hid his face in his hands 'fore he could say a word.”

“Teacher, did Solomon have three hundred wives?” “Yes.” “What, all at once?” “Yes.” “Then why does it say he slept with his fathers?”

“Minnie, what makes you such a bad girl?” “Well, mamma, I s'pose God sent you the best he could find, so if I don't suit it ain't my fault.”

“You're a sweet little darling, Katie.” “I s'pose God put some sugar in 'the dust.”

“Do babies come from heaven, mamma?” “Yes, dear.” “Well, I shouldn't want them there either if I was the angels.”

Cora—“How lamblike the minister is!” Dora—“And what sheep's eyes he casts at us girls!”

“Shall we have clothes in heaven, mamma?” “No, child.” “Won't it be fun to see the fat cook waddling about in heaven?”

Little Susie H. (poring over a book in which angels were represented as winged beings) suddenly remarked, with much vehemence—“Mamma, I don't want to be an angel when I die, and I needn't, need I?” “Why, Susie?” questioned mamma. “'Cos I don't want to leave off all my clothes, and wear fadders like a hen!”

PROFANE JOKES.

A CERTAIN Freethinker is mildly severe upon professors of religion. He should remember that it is only by professing religion that a man can enjoy his portion of iniquity in any kind of peace.

If a jackass were to describe the deity, he would represent him with long ears and a tail. Man's ideal is the higher and truer one; he pictures him as somewhat resembling a man.

“Why are Calvinists' minds so stunted and undersized?” “I suppose it's because they are brought up on the Shorter Catechism.”

It is wicked to cheat on Sundays. The law recognises this truth, and shuts up the shops.

“Mamma,” said little Mabel, who had just come home from church, “what made that man in the corner say ‘Amen’ so often while the preacher was talking?” “I know,” said Willie confidently. “Well, Willie,” said his mother, “why is it?” “It's a way he has of calling time on the preacher.”

A clergyman was questioning his Sunday-school about the story of Eutychus, the young man who, while listening to the preaching of the Apostle Paul, fell asleep, and, falling down, was taken up dead. “What,” he said, “do we learn from this solemn event?” “Please, sir,” replied a little girl promptly, “parsons should learn not to preach too long sermons.”

Renunciation.

Wakeful I lay at night, and thought of God,
Of heaven, and of the crowns pale martyrs gain,
Of souls in high and purgatorial pain,
And the red path which murdered seers have trod.
I heard the trumpets which the angels blow,
I saw the cleaving sword, the measuring rod,
I watch the stream of sound continuous flow,
Past the gold towers where seraphs make abode.
But now I let the aching splendor go,
I dare not call the crowned angels peers,
Henceforth I am content to dwell below
'Mid common joys, with humble smiles and tears,
Delighted in the sun and breeze to grow
A child of human hopes and human fears.

—W. M. W. Call.

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 Evolution of the Idea of God."
BRADLAUGH CLUB AND INSTITUTE (86 Newington Green-road, Ball's Pond): 7.15, Touzeau Parris, "Theosophy: Is it Wisdom or Folly?" December 11, at 8.30, Concert and Dance.
CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, C. Watts, "Christian Tactics Exposed."
EAST LONDON BRANCH (103, Mile End-road): W. H. Harris, Shakespearean Recitals.
SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Surrey Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 11.15, Discussion, "The Ethics of Epicurus"—opened by H. O. Newland; 7, Dr. Washington Sullivan, "Ethics of Punishment."
WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall): 11.15, Sidney Webb, LL.B., "Democr. cy."
WOOD GREEN (Station-road Hall): 7.30, Chilperic Edwards, "The Book of Jonah in the Light of the Higher Criticism."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

WEST LONDON BRANCH (Marble Arch): 11.30, R. P. Edwards; 3.30, A lecture.

COUNTY.

BIRMINGHAM (Bristol-street Board School): 7, T. Norbury, "Russian Diplomacy."
BRISTOL (St James's Hall, Cumberland-street): November 10, at 8, Business meeting—at Mr. Leaker's house. No meeting on Sunday.
CHESTER (Corn Exchange): O. Cohen—11, "Why Should we Follow Jesus?" 3, "Secularism a Better Creed than Christianity"; 7.30, "Is there a God?"
DERBY (Pollicott's Dining Rooms, Market-place): 7, Mr. Whitwell, A reading.
GLASGOW (Brunswick Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): Harry Snell—12, "Was Jesus a Socialist?" 6.30, "Charles Bradlaugh: Atheist and Reformer"—with lantern illustrations.
LEICESTER SECULAR HALL (Humberstone Gate): 6.30, L. Small, B.A. "Concerning the Origin of Life."
LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, The Secretary, "The Jesus of the Gospels."
PORTH (Town Hall): Mr. Cox—11, "The Sermon on the Mount"; 3, "The Lord's Prayer"; 7, "Does God Care?"
SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): H. Percy Ward—11, "Shall we Live After we are Dead?"; 3, "What will you Give us in Place of Christianity? A Secularist's Answer"; 7, "From Wesleyan Pulpit to Secularist Platform." Tea at 5.
SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, King-street): 7, Business meeting; 7.30, Adjourned discussion, "The Educational Question."

Lecturers' Engagements.

O. COHEN, 12 Merchant-street, Bow-road, London.—December 19, Leicester.

A. B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, London, S.E.—December 12, Camberwell Radical Club; 19, Camberwell Secular Hall.

H. PERCY WARD, Leighton Hall, N.W.—December 12, Sheffield, January 8 to 12, Mission to Stanley. 23 and 30, Manchester.

POSITIVISM.

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.—Church of Humanity, St. Mary's-place. Service and Discourse every Sunday evening at 7.

SUNDERLAND.—Church of Humanity, 23 Blandford-street. Service and discourse every Sunday afternoon at 2.45.

WEST HARTLEPOOL.—Druids' Hall, Tower-street. Meeting for inquirers, conducted by Mr. Malcolm Quin, second Wednesday of every month at 7.30.

BATLEY.—Positivist Meeting at Mr. Joseph Walker's, Primrose Hill, Lady Anne-road, every Sunday afternoon at 2.30.

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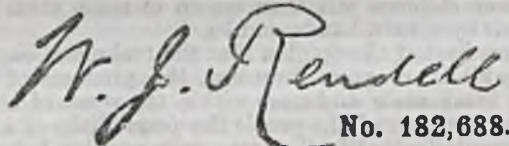
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