

The Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

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THE REAL ROBERT BURNS.

III.—BURNS AS A FREETHINKER.

"IN his sunny moods," wrote Carlyle, "a full, buoyant flood of mirth rolls through the mind of Burns." "The master-quality of Burns," Mr. Henley says, "the quality which has gone, and will ever go, the furthest to make him universally and perennially acceptable, is humor." Mr. Henley thinks his sentiment is sometimes strained, and often rings a little false. "But his humor—broad, rich, prevailing, now lascivious or gargantuan and now fanciful or jocose, now satirical and brutal and now instinct with sympathy, is ever irresistible." This is true and admirably put. We should say that Mr. Henley understands and enjoys Burns's humor better than Carlyle did; and for this reason, we fancy, he does not share Carlyle's regret that Burns expended so much of his humor upon the orthodox clergy of the local Kirk. Perhaps it ought to be stated, in this connection, that Carlyle lived more than half a century after writing his Burns article, and that he in turn expended much of his humor upon the clergy of all denominations. However, this is what Carlyle wrote in 1828:—

"It seems to us another circumstance of fatal import in Burns's history that at this time he became involved in the religious quarrels of his district; that he was enlisted and feasted, as the fighting-man of the New-Light Priesthood, in their highly unprofitable warfare. At the tables of these free-minded clergy he learned much more than was needful for him. Such liberal ridicule of fanaticism awakened in his mind scruples about Religion itself; and a whole world of Doubts, which it required another set of conjurers than these men to exorcise."

This is the voice of a Scottish student fresh from the schools of Calvinism; from whose influence, by the way, he never quite escaped; for just as Carlyle retained his native brogue almost unimpaired during his more than forty years' residence in London, so he retained to the last the prejudices he imbibed with his education. His intellect saw through the dogmas he had been taught, but the spirit of them always dwelt in his feelings.

Mr. Henley comes later, and has been trained in a broader-minded school. He notices with satisfaction that Burns was "the most anti-clerical," as well as the most popular, poet of Scotland. "Being a Scot," Mr. Henley says, "he was instinctively a theologian; being himself, he was inevitably liberal-minded; born a peasant of genius, and therefore a natural rebel, he could not choose but quarrel with the Kirk—especially as her hand was heavy on his friends and himself." And again in a footnote: "He was ever a theological liberal and a theological disputant—a champion of Heterodoxy, in however mild a form, whose disputations made him notorious, so that his name was as a stumbling-block and an offence to the Orthodox."

Curiously, as some will think, Mr. Henley puts in a word for "Sour John Knox," as Browning called him; and what he says is so novel and striking that we venture to quote it *in extenso*:—

"He was the man of a crisis, and a desperate one; and he played his part in it like the stark and fearless opposite that he was. He was a humorist, he loved his glass of wine, he abounded in humanity and intelligence, he married two wives, he was as well beloved as he was extremely hated and feared. He could not

No. 866.

foresee what the collective stupidity of posterity would make of his teaching and example, nor how the theocracy at whose establishment he aimed would presently assert itself as largely a system of parochial inquisition. The minister's man who had looked through his keyhole would have got short shrift from him; and in the Eighteenth Century he had as certainly stood with Burns against the Kirk of Scotland, as represented by Auld and Russell and the like, as in the Sixteenth he stood with Moray and the nobles against the Church of Rome, as figured in David Beaton and the 'twa infernal monstrie, Pride and Avarice."

Without stopping to agree with Mr. Henley or to dissent from him with regard to John Knox, we proceed with our remarks on Robert Burns. His "scruples" and "doubts," which Carlyle regretted, have naturally attracted the attention of the biographers. Allen Cunningham, for instance, writes as follows:—

"When in the company of the demure and the pious, he loved to start doubts in religion, which he knew nothing short of inspiration could solve; and to speak of Calvinism with such latitude of language as shocked or vexed all listeners, and caused him to be regarded by some as a free-thinker or a deist."

Cunningham, however, is very anxious to assure us that Burns was really nothing of the kind; and, after the style of the orthodox stories about the deathbeds of Voltaire and Thomas Paine, he introduces us to "Mrs. Haugh—a most respectable woman," in whose house he lived at Dumfries, and who was "much with him during his last illness." To this most respectable woman, we are told, he "lamented that he had sometimes doubted the truths of Scripture." This is meant to be edifying, but it is not convincing. The trick has been repeated so often that it has lost all its force. It only imposes on blind piety and invincible stupidity. What Burns wrote and spoke to the public and to his intimate friends is infinitely more important than anything he may have said (or not said) to a landlady, whether respectable or otherwise.

Allow as much as possible for the emphasis and exaggerations of humor; yet plenty remains to prove that Burns was a hater of priestcraft, a friend of freethinking, and a sceptic in regard to the distinctive dogmas of Christianity. We will appeal to his poems first, and then to his correspondence.

There are four lines in *Tam o' Shanter* which Burns removed from one edition, in compliance with the advice of a high-placed friend. They occur at the end of that list of gruesome objects on the holy table:—

Three lawyers' tongues turn'd inside out,
Wi' lies seam'd like a boggar's clout,
And priests' hearts, rotten, black as muck,
Lay stinking, vile, in every neuk.

This is not tragic, like what precedes it, but satirical, and therefore somewhat incongruous; yet the incongruity rather intensifies the satire, the reader being brought down suddenly from terror to disgust.

The satires on the Old-Light clergy offer a tempting field for quotation, but we must limit ourselves to a few picked specimens. How finely rollicking is the start of *The Kirk's Alarm*:—

Orthodox, Orthodox,
Wha believe in John Knox,
Let me sound an alarm to your conscience;
There's a heretic blast
Has been blawn in the wast,
That what is no sense must be nonsense.

Fun and wisdom were never more happily commingled.

How the sting is all kept in the tail of the satire! And how surprising and delicious it is—to everybody but its victims!

Holy Willie's Prayer is simply beyond praise. Sir Walter Scott called it "a piece of satire more exquisitely severe than any which Burns afterwards wrote; but unfortunately [he added] cast in a form most daringly profane." With what tremendous power, moving with the utmost ease, Burns hits off the whole essence of Calvinism in a single verse.

O Thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,
Wha, as it pleases best thyself,
Sends aye to heaven and ten to hell,
A' for thy glory,
And no for onie guid or ill
They've done afore thee!

How line by line and verse by verse, in this creative satire, Burns develops the character of an orthodox Calvinist, proud of his own election, content with the thought of others roaring in hell, impatient of all heresy, yet with a keen eye for temporal advantage, and a tendency to backslide in the ways of the flesh! The art of this poem is perfect. Just as the first verse epitomises Holy Willie's religion, so does the last verse epitomise his character; the deity and his devotee being worthy of each other:—

But, Lord, remember me and mine
Wi' mercies temp'ral and divine,
That I for gear and grace may shine,
Excell'd by nane,
An' a' the glory shall be thine,
Amen, Amen.

In the Epistle to Gavin Hamilton there is splendid satire on the old orthodox theory that good works are damnable without saving faith. Hamilton is exemplary as master, landlord, husband, father, and neighbor; but what is the use of that?

It's no thro' terror of damnation:
It's just a carnal inclination.

Morality slays its tens of thousands; vain is the hope that trusts in mercy, truth, and justice; you may practise any villainy as long as you "stick to sound believing."

Learn three-mile pray'rs, and half-mile graces,
Wi' weel-spread looves, an' lang wry faces,
Grunt up a solemn, lengthen'd groan,
And damn a' parties but your own;
I'll warrant then, ye're nae deceiver,
A steady, sturdy, staunch believer.

Burns could not believe in a hell for honest men. He did not believe that the dread of future punishment was a moral motive.

The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip
To haud the wretch in order.

He pities poor Old Nick, and hopes he will get out of his hot prison. As for himself, Robert Burns, he has no fear. King David is ranked among the chief of saints, though he was an adulterer and a murderer.

And maybe, Tam, for a' my cants,
My wicked rhymes, an' drucken rants,
I'll gie auld cloven Clooty's haunts
An unco slip yet,
An' snugly sit among the saints
At Davie's hip yet.

Burns could not have believed in the historical truth of the Bible, or he would never have spoken so profanely of some of its well-known incidents. No real believer could have written that delightful poem on the antiquarian Captain Grose, whom Burns represents as having such an extraordinary budget of ancient articles.

Of Eve's first fire he has a cinder;
And Tubal-Cain's fire-school and fender;
That which distinguished the gender
O' Balaam's ass;
A broom-stick o' the Witch of Endor,
Weel shod wi' brass.

On the whole, although it does not do to take a dramatic poem as necessarily an index to the writer's own mind, we do not think we are far wrong in saying that there is a good deal of Robert Burns himself in the opening of the final chorus in the superb and triumphant *Jolly Beggars*:—

A fig for those by law protected!
Liberty's a glorious feast!
Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.

We could greatly extend our appeal to Burns's poems, but we must now turn to his correspondence. And here we must make an important observation. Burns adapts

himself a good deal to the persons he is addressing. He is naturally more orthodox and conventional in writing to a lady like Mrs. Dunlop, and more heterodox and outspoken in writing to cronies like Mr. Cunningham. Mrs. Dunlop takes umbrage at something Burns has said, and he hastens to tell her "you mistake me," that religion is not only his "chief dependence," but his "dearest enjoyment," and that "an irreligious poet is a monster." But in the very next month, writing to Robert Muir, Burns has a fling at "old-wife prejudices and tales":—

"Every age and every nation has a different set of stories; and as the many are always weak, of consequence they have often, perhaps always, been deceived.It becomes a man of sense to think for himself, particularly in a case where all men are equally interested, and where, indeed, all men are equally in the dark."

Even in writing to Mrs. Dunlop, nearly two years later, Burns wonders whether there is any truth in the stories of a future life, or whether they are "all alike, baseless visions and fabricated fables." He speaks of "the world to come" as "a flattering idea," and adds: "Would to God I as firmly believed it, as I ardently wish it!" He speaks of Jesus Christ as the "amiablest of characters," which is not the language of a Christian, but of a Deist; and says, "I trust thou art no impostor," which is surely not the language of confidence. Writing to Cunningham, two months later, he fears that "every fair, unprejudiced inquirer must in some degree be a sceptic." There are no "very staggering arguments" against man's immortality, but "the subject is so involved in darkness that we want data to go upon." In a still later epistle to Cunningham he indulges in a dithyramb on "the sightless soarings of School Divinity," who turns Reason delirious, and drives Truth back to the bottom of her well. This is how (he says) she raves:—

"On earth discord! a gloomy Heaven above, opening her jealous gates to the nineteen-thousandth part of the tithe of mankind! and below, an inescapable and inexorable hell, expanding its leviathan jaws for the vast residue of mortals!!"

So the poor wretches, who are sunk in misery in this world, are to take comfort from the thought that, as it is but one to nineteen hundred thousand that their situation will mend here, so "'tis nineteen hundred thousand to one, by the dogmas of Theology, that you will be condemned eternally in the world to come."

"All my fears and cares are of this world," Burns wrote to Cunningham; and he added, "If there is another, an honest man has nothing to fear from it." This resembles the conclusion of Burns's epitaph "On a Friend":—

If there's another world, he lives in bliss;
If there is none, he made the best of this.

Burns cared next to nothing for that "general opinion" which divines appeal to, as though the repetition of a belief, particularly of one stuffed into children by their teachers, could add anything to its weight. He looked upon mankind at large as a mob, and declared—"their universal belief has ever had extremely little weight with me." "I am drawn," he added, "by conviction like a Man, not by a halter like an Ass." It was impossible to cramp his great spirit within the petty limits of orthodoxy. Indeed, the couplet just quoted, and the prose passage before it, express a sentiment which is foreign to every religion on earth. Once admit that an honest man is as fit for any other world as he is for this one, and creeds become not only superfluous, but impertinent. Burns, therefore, does not belong to any Faith; he belongs to Humanity.

G. W. FOOTE.

THE DECAY OF PIETY.

RELIGIONISTS who look back to the good old days are ever lamenting the decline of religious fervor, the desecration of the Sabbath, and lessening church attendance. Statistics, so far as they can be ascertained, fully bear them out. Church-going is decreasing even in villages, still more in towns, and most of all in cities; while in London the bulk of the population never think of entering any place of worship.

Although, from the legal point of view, every member of the commonwealth is *ipse facto* a member of the Church

of England, from the Church's standpoint only those are members who have been episcopally confirmed, and who voluntarily present themselves as "communicants" at "the Lord's table." Now, in every church only a very small fraction of the attendants have been either confirmed, or partake of the Church's most solemn rites. Of these the far larger proportion are females. In statistics of church and chapel attendance we everywhere find a paucity of adult males. Considering the number of female servants and working men's wives, whose duties keep them at home, it is striking that the bulk of church and chapel attendants should everywhere be women, and that even of these only a few partake of the characteristic rites of the Church to which they belong. Morning communion used to be the rule in the Church, but morning attendance is said to be tending to the vanishing point. The Church has, in our own generation, undoubtedly become more attractive by an attempted union with art. The Evangelicals have been obscured or forced to imitate the showy services of the High Church party, who give a fillip to jaded ladies by the attractions of music and millinery, getting the industrious among them to embroider gorgeous Ritualistic vestments and altar cloths. Among Nonconformists the ordinary service is giving way before Pleasant Sunday Afternoons, and music has invaded the most Puritanic conventicles, until the voice of the soprano is of nearly as much importance as the sky-pilot's power in prayer. If one of Dean Ramsay's pious old ladies were to visit an Anglican church, she would indeed think it "an awfu' way o' spen'ing the Sawbath." But even Scotland is getting quit of Puritanism.

In a recent symposium in a religious contemporary it was admitted on all hands that even where church and chapel attendance was maintained there was a great falling off from former piety, seen in the general decline of family worship. Bible reading, family prayer, and even grace at meals are becoming things of the past. It is when we look back to the dark ages of faith that we see how much has departed. Demons and angelic visitants were as common in the Middle Ages as in Bible days: but they have vanished like the snows of yesterday. The natural has slowly superseded the supernatural. The men of God are ceasing to be little gods themselves, even in the rural districts. People are beginning to think for themselves. Religion has become attenuated. Its influence has declined; its area been circumscribed. It no longer commands the absorbing interests of all classes, as it did but a century or two ago. The modern man thinks more of the social improvement of this world than of heaven. There are a thousand and one secular affairs which leave little more for attention to theology, and which direct the mind into other channels.

Primarily this decline of piety must be attributed to decline of faith. If people really believed that their eternal happiness or misery depended on certain observances, they would faithfully perform them. Despite every taboo placed on the propagation of Freethought, most people are aware that there are those who reject every doctrine of Christianity, who deny its claims and challenge its pretensions.

Private worship has declined with the decay in faith that prayer is answered. Those who do pray do not confidently expect their prayers will be answered. It would be hard to find now even in the rural districts the yokel, drawn by Charles Keene, who said to the new parson: "Be you a-going to farm yer glebe, sir? Cause as how that's the arliest and forrudest bit o' land is the whole parish, and our last parson used to get in his hay, then he'd clap on the prayer for rain, and where were we?"

In the second place, the Church has rival attractions even on the day of which it claims a monopoly. Universal elementary education and cheap reading have given a better means of filling the mind than going to church to have lithographed sermons, written by ladies, read to you. The Sunday newspaper is a rival to morning service, and books and private entertainments a rival in the evening. Above all, to indoor workers there is the attraction of the open air. The bicycle has given easy access to the country, and even in kirk-going and clergy-cowed Scotland is breaking up the sanctity of the Sabbath.

The great bulwark of religion is the endowments devoted to its maintenance and propagation. If there was a wealthy corporation interested in proving the existence of witchcraft, that exploded superstition would still find

numbers of zealous and satisfied believers. But the risky business of sky-pilotage is beginning to be seen through, and when its professors are found to be dull or dishonest their black business is bound to become despised and discredited.

J. M. WHEELER.

MODERN SCEPTICISM.

(Concluded from page 115.)

IN his sermon which we partially noticed in these columns last week the Rev. T. O. Taylor, having made some sensible admissions as to the spread of Scepticism and the high moral character of its modern expounders, rushes into a wild glorification of the nature and influence of Christianity; and also into an impulsive and extravagant depreciation of the power of Scepticism. He says: "And now comes the question, Can modern Scepticism be accepted as an adequate substitute for Christianity? If in the struggle for existence now going on Scepticism were to be victorious, what would be the consequence? Eliminate religion from human life, take away our faith in God and our faith in immortality, and what would be the outcome of that? Some of the Sceptics with whom we come into contact to-day would have us believe, for example, that our faith in the doctrine of immortality has an enervating influence upon human life, and that to believe that when we die here upon earth we are altogether done with supplies an immense moral tonic."

In these remarks the rev. gentleman's statements are vague. What does he mean in this case by Scepticism? Is it disbelief in orthodoxy? If so, it is not a question of an "if," but one of certainty. Scepticism, to orthodox Christianity, is victorious in the fields of ethics, science, education, philosophy, politics, and the various social sections of the community. No practical reformer at the present day, in his efforts to improve the mundane conditions of society, regulates his actions by orthodox teachings. Such attempts belong to the past. This is an age of utility based upon human requirements, not a period of dependence upon speculations as to alleged supernatural aid. Now reason and science predominate in all reformatory measures, instead of theological faith and reliance upon an unknown providence. The "consequence" of this transformation is one of decided improvement in every department of life. Secular agencies have secured advantages for the masses which "spiritual" means, after centuries of trial, failed to do. We suggest to the rev. gentleman that he should carefully study Lecky's *History of European Morals* (vol. ii.), where it is stated that "nearly all the greatest intellectual achievements of the last three centuries have been preceded and prepared by the growth of scepticism" (p. 205). Buckle, also, in his *History of Civilization*, has these pertinent truths: "The act of doubting is the originator, or at all events the necessary antecedent, of all progress. Here we have that scepticism, the very name of which is an abomination to the ignorant, because it disturbs their lazy and complacent minds; because it troubles their cherished superstitions; because it imposes on them the fatigue of inquiry; and because it rouses even sluggish understandings to ask if things are as they are commonly supposed, and if all is really true which they from their childhood have been taught to believe. The more we examine this great principle of scepticism, the more distinctly shall we see the immense part it has played in the progress of European civilization. . . . It may be said that to scepticism we owe the spirit of inquiry, which, during the last two centuries, has gradually encroached on every possible subject; has reformed every department of practical and speculative knowledge; has weakened the authority of the privileged classes, and thus placed liberty on a surer foundation; has chastised the despotism of princes; has restrained the arrogance of the nobles, and has even diminished the prejudices of the clergy. In a word, it is this which has remedied the three fundamental errors of the olden time—errors which made the people, in politics too confiding, in science too credulous, in religion too intolerant" (chap. vii.).

As to "eliminating religion from human life," what religion is here meant? If the Christian religion, that is not now, if it ever were, incorporated in either personal or national life, and therefore it is useless to talk about its

elimination. The whole of the life of the nation is based upon, and guided by, agencies that are not sanctioned by the New Testament. In reference to faith in God and immortality: Suppose it were "taken away," what then? Morality would still exist; for, as the Bishop of Hereford states in his Bampton Lectures, "The principles of morality are founded in our nature, independently of any religious belief, and are, in fact, obligatory even upon the Atheist." Professor Tyndall also observes: "If I wanted a loving father, a faithful husband, an honorable neighbor, and a just citizen, I should seek him and find him in the band of Atheists." And even Dr. Chalmers, in his sermon on an "Estimate of Morality that is without Godliness," states that in the "region of Atheism the eye of the sentimentalist might expatiate among beautiful and interesting spectacles—amiable mothers shedding their graceful tears over the tomb of departed infancy—high-toned integrity maintaining itself unsullied amid allurements of corruption, benevolence plying its labors of usefulness, and patriotism earning its proud reward in the testimony of an approving people." Buddha and his followers, consisting of more than 400,000,000 of the human race, had no faith in a God, and yet his system contains a code of morals that has never been surpassed. Of course the belief in God and immortality may be a consolation to those who can honestly accept it, but others find consolation and incentives to virtue in different sources. Consolation was experienced long before the inception of the Christian religion, and it exists now where no faith in "supernatural" religion obtains. If this belief were "taken away," life would not be a blank. We should still have the beauties of nature to cheer us; the facts of science to supply our needs; the happiness of the race to inspire us to noble acts; and, finally, the love and affection of our friends to console us in the hours of affliction.

It is quite true, in our opinion, that the belief in the Christian doctrine of immortality, where it is really entertained, has an "enervating influence upon human life." The heaven it promises is depicted as a gloomy and exclusive abode, and the hell it threatens as a cruel and revolting region. According to this doctrine, there is no salvation for us except through Christ, to whom we are told we cannot go unless the Father draws us; the few only are to be saved, and the many lost. Some of us were ordained to condemnation before we were born, and while it is impossible for us to obey many of the injunctions of the New Testament, we are informed in the same book that Jesus will come "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." To those he will say: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels." These unbelievers are to be cast "into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." We cannot conceive that such teachings as these can have any other effect, upon persons whose minds are not hardened with a cruel theology, than "an enervating influence."

With the view of proving his allegation, that Scepticism and immorality are inseparable, the rev. gentleman reproduces the old fallacy, that the horrors of the great French Revolution were the result of Atheism. When will the exponents of Christianity learn from history the facts of what really happened in France at the latter part of the eighteenth century? Either their lack of knowledge, or their wilful perversion of the truth, is astounding. It is not denied that Atheism played an important part in securing for France her liberties. Still, it by no means follows that Scepticism must be held responsible for the excesses which attended the act of regeneration. Would Christians consent to hold Christianity responsible for the massacres of the Inquisition, the holocaust of St. Bartholomew's Day, the Holy Wars, or the Star Chamber? If the many fearful crimes and sanguinary sacrifices associated with these events in Christian development are not to be charged upon Christianity, why, in the name of consistency, should Atheism be blamed for the excesses of the French Revolution? No one deploras those excesses more than ourselves; but the records of history are remarkably clear in revealing as their provocation, not Atheism, but the persistent alliance of the Church and priestcraft with the political and social corruptions of the time; the fever of despair into which the Crown, the aristocracy, and the clergy had driven the people; and the interference of the allied European powers in the internal

affairs of the French people by a threatened, uncalled-for, and remorseless invasion of their territory.

Of the truth of what we here state history affords abundant proof. James Bronterre O'Brien, in his *Life of Robespierre*, says that the "honest leaders of the Revolution wished to avoid the necessity of physical force, if possible, and, when unavoidable, to employ it only for useful purposes—i.e., for advantages common to all classes." The truth is, the excesses of the French Revolution were provoked by the passion arising from the fever of national despair, aggravated by the recollections of the bitter past, and the apprehensions of an even more terrible future. Madame de Staël writes: "Misery produced ignorance, and ignorance in turn augmented misery: if, therefore, it is asked, why the people showed themselves so cruel during the Revolution, no other cause need be so assigned than that poverty and misery had produced a moral corruption.... The malignant character of the Revolution was owing to the nobility and clergy, quite as much as to the people. On whom does the guilt of the excesses lie? Had not priests educated the people which overthrew the throne?" (*Popular Encyclopedia*, vol. iii., pp. 252-3). "There is not a writer," says Richard Cobden in his justly celebrated letters of 1793 and 1853, "whether French or English, who, in recording historically the dismal catalogue of crimes which, for a period of three years, disgraced the domestic annals of France, does not attribute the ferocity of the people, and the atrocities committed by them, in a large degree to the proclamation of the Duke of Brunswick, and the subsequent invasion of the French territory." "No doubt," says Alison, "can now exist that the interference of the allies augmented the horrors and added to the duration of the Revolution. All its bloodiest excesses were committed during, or after, an alarming but unsuccessful invasion by the allied forces."

These are some of the facts from history which show who really marred what Buckle truly terms "the most important, the most complicated, and the most glorious event in history." It was not scepticism that caused the bloodshed of the Revolution, but pious God-believing men, who, at the sacrifice of honor, justice, and humanity, sought to prevent the establishment of a Republic in France.

There are other points in the rev. gentleman's sermon which we should like to notice, but the space at our command is exhausted. He winds up his sermon with some lines from Tennyson; we conclude our two articles with a quotation from the same author:—

There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

CHARLES WATTS.

THE INDIFFERENCE OF HEAVEN.

IF there is anything certain on earth, it is that no active interest in earthly concerns is exhibited by heaven. Mankind may be the object of celestial contemplation. An all-seeing Eye may be ever upon us. But the contemplation must be cold, cynical, cruel. The all-seeing Eye does not indicate its existence by an all-powerful helping Hand. Observation is unaided by assistance. The realities of life, the facts of history, are dead against any idea of Providential interference. In the past, as well as in the present, everything points—except the teachings of the Churches—to the absolute, unbroken indifference of heaven.

Victor Hugo, in the magnificent description of Waterloo which he has left us in *Cosette*, labored hard to show that the issue was decided, not by Blucher, but by God. "Was it possible," he asks, "that Napoleon should win this battle? We answer, No. Why? Because of Wellington? Because of Blucher? No. Because of God." Freethinker as he was, the great French writer had failed to divest himself of all the superstitions of childhood. Possibly he felt that, as he could not give the victory to Bonaparte, and would not give it to Wellington or to Blucher, he might as well ascribe it to a figment of the imagination. Nothing else was left to him. God is usually the last convenient resort of the believer's baffled intellect. If no reasonable solution of a problem can be found, God is brought in to obviate a confession of ignorance. As, for instance, the sapient verdict of "Visitation of God" occasionally—though less frequently now-a-days than formerly—returned by coroners' juries.

But observe how, in the end, Hugo's sober sense asserted itself in spite of inherited prejudice, theological and national. Describing the scene on the battlefield when the carnage was over, he says: "The night was serene. Not a cloud was in the zenith. What mattered it that the earth was red, the moon retained her whiteness. Such is the indifference of heaven." This does not seem quite consistent with his earlier pronouncement, for he is not speaking of the mere outward aspect of nature, as a previous allusion to heaven clearly shows. There are, however, some things permitted to men of genius. In small fry they would be intolerable. The inconsistent asseverations of pulpiteers on the subject of Providence tend only to fill rational minds with impatience and aversion. Victor Hugo, to his credit, hit on the truth at last in the pregnant phrase—the indifference of heaven. One despairs of the pulpiteers ever finding the right track even by accident.

It is, of course, open to be said that in this particular instance of Waterloo, as in other events, Providence may have been intent upon carrying out some great design, and at the same time have been indifferent to, or at any rate not deterred by, the minor and immediate results. He may have pursued some remote end in determining the issue of Waterloo, while indifferent to the wholesale butchery and misery that then and there ensued. That explanation might serve if we could, by some act of mental violence, bring ourselves to believe that there was no other or better method open to beneficent omnipotence. Victor Hugo says that God had resolved that it was about time to put an end to Bonaparte. Well, could not that have been done without all the wastefulness of Waterloo? It was surely easy enough to terminate at any point this man's existence, and that of any possible successor. There is something almost ludicrous in Hugo's picture of the waking-up of God to the enormities of Bonaparte. "Reeking blood, overcrowded cemeteries, weeping mothers," had long been pleading to the Almighty. "When the earth is suffering from a surcharge, there are mysterious moanings from the depths which the heavens hear." Then it was, and not till all this had occurred, that Bonaparte's fall was decreed. The chief question, however, is why, if heaven has such a pitying ear, and regulates mankind's concerns, Bonaparte should have been born at all, or permitted to work such wide-spread evil. At any rate, his fall seems to have been decreed a little late in the day. These, however, are points for believers to satisfy their minds on for themselves. They do not concern us who confine ourselves to the historical facts, which carry with them their own explanation, and are only obscured by the application of theological theories. Ask the man in the street, "Who won Waterloo?" and he will immediately answer: "Why, Wellington and Blucher, of course." Ask the man in the Church, and perhaps he will answer "God"; but he will have some difficulty in explaining all that is involved in the assertion.

I have been led into dwelling on this matter of Waterloo, which in itself is certainly not quite an up-to-date topic, because it affords an illustration of the difficulties that beset a belief in Providential interposition. Many modern preachers—who have given up the inspiration of the Scriptures and the old notions of creation, heaven, hell, and other trifles of that sort—still pretend to trace the finger of God in the affairs of mankind. They liberally allow themselves what Matthew Arnold calls "a license of affirmation respecting Deity." Yet, with all the advantages of unverifiable assertion, these venturesome individuals leave much—almost everything—to be explained. What they have to account for would stagger less confident, more humble, and perhaps more thoughtful minds. When they have triumphantly shown us the thank-offerings of the saved, we await their observations on the tombs of those who have perished. Also, it devolves upon them to explain why it is that, while great moral and material catastrophes have been impending or occurring, their Deity has serenely slumbered, but has been suddenly most active and alert in regard to small isolated matters in which nothing of much consequence was involved. An earthquake swallows up some scores of thousands of human beings. Is Providence asleep? No, certainly not; he is busy just then providentially arranging a much-required gift of £500 to the re-building fund, or parson's sustentation fund, of some little Bethel, for which gift he is, in company with John Jones, Esq., whose hand gave it, duly and effusively thanked.

A writer in *Blackwood's*, years ago, complained—and the complaint has been repeated to the present day; it was alluded to lately in the *Academy*—that Shakespeare was not sufficiently imbued with a belief in Providence. The pious *Blackwood* critic almost pathetically observed: "It is a serious imputation on Shakespeare that there is not to be found in his writings any habitual reverence for the Supreme Being, or permanent recognition of the superintendence of an all-wise and beneficent Providence. Expressions, indeed, having that tendency, and second in sublimity and truth to none that ever came from the human mind, are to be found scattered through his works; but it does not seem to have been the permanent direction of his thought" (*Blackwood's Magazine*, June, 1851). And the Rev. Richard Cecil, apparently perceiving the same thing, remarks in one of his discourses: "A man whose heart and taste are modelled on the Bible nauseates him [Shakespeare] in the mass, while he is enraptured and astonished by the flashes of his pre-eminent genius." These extracts appear in a very scarce little treatise on the *Religion of Shakespeare*, the recent perusal of which, in the Guildhall Library, has afforded me some entertainment.

Is it any reflection on Shakespeare that the attitude of his mind, if thus correctly described, leaned so much in the direction which is taken by modern thought?

FRANCIS NEALE.

A CONVERTED Q.C.

FOR upwards of a fortnight posters have appeared throughout Cardiff announcing a lecture by Mr. Reader Harris, Q.C., London, on Wednesday, February 16, the subject being, "How I Became an Agnostic, and how God Saved Me." As I happen to be one of those benighted individuals known as an Atheist, and as the lecture received a commendatory notice in the local press, I determined to attend it, thinking that a real live Q.C. was just the sort of person from whom one might expect to hear the weak points of Agnosticism exposed. The large gathering which assembled in the Cory Memorial Hall would best be described as a congregation, and a more fitting description of the whole affair would have been an Evangelistic service, instead of a lecture. Proceedings commenced with the singing of a hymn, and thereafter the Rev. Mr. Spurgeon, the exceedingly pious minister of Wood-street Chapel, offered up a long and fervent prayer, which included a special request that all unbelievers present might profit by the lecture, and be rescued from the terrible condition of being "without God and without hope." But God did not soften the hard hearts of the "infidels" present—and I noticed a good many—and Mr. Spurgeon must attach the blame to Mr. Harris. As a raconteur Mr. Harris might prove a great catch at a muffin worry or a Sunday-school treat; but he has yet to earn his spurs as a lecturer. Here and there, during the course of his speech, he disclosed an aptitude for misrepresentation, which was only equalled by the aptitude he displayed for blowing his own trumpet, the egotism he revealed being at times nauseous.

At the outset he defined an Agnostic as "one who believed in a great First Cause, but that *he* was *unknowable*." The Atheist, however, fared even worse than the Agnostic. "The Atheist is one," said Mr. Harris, "who says there is no God." Fancy this from an eminent Q.C.! Mr. Harris is either ignorant of the true meaning of both terms, or he wilfully misrepresented them. In any case, he misled a large part of the audience by these definitions, which is far from creditable to one occupying his position in public life. The next point worthy of notice was an assertion that he once heard Charles Bradlaugh refer in eulogistic terms to the Sermon on the Mount. The only light thrown upon this alleged utterance of Mr. Bradlaugh's was the statement that he heard it made in a hall in Finsbury. Contradicting as it does everything that Mr. Bradlaugh has written upon the Sermon on the Mount, this statement may also be dismissed as apocryphal. Indeed, the only authority Mr. Harris had for affirming that Mr. Bradlaugh was the lecturer on this particular occasion was the testimony of a man in the audience, who, like himself, had been listening to the open-air meeting which was held previous to the meeting indoors.

The rest of the lecture of the "convert" calls for very

little comment. The infantile nature of his subsequent remarks may be gathered from the following. The first incident which caused him to gradually renounce his Agnosticism happened in the United States. Having lived there for a number of years, he desired at length to return to England, and when he arrived at the port from which he intended to sail he was chagrined to find that the steamer he should have sailed in had just gone. This necessitated a fortnight's delay, and he spent the time—although, mark you, he was *still* an Agnostic—in cursing God. But Jehovah got even with him in the long run, for the steamer was wrecked and those on board perished. An old lady sitting close to me exclaimed, in melting tones, "Oh! what a pity!" when Mr. Harris mentioned his discomfiture at losing the steamer; and, in the light of what followed, I now heartily endorse the old lady's exclamation.

Of course, it was most considerate of God Almighty to drown a whole boat-load of people so that Mr. Harris's conversion from Agnosticism might ultimately be effected; and it all goes to disprove the charge of irony that has been levelled against the writer of that pious hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." This incident caused Mr. Harris much perturbation, but it was a few years later that he became converted. His conversion took place while he travelled by train from London to Ealing—Jesus Christ himself taking part in the ceremony. According to Mr. Harris, he sat alone when Christ entered the compartment, but they soon exchanged compliments and travelled together for a large part of the journey, the upshot being that he was rescued from Agnosticism, and became, and has been ever since, a Christian. The impression which this experience created caused him to travel beyond his destination, and this oversight gave the Devil a chance which he quickly availed himself of.

Immediately after Christ's departure Old Nick appeared upon the scene, and insinuated to Mr. Harris that, although he had travelled beyond the limit allowed by his ticket, it was an easy matter to defraud the railway company. Mr. Harris, however, did not yield to the Devil's solicitations—which goes to prove how thoroughly he was converted. Next we were informed that the hypocrisy of those who professed Christianity was responsible for the prevailing Agnosticism and Infidelity. These and similar puerilities constituted Mr. Harris's stock-in-trade, and they were well calculated to tickle the risibility of every Freethinker present.

A good deal of disappointment was expressed that no opportunity was given for discussion after the lecture. Despite the fact that Mr. Harris wrote to a local correspondent, a few days before the date of the lecture, that "he would be quite willing to do his best to answer written questions handed up to the platform, or to answer oral questions privately," the chairman, as soon as Mr. Harris had finished, abruptly closed the meeting, after a vote of thanks to the lecturer had been moved and seconded. Discussion was therefore burked, and, as the local press declined to insert a correction of Mr. Harris's definitions of Atheism and Agnosticism, the orthodox portion of the audience would leave the meeting quite satisfied with the definitions given. Much was made of the fact by the chairman, and also by the lecturer himself, that the lecture was delivered gratis; and, judging by the number of Freethinkers that are likely to be converted by its instrumentality, the organisers of the meeting ought to congratulate themselves that the arrangements were not otherwise. It was a most jejune attempt, especially coming as it did from a trained legal mind; and it once more demonstrated, in the most convincing fashion, the dire extremities into which the defenders of Godism are being rapidly pushed.

CELSUS.

Charles Darwin.

Alone among the prophets and teachers of triumphant creeds, he saw with his own eyes the adoption of the faith he had been the first to promulgate in all its fulness by every fresh and powerful mind of the younger race that grew up and around him. The Nestor of Evolutionism, he had lived among two successive generations of thinkers, and over the third he ruled as king. With that crowning joy of a great, a noble, and a happy life, let us leave him alone in his glory.—*Grant Allen.*

THE SON OF GOD-KNOWS-WHO.

IN Palestine there once did dwell
A meek and gentle Jew:
Christ Jesus, or, Eman-u-el—
The son of God-knows-who.

C. J., unlike each other lad
That's ever lived, till now,
Was born without an earthly dad—
But only God knows how.

Some scribes, who've "had" mankind on toast
Eclipse the Brothers Grimm:
They say Christ's father was a "ghost"—
But only God knows *him*.

A traveller was this dadless chap,
He knew Je-ru-sa-lem,
And towns which are not on the map—
For only God knows *them*.

He gave some "wrinkles," if you please,
To many a learned "pot";
At twelve years old he taught M.D.'s—
But only God knows what.

Some mighty "truths" C. J. proclaimed,
And Bible-bangers swear
Those "truths" are in the Gospels named—
But only God knows where.

Christ Jesus lived till thirty-three,
Then thought 'twas time to die;
He had himself nailed to a tree—
But only God knows why.

When dead as nails he did a dive
To hell, and made his bow
To Satan; then came back alive—
But only God knows how.

He stayed awhile—then said good-bye,
And vanished in the air:
He has a mansion in the sky—
But only God knows where.

So runs the tale of Christ the Jew,
It really is *too* rich;
Some portion of it may be true—
But only God knows which.

The Book which tells it meets with much
Respect from many a "flat";
To us, it reads like "Double Dutch"—
And only God knows *that*.

But swallow all of it complete,
Without the least ado;
And when you die, you'll go to meet
The Son, and God-knows-who!

ESS JAY BEE.

ACID DROPS.

THE Zola trial has been dragging along its weary length, but by the time we go to press it will probably be over. Nothing more disgraceful to a civilized community has ever been witnessed. The proceedings have been a perfect travesty of justice. More than ever it is obvious that Zola has displayed magnificent courage. Whatever may be the verdict of a terrorized jury, or the sentence of a grossly prejudiced judge, Zola is more than absolved by the judgment of the civilized world. In all probability we shall write at length on this subject in next week's *Freethinker*.

The *Church Times* of February 18, in "A Call to Fasting and Prayer," says: "The Confirmation statistics of nearly every diocese are lamentable." It adds: "The percentage of communicants is also far below the mark." Church attendance, too, is defective. Our High Church contemporary asks: "What can be the spiritual condition of parishes where the priests themselves admit that the average attendance on Sunday mornings is not more than 500 out of 11,000 parishioners, or of 700 out of 20,000, or of 250 out of 13,000?" And so it calls to prayer and fasting. The parsons may pray, but we much doubt whether they will fast more than usual in Lent.

Society is supposed to go into sackcloth and ashes during forty days from Ash Wednesday, in commemoration of the Lord's fasting and temptation in the wilderness. As it was a farce for God to be tempted, so Lent is kept in a farcical fashion; marriages and balls decline in number, but Sunday parties, with abundance of meat, are as common as ever.

and they sometimes develop into a nice little dance at the conclusion on Monday morn.

The custom of fish-eating during Lent is the best evidence yet adduced that the Christian religion was originated by fishermen.

A teacher in a Sunday School of an Episcopal Church said to one of her pupils: "James, what good thing—what great thing, are you willing to give up as a sacrifice during the Lenten season?" James meditated about ten seconds and responded: "I think I'll give up going to Sunday-school."

That graffito discovered by a pious professor at Rome, and declared by him to be a picture of the Crucifixion by one of the soldiers who were present, is now dismissed as a hoax amid universal laughter. The antiquaries say it is a picture of rope dancers or sailors climbing up masts, and that the words beneath, instead of referring to Jesus Christ, have really an obscene significance. Even the pious professor himself has had to give in. He now admits that the graffito is not a picture of the Crucifixion, though to cover his retreat he says there is still some mystery about it.

Father Marucci declares that the papers made too much of what he threw out as a mere supposition. He really does not know what the scratchings represent. Another evidence-bubble burst.

In some Bibles "fulfilled circa B.C. 168, 169, 170, and 171" is inserted in the margin of the eleventh chapter of Daniel, opposite verses 22-24 and 29-30. The fulfillment was supposed to have been accomplished by Antiochus Epiphanes. But all the best critics are agreed that these serve to prove that the book was only written then.

The humbug of ancient history is well exemplified by the stories about Jerusalem. The holy city used to be put in the centre of maps, and was considered one of the wonders of the world. Josephus says one million one hundred thousand Jews are computed to have perished during the siege. Yet modern topographers tell us that the whole plateau on which Jerusalem is built could not have held even a hundred thousand inhabitants, so that the holy city can never have been more than a small provincial capital.

They dealt in round numbers in ancient times. It is related in the veracious 2 Chronicles xiii. that Abijah of Judah, with four hundred thousand chosen men, fought Jerob of Israel with eight hundred thousand. "And Abijah and his people slew them with a great slaughter, so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men."

Langton Matravers parish had a police constable who is now no more. He died of ulceration of the throat, which Dr. Lys, medical officer of health, believes was brought on by kissing the police-court New Testament—a practice which he describes as "dangerous from a sanitary point of view." That poor constable had better have saluted all the pretty girls in the parish than have kissed that microbe-haunted book of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Anent Talmage's marriage to his third young wife, the *Looking-Glass* of Atlanta revives a tale told in the *New York Sun* at the time of his second espousal. Talmage was living in Philadelphia, and his household consisted of his wife, one child, and a pretty sister-in-law. One day the whole family went out boat-riding on the Schuylkill River, and the little craft was upset. As the story goes, the parson saved himself and the good-looking sister-in-law, while Mrs. Talmage and the kid went to Davy Jones's locker. That, at least, is the version that appeared in the *Sun*, garnished with vivacious comments in Mr. Dana's own peculiar style. Next Sunday Dr. Talmage announced from the pulpit that he would hold the editor personally responsible if he printed another line on the subject. The result was an onslaught in next day's *Sun* ten times worse than the original article.

While the parishioners of St. Philomenas Church, Cincinnati, were at worship, lightning struck the edifice, and played all kind of zig-zag pranks in the faces of the saints. The church was full of children at the time, but, fortunately, it was protected by a lightning-rod—the invention of an infidel—and no one was hurt.

We read in the *Catholic*, which is an anti-Catholic paper, edited by the Rev. T. Connellan, at Dublin, that "The notorious Colonel Ingersoll is finding his level at last. His day as a popular lecturer is over." At the same time we read that crowds have been following his lectures in the Southern States. The extract we reprint from the *Atlanta*

Looking-Glass will suggest how much the wish is father to the thought in the assertion of the *Catholic*.

The *Independent Pulpit*, of Texas, says: "The Germans who settle in this country readily adapt themselves to our free institutions, and make excellent citizens. Why is it that in Germany they submit to be ruled by a crazy tyrant, who, but for his imperial investiture, to which he was born as a pig is born to a sty, would not be of more consequence in the world than the average accountant in a commercial establishment?" The reason is not far to seek. The free-thinking, democratic, high-spirited, and enterprising Germans have migrated, leaving the country to those who are content to be dominated by priests and soldiers. The autocratic policy of the Emperor drives all the best Germans to other countries.

At Lancaster last week the goods of five Nonconformists at Morecambe and Lancaster, seized for the vicar's tithes, were offered for sale. No genuine bids were made, excepting in one lot, which was bought in. An anti-tithe meeting, addressed by several previous victims, was held in the street prior to the sale, and the action of those responsible for the distress was condemned.

Money rules in the Greek Catholic Church as elsewhere. At St. Nicholas, of Yonkers, N.Y., two of the trustees are liquor dealers. The pastor, Father Scotivitz, had the temerity to preach against rum. He soon got orders through Archbishop Corrigan to change for another church.

Mrs. Lena Rosenthal, of New York, got too much religion, which struck her in Abrahamic fashion. "To-day I will sacrifice your children, for God has so ordered me," said she on Sunday, February 6, to her sister, Mrs. Kuhitzi. The latter paid no attention to her. She had often talked that way, and nothing came of it. Shortly before noon Mrs. Rosenthal acted unusually affectionately towards the little ones. Their mother became anxious. The table was set, and she saw Mrs. Rosenthal pick up a keen-edged carving knife and brandish it about. Mrs. Kuhitzi took her children to the street, and got her inspired sister arrested and committed to an asylum.

Miss May Bowles, the school-teacher who was burnt to death in her bed at St. Alban's, had developed morbid religious tendencies. When dying, she said she had undergone "a trial by fire, and God was responsible." As Henri Beyle said, "God's excuse is that he does not exist."

Providence has been displaying itself in a severe drought in Australia, leading to the death of innumerable lambs. The heat has enveloped large tracks of country in bush fires.

Distress in the West of Ireland is said to be most acute, and the Government relief quite inadequate. The people have been reduced to eating their seed potatoes; so that the coming outlook is also bad.

Philpott, of the Salvation Army, Maoriland, is accused of the murder and secret burial of his mate. Boshier, another Salvationist, was lately hanged for the murder of an old couple at Pentone.

The Methodist missionary preacher, Rev. Frederick West, has been sent to Auburn Prison from Syracuse for ravishing an eight-year-old girl.

A church building was struck by lightning in Cincinnati the other day, and was literally knocked into smithereens. Now, that is by no means an uncommon occurrence. Indeed, lightning insurance on churches has become a great modern necessity, to ward off the losses Divine Providence inflicts on his own.

In view of the approach of the recent eclipse, the Emperor of China issued a proclamation appointing a period of humiliation, fasting, and prayer, shortly followed by a degree of thanksgiving, in which he said: "We have received the memorial of Wang Wen-Shao, Viceroy of Chihli, the successor of Li Hung Chang, reporting that, owing to the favor of the river gods and dragons, the Yung-Ting river and the grand canal during the last year have been singularly free from overflow and accidents. We therefore feel grateful to the gods and dragons for their protection and mercy, and therefore command that ten great Tibetan incense sticks be burned before each dragon god of the river and canal, and that the said viceroy shall send the said incense sticks to the taotai of the Yung-Ting intendency, who shall offer them at the dragon temples in our name and behalf, and in token of our gratitude."

After printing the foregoing, the *Minneapolis Tribune* inquires: "Does not such an utterance from the ruler of a great empire, which claims to possess a superior civiliza-

tion, sound ridiculous and absurd in this age of the world? We honestly think it does; but if the editor of the *Tribune* will point out wherein it differs in that respect from the annual Thanksgiving proclamation of our chief executive, we will acknowledge new light on the subject of comparative imbecility.—*Truthseeker*.

The Catholic party in Hungary has, it is said, decided to adopt anti-Semitism as a part of its program. The big Jewish money-lenders, it is expected, will retort on Catholic interests by withholding loans.

The Roman Catholic Bishop of Middlesborough says of Catholic Anti-Semitism: "Where there is provocation there will be retaliation." To an ardent religionist, the fact that a man does not accept his religion is considered provocation.

St. Ethelburga's, at Bishopgate, has witnessed another scene because Mr. Kensit, the anti-Catholic publisher, finds it good business to refuse to take water with his wine when he partakes of his Savior. But why should not that worthy be as worthily represented in Adam's ale as in the juice of the grape?

It is the *Tablet* which suggests that Mr. Kensit and his friends are really Jesuits in disguise, or they would not receive half-communion or a mutilated sacrament.

Christianity has to be toned down to suit the susceptibilities of the Japs. The old business of salvation through the blood doesn't work in lands where Buddhism, with the doctrine of Karma, has had sway. The Rev. Hizedo Yoshimura, a Japanese Universalist preacher, claims that his sect alone is making progress in Japan.

Pastor Crowe, a New York Universalist, says: "More than any thousand men in this country, Dwight L. Moody has kept alive the senseless warfare against knowledge. That sermon of his on 'The Blood' has created more infidelity than Ingersoll's lecture on 'The Gods.' He has prohibited the exercise of common sense in religion. Mr. Moody is simply one of the millions who have always associated their religious experience, their worship of God, and their hope of immortality with the black garments of superstition."

The Mayor of Newport has peculiar views concerning the Christianity of policemen. In the case of a railway man, accused of giving coal to some women, his worship stated that "he would rather believe the word of a man who was a Christian than the word of a policeman, unless he also was a Christian. Defendant had assured him that he never saw the woman there. Defendant was a member and organ-blower at Victoria Congregational Church." The Kaiser wants his soldiers to be Christians, and the mayor desires the same of his constables.

Mr. Grey Hill, a Liverpool solicitor, who owns a good part of the Mount of Olives, is, it is said, about to build an hotel. Some day they may have a cricket ground in the garden of Gethsemane.

H.M. Prison Commissioners have instructed all governors and chaplains under their control that in future a burial service is to be read at the interment of the bodies of prisoners who have suffered the full penalty of the law. They must have "the sure and blessed hope of a glorious resurrection."

In a recent lecture, R.C. Archbishop Carr (Melbourne) suggested that the souls of infants who die unbaptized are possibly kept in reserve to animate the bodies of future inhabitants of this world, when the hoary, sin-laden, and utterly-tired old planet shall have been cleaned up and generally swept and garnished for a perfectly new experiment. Truly, the Church has a hard row to hoe now-a-days when it goes into speculations like these. It used to have a comparatively easy time of it.

In earlier days man wasn't so much worried about details as he is now; he merely asked for large, robust assertion. He only knew that he came from somewhere that was so large and dark and vague that he felt scared when he thought of it, and that he went somewhere which was so eminently uncertain that his hair bristled up at the prospect. Also, he knew that he was a very short time here, and a very long time away; and, feeling a desire for some consolation, he invented a man in long gay rags to tell him (for a consideration) pleasant things about the place he was going to.

In those days he was so desperately anxious to hear something pleasant to alleviate his horrid dreams about the place he was going to that he was willing to pay almost any money for the information, and he was so anxious not

to burst up his only consolation that he never asked where the hired ghostly-comforter got his information from. Now, alas! he wants so many details for his money that the spectral supporter has hard times supplying the information.

In the simple-minded long ago everything that was superfluous, or in the road, or that couldn't be otherwise accounted for, could be disposed of in one act by saying that it would be damned; but this cheerful, off-hand, wholesale mode of getting rid of uncomfortable problems is getting out of date now. The community pays a great deal less money than it used to do, and wants a great deal more value for it. Where it used to put one shilling in the plate in return for the statement that the unbaptized infant would be lost, it now parts with three-pence, and demands that that infant shall have another show. And the Church, in a clumsy, hesitating, tentative fashion, is trying to give that infant a fresh deal accordingly.—*Sydney Bulletin*.

In a booklet on *The Scapular of our Lady of Mount Carmel*, published by Burns and Bates, the following good story is found. "Claude de Colombiere tells us of a man who had several times attempted to drown himself, but without success; he wondered what hindered him, and at last, remembering he had a scapular on, he threw it off, and then again threw himself into the water and was drowned. Thus he died in mortal sin; but he could not die till he had stripped himself of the habit in which anyone dying shall not suffer the eternal flames of hell." This yarn might compete with that of Elisha and the swimming axe.

The Catholic story is almost as good as a Puritan one which we heard as a warning in childhood. It was gravely related that some men were playing cards on Saturday night, and, unheeding the time, played on as the Sabbath approached. When the clock struck twelve, they saw that the hearts and diamonds turned black, while the clubs and spades turned red. They concluded to leave off.

The *Monthly Paper*, issued by St. Alban's Anglican Church, Holborn, has a story in the current issue which will vie with that of the Scapular. An enemy of the Christian religion is represented as placing deadly poison on the feet of a crucifix in a church, which was usually kissed by worshippers. A lady superior was about to kiss the feet when, "just as the lips of the woman approached the pedestal, and just as they were on the point of touching it, the wooden Christ suddenly raised His foot, the nail fell out of it, and the foot drew itself up towards the Cross so high that it was impossible to reach it from the ground; and thus, with bent knee, leaning against the Cross, the statue remained without motion in its original stiffness." Next, please!

A crank with cash (or is it artful Baxter, author of *Louis Napoleon, the Destined Monarch of the World?*) advertises that "the momentous prophetic epoch of the final ten years begins with Eastertide, 1898." From a reference to the *Christian Herald*, we seem to detect the fine hand of Saint Baxter, prophet and provision merchant, whose large property would have reached the poor by this time if he had accepted conditions offered to him some years ago.

Bishop Ryle, of Liverpool, has been denouncing the practice of auricular confession, which is approved and practised by Bishop King, of Lincoln, and affected by the whole of the sacerdotal party.

The "First Church of Christian Science" at Philadelphia has been refused a charter by Judge Ponnypacker, of the Court of Common Pleas, on the ground that its doctrine of faith-cure is contrary to the statutes of the State of Pennsylvania. Here is a chance for Christian Science to produce a crop of martyrs. Although holding similar views to the Peculiar People, they are hardly made of the same stuff, and they back-up the faith-cure with metaphysical jargon as well as Scripture.

A *Humanitarian* representative called on a Christian scientist leader in London for information about a lady in Kansas City who was fined for failing to report a case of diphtheria, the case being that of a child who died under Christian Scientist treatment. The London leader, however, was not to be drawn. She invited the interviewer to attend her course of lectures, the cost being twenty guineas a term! Why, that sum of money in the hands of Cashier Judas would have stopped the Crucifixion.

A correspondent of the *Rock* complains of the "low level to which Christianity has sunk" in North-west London. He is "absolutely shocked at the scanty attendance at the churches." But what is one man's poison is another man's meat. To us this news is positively gratifying. North-west London has gone up in our estimation.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, February 27, Operetta House, Chambers-street, Edinburgh: 11.30, "The Use and Abuse of the Bible"; 2.30, "Man's Origin and Destiny"; 6.30, "God and the Devil."
March 6 and 13, Athenæum Hall, London.
April 17, Huddersfield.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS.—February 27, Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, W. March 13, Camberwell; 30 and 31, Debate at Portsmouth. May 1, 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.

MUCH correspondence stands over till next week in consequence of the Editor's absence in Scotland.

G. F. DUPLAY.—If what you say is true, you waste your time in writing letters, as we do in writing articles.

G. BRADY, sending his monthly ten shillings for the Treasurer's Scheme, is afraid the late unfortunate labor war will affect the contributions all round. This correspondent adds: "Your articles on the Real Robert Burns are excellent reading. I am looking forward with pleasure to your next, which ought to be of particular interest to all Freethinkers."

J. T. CONGREVE.—*Harry Richmond* is not the best of George Meredith's novels to begin with. We recommend *Richard Feverel*. Still, if you see *nothing* in the former, it is probable that you are not born to be a Meredithian. We say this without any disrespect, open or implied. Tastes vary and judgments differ; and the only safe rule is to live and let live.

W. H. SPIVEY.—Mr. Foote has booked April 17 for Huddersfield.

H. E. GOUGH, 31 Victoria-road, Tranmere, Birkenhead, offers to co-operate with other Freethinkers to arrange to have Mr. Cohen lecture there. We hope this notice is not too late for something to be done.

NORMAN WILLISTIC.—We are pleased to note your conversion from Roman Catholicism.

H. JONES.—Major-General Forlong's *Short Texts* is published separately, but we do not know at what price. Mr. Wheeler will recur to the subject of Pagan Morality shortly. Whitaker's Almanack has ceased to give a list of sects. Many were insignificant—except to themselves. In Blunt's *Dictionary of Sects and Heretics* you will find over a hundred under the letter A alone. We note your correction that Ogden, of Mr. Watts's article, should be Ogden Taylor.

N. S. S. TREASURER'S SCHEME.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—T. Theobald, 5s.; N. Atkinson, 5s.; W. Thomson, 4s.; R. Skonce, 5s.; R. S. Ferrier, 2s.

CHILDREN'S PARTY:—Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Deakin, 10s.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Independent Pulpit—The Eagle and Serpent—Adult—Truthseeker—Progressive Thinker—Echo—Liberty—Der Arme Teufel—Free Society—Ethical World—Secular Thought—Cincinnati Free Opinion—Torch of Reason—Two Worlds—Glasgow Weekly Citizen—Daylight—Maldon Express—Isle of Man Times—Fria Tankar—People's Newspaper.

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

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

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

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

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 28 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.

THE sudden cold weather somewhat thinned Mr. Foote's morning and afternoon audiences at Glasgow on Sunday, but the hall was crowded in the evening, the lecturer being in good form, and the audience most appreciative and enthusiastic. Mr. Black occupied the chair on all three occasions. Before the evening lecture Mr. Foote "named" the chairman's baby granddaughter, Agnes Watt Black, apparently to the pleasure and satisfaction of the meeting.

We are happy to know that the Glasgow Branch is making excellent progress, and that the Committee are in the best of spirits for the work before them. With regard both to members and funds the Branch is in a better position than ever. At present, owing to the retirement of their newsagent, the Committee are running the bookstall themselves, and find it a fair source of revenue.

During the week Mr. Foote has delivered free lectures at

Motherwell and Paisley. To-day (February 27) he delivers three lectures at Edinburgh, in the Operetta House, Chambers-street. This is a large place, centrally situated, and no doubt the local friends will do their best to fill it.

Mr. Foote's lecture at Motherwell on Monday was delivered in the handsome new Co-operative Hall, which is considerably larger than the Town Hall, in which the lectures there have been held hitherto. There was a capital audience, and the lecture was very warmly applauded. No discussion was forthcoming, though Mr. Black, the chairman, earnestly invited it; but a well-meaning Christian put some rather confused questions, which moved the audience to laughter.

The Freethought cause is doing fairly well at Motherwell. The local N. S. S. Branch is progressing, though it never was as strong as it was represented by a certain "infidel-slayer," who lies as naturally as a cat laps milk. This person stated that he had gone to Motherwell and killed the N. S. S. Branch, which numbered a thousand members and had an M.P. for its president! This person seems to think that Secularists are killed as easily as Samson's Philistines, and with the same weapon.

Mr. Charles Watts had a very intelligent audience last Sunday evening to hear his lecture upon "Mrs. Besant's New Position on Theosophy and Spiritualism." Evidently all present were highly interested, and the applause throughout was frequent and hearty. There was no discussion, but a few pertinent questions were asked. Mr. Harry Brown made an excellent chairman.

Mr. Watts again occupies the platform at the Athenæum Hall this evening, Sunday, February 27, taking for his subject "The Christian Sunday Crusade." This question is of some importance at the present time, when professed Christians are united for the purpose of endeavoring to deprive the people of the free use of the Sunday, and making the day one of gloom and depression.

To-day, Sunday, February 27, is Mr. Charles Watts's birthday, he having reached his sixty-third year. At the age of seventeen he joined the Freethought movement, and at twenty-three he commenced active work in the Secular cause. He has thus devoted forty years in the endeavour to destroy superstition and to vindicate the right of mental freedom. After his lecture this evening Mr. Watts will say a few words as to his past and future career.

Our South London friends will do well to visit the Camberwell Hall to-day (February 27), and hear Mr. Chilperic Edwards. We can promise them they will listen to an instructive, interesting, and even humorous lecture, well delivered.

Those who delight in contributing towards the enjoyment of the young should send in their subscriptions without delay for the Children's Entertainment, for which arrangements are being made. The secretaries, or Mr. Hartmann, the treasurer, 29 Gubyon-avenue, Herne Hill, will be happy to receive subscriptions. Miss Vance, 376 Strand, will send collecting-cards to friends who apply for same.

The *Saturday Weekly Citizen*, of Glasgow, always has some choice literary extracts and some good original articles. From one of the latter, in the number for February 19, we clip the following: "Christianity, although supported by vested interests and buttressed by numerous clear-cut dogmas, has, especially within the last half century, given evidence of many radical alterations. Dogmas once accepted have been questioned, altered, rejected; and several of the old principles of the religion of Christendom have received a new interpretation."

M. Maurice Vernes presided last week at a meeting of the Société des Etudes Juives, at Paris, and took the opportunity of saying, in the face of anti-Jewish agitation, that, although he could no longer speak as a Christian, as a philosopher and a Freethinker he reprobated with all his force the campaign which some miscreants had undertaken against Judaism, with the applause of an ignorant and deluded public and the connivance of the representatives of an obsolete theocracy.

According to the character-sketch in the *Review of Reviews*, Mr. John Burns counts the greatest poet of Scotland among his ancestors; and "in politics and in religion, in sentiment and in conviction, John Burns has not strayed far from the ideas of the National Bard." John's voice was first trained in the choir of Battersea Parish Church, and Mr. Stead seems to hope it will some day be heard again in a Christian sanctuary. We should like to see John's smile on reading this passage.

Three men have most influenced John Burns—Paine,

Owen, and Cobbett. Two of these were Freethinkers, one even an Atheist. Mr. Stead, of course, tries to minimize John Burns's Freethought, but has to confess that he is "not a religious man in the conventional sense of the term, being a member of no church or chapel."

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL AT SHORT RANGE.

OFFHAND PEN-PICTURE OF THE GREAT AGNOSTIC ORATOR.

COLONEL ROBERT G. INGERSOLL spent last Wednesday in his rooms at the Kimball. He was supposed to be resting after his lecture, and before proceeding to Savannah; but, as a matter of fact, he put in the entire day receiving callers, and stemming an almost uninterrupted tide of talk, and the unflagging good humor and vivacity with which he bore himself was the best of evidence that the years have touched him lightly.

Leaning across the casement of a casual conversation, the great Agnostic is the most charming man in the world. He impresses one instantly with a sense of great simplicity and great power, and he has a fashion of rounding up his sentences with an epigrammatic twist that is generally so apt as to be startling. Yet his language is extremely plain. No man with a big vocabulary at his elbow was ever less addicted to colloquial sesquipedality. Occasionally he touches up a sentence with a little picturesque profanity. But his oaths are humorous, not denunciatory. When he unleashes his withering verbal lightning he never swears.

As Colonel Ingersoll settled himself in the corner of his sofa, Wednesday evening, to have a final chat with a few privileged callers, he looked the picture of health and contentment. His skin is still smooth, his eyes are bright and clear, and there is none of the tremulous uncertainty that usually characterizes age, in any of his movements. On the contrary, his hand, which he frequently extended in slight gesticulation, was as steady as iron. He declared that he had never felt better.

Mrs. Ingersoll is accompanying the Colonel on his southern trip. She is a tall, erect woman, with a well-rounded figure and a dark, handsome face, lit by kindly eyes. The little, unconscious evidences of affectionate regard that are continually passing between herself and her husband are beautiful to witness. She seemed eager to draw him out, to lead him to say bright things, and pleased when she succeeded. Their home life must be perfect.

Colonel Ingersoll wears heavy spectacles in gold frames. They are the kind of spectacles that have little moon-shaped bits of a different lens let in at the bottom. When he talks he takes them off and polishes them mechanically while he fixes his listeners with his small, bright eyes. He smiles often, and now and then he lets the smile develop into a quaint, chuckling laugh that is thoroughly infectious. This look, smile, and laugh cut so important a figure in his conversation, and lend such meaning to much that he says, that any report would be necessarily greatly lacking in color. But his most desultory talk overflows and scintillates with bits too good to be lost. Here are a few, a very few, of the characteristic things he said in an hour's chat, in which the verbal shuttlecock flew all the way from paint to politics:—

Party feeling is like a river—the swifter it runs the crookeder it is.

Horace was the typical clubman of his day, and I guess he was a devilish good fellow; but he never struck me as being a great poet. Phyllis and Chloe, and all those girls make me—oh! well, tired.

Coming down the ages, Rembrandt is the first real painter we strike.

Cicero must have been a splendid orator. He was a lord of language. But I never could understand how the mischief Demosthenes acquired his reputation.

By the way, Danton was an orator, too, as sure as you live!

Did you ever notice that political parties always become Conservative when they acquire responsibilities? Why, if the greenbackers had obtained control back in the '70's, they wouldn't have issued any greenbacks—not one!

No, and the Pops wouldn't make any trouble either if they should happen to get in.

Parties are like fellows you meet—they're always telling what they're going to do, and when they get the chance they don't do it.

Turner's "Slave Ship" reminded me of a chap that had spilt a bucket of paint and then sat in it.

The only distinction I make is between clean men and dirty men.

Lincoln was a mighty ugly man until you looked at him a while.

Funny? Why, he could pluck a joke from the jaws of death!

I don't like elocution. What right has a fellow to punch you in the ribs with an adjective?

Gladstone never impressed me as being a great intellectual force.

Yes, the aristocracy is bound to rule. I mean the aristocracy of brains, virtue, breeding, wealth, and culture.

To me, Corot is the greatest of painters; but maybe that's due to some mental twist of mine.

There oughtn't to be any figures in landscape painting. They seem like an impertinence.

There's more division of opinion among the ignorant than there is among the intelligent. That's queer, but it's true.

Yes, I like Millet, but oh! how fearfully he pictures the brutalizing and dehumanizing effect of poverty. It's awful! awful! Those hideous, haunting peasants of his—I wouldn't like to have one of 'em around the house.

There's nothing in ancient literature to compare to the modern—not a thing.

The same is true of painting, but not of sculpture. The Greeks, well—

Diderot was the blametest talker that ever was. Voltaire went to see him in his old age. They had never met before, and, as usual, Diderot did all the talking. When Voltaire went away, he was asked what he thought of him, and said: "He's a great man, a very great man; but he has no genius for dialogue."

That the world should suffer from over-production, and suffer at the same time for want of the things produced, is a hideous paradox which we don't seem able to unravel.

—Atlanta Looking-Glass.

THE DEIST'S GOD.

THE Theist exclaims: "Be careful not to worship the ferocious and strange God of theology; mine is much wiser and better. He is the father of men; he is the mildest of sovereigns; it is he who fills the universe with his benefactions!" But I will tell him, do you not see that everything in this world contradicts the good qualities which you attribute to your God? In the numerous family of this mild Father I see but unfortunate ones. Under the empire of this just Sovereign I see crime victorious and virtue in distress. Among these benefactions, which you boast of, and which your enthusiasm alone sees, I see a multitude of evils of all kinds, upon which you obstinately close your eyes. Compelled to acknowledge that your good God, in contradiction with himself, distributes with the same hand good and evil, you will find yourself obliged, in order to justify him, to send me, as the priests would, to the other life. Invent, then, another God than the one of theology, because your God is as contradictory as its God is. A good God who does evil or permits it to be done, a God full of equity and in an empire where innocence is so often oppressed; a perfect God who produces but imperfect and wretched works; such a God and his conduct, are they not as great mysteries as that of the incarnation? You blush, you say, for your fellow beings who are persuaded that the God of the universe could change himself into a man and die upon a cross in a corner of Asia. You consider the ineffable mystery of the Trinity very absurd. Nothing appears more ridiculous to you than a God who changes himself into bread, and who is eaten every day in a thousand different places.

Well! are all these mysteries any more shocking to reason than a God who punishes and rewards men's actions? Man, according to your views, is he free or not? In either case your God, if he has the shadow of justice, can neither punish him nor reward him. If man is free, it is God who made him free to act or not to act. It is God, then, who

is the primitive cause of all his actions; in punishing man for his faults, he would punish him for having done that which he gave him the liberty to do. If man is not free to act otherwise than he does, would not God be the most unjust of beings to punish him for the faults which he could not help committing? Many persons are struck with the detail of absurdities with which all religions of the world are filled; but they have not the courage to seek for the source whence these absurdities necessarily sprung. They do not see that a God full of contradictions, of oddities, of incompatible qualities, either inflaming or nursing the imagination of men, could create but a long line of idle fancies.

—Jean Meslier.

THE BIBLE UP TO DATE.

SOME time ago Mr. W. T. Stead proposed, with a bevy of sweet girl graduates, to translate the New Testament from what Mr. Swinburne called canine Greek into vernacular English. Perhaps the girls could not be got, perhaps Julia stood in the way, or perhaps that good man's advisers saw that such a version would vulgarize the gospel and take the gilt off the gingerbread fetish. Anyway, it seems that Mr. Stead's project has fallen through; but the idea was taken up, and we hear is being carried out, by a Mr. Howard Swan, who is said to be putting the whole of the Bible into "current language," in order to bring it home to the business and the bosoms of average Britishers. We wish Mr. Swan all joy of his undertaking, although the idea is not exactly original.

In 1768 Dr. E. Harwood, of Bristol, put out *A Liberal Translation of the New Testament, being an Attempt to Translate the Sacred Writings with the same Freedom, Spirit, and Elegance with which other English Translations from the Greek Classics have Lately been Executed*. A few specimens of Dr. Harwood's elegant execution will suffice. The father of the Prodigal Son is described as "a gentleman of splendid family." The "three tabernacles" which Peter proposed to raise on the Mount of Transfiguration were not good enough for Dr. Harwood, who could evidently read his title clear to a mansion, for he makes the Apostle say, "Oh, Sir! what a delectable residence we might fix here." Instead of "We shall not all die, but we shall all be changed," he gives us this portentous statement: "We shall not all pay the common debt of nature, but we shall, by a soft transition, be changed from mortality to immortality." The warning to the Laodicean Church in the book of Revelation Dr. Harwood improves into: "Since, therefore, you are now in a state of lukewarmness, a disagreeable medium between the two extremes, I will, in no long time, eject you from My heart with fastidious contempt." This is vastly more polite than the threat to "spue thee out of My mouth," which was good enough for the makers of the Authorized Version, who lived in a coarse and unpolished age.

In relating the story of the virgin birth in the first chapter of Matthew, the fastidious Dr. Harwood has: "When Joseph awoke he acted according to the direction of the angel and took her to wife, but refrained from all conjugal embraces till her delivery." We hope that when Mr. Swan deals with such passages he will reform them altogether.

In 1888 Edward Bilton issued *The Four Gospels*, translated into modern English. This is mainly a correction of grammar and of obsolete phrases such as "it came to pass." He alters the parable of the unjust steward into "a certain landlord who was accused of having squandered his rents and mismanaged his estate." For he confesses in his preface: "This parable is notoriously obscure, the most evident explanation being quite inconsistent with morality." So Mr. Bilton kindly endeavored to insert the morality which is wholly wanting in the Gospel. This is the sort of revision that is wanting. Cassell's, some time ago, issued a Child's Bible with all the smut omitted; and now, to bring the thing properly up to date, there should be retained only as much as accords with modern sentiment. Thus the barbarous old fetish book would become small by degrees and beautifully less.

Some few years ago Uncle Benjamin gave, in our columns, the revision by a temperance girl-graduate of

the opening part of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Saint John:—

"On the third day it happened that a wedding was celebrated at Cana, in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was one of the company. Jesus and his followers got also to be invited to the nuptial entertainment, and they drank up all the wine set before them. So his mother said to him: 'Son, the wine is exhausted.' 'Woman,' he replied to her, 'don't dictate; what's that to thee or me?—my time has not yet arrived.' His mother, speaking to the waiters, said: 'Do whatever he chooses to tell you.' Now there were six stone jars ready for use, in accordance with the customs of the Jews, capable of holding two or three firkins apiece. Jesus said to them: 'Fill up the jars.' And they filled them right up to the brim. And he said to them: 'Now draw it out and take it to the master of the revels.' And when the master of the revels tasted the wine that had become water, while he knew nothing about it, he called jocularly to the bridegroom: 'People generally put forward their best wine first, and then, when folks have become tipsy, give inferior stuff. But you have kept the proper stuff till now.' And when they had swallowed the water, fancying it was wine, they got sobered down and believed on him."

We hope that Mr. Howard Swan, in carrying out his task, will use an equally free hand. LUCIANUS.

HUGH PRICE HUGHES ON JOHN McNEILL.

THE Apostle of St. James's Hall says "London is the wickedest city in the world." I will not dispute the statement with so great an authority on wickedness as H. P. H. He knows; I don't. This does not say much for the success of the many various efforts put forth by the sky-pilots to convert this sin-stricken city. Showman Booth has been at it nearly thirty years. Moody and Sankey had a good try. Brother Hughes has been in business ten years at Piccadilly. Joseph Parkor has had a hand at it. And now the combined Churches are running John McNeill. Moody wouldn't come. Perhaps he has given us up as hopeless. So, failing the Yankee, they have fallen back on the Scotchman.

Trade is rather bad in the Heavenly line just now; people are getting tired of church and chapel; religion is just a trifle dull. So, to wake things up a bit, the self-styled "Free" Churches have got hold of a special line in the shape of "John McNeill," hoping that he will be able to make things look up. The other Sunday afternoon John was to have appeared at St. James's Hall; but he had a rest. So the Rev. H. P. H. filled the bill. He discoursed (being evidently hard up for a subject) on

"WHY JOHN McNEILL DRAWS."

Now, if Mr. Hughes had told us *who* John McNeill draws, it would have been more to the point. How many non-church-goers; how many Secularists, Socialists, Free-thinkers, Jews, labour leaders; how many politicians, lawyers, editors, authors, does he get hold of? Granted he can draw a crowd, but if 80 per cent. of that crowd are regular church-goers, where is the benefit of his work? Let him contest G. W. Foote, Charles Watts, Robert Blatchford, Tom Mann, John Burns, and I shall then begin to believe in the quality of his work.

First of all, says Mr. Hughes, J. M. draws because he is J. M. Really! Now I should actually have thought he would have drawn better if he had come as, say, the angel Gabriel. What a sensational headline:—

GREAT METROPOLITAN MISSION BY GABRIEL THE FIRST.

SPECIAL DEPUTATION FROM HEAVEN.

Mr. Hughes's second reason was "the old-fashioned Gospel." But if "the old-fashioned Gospel" has such marvellous drawing power, why on earth doesn't H. P. H. stick to it at St. James's Hall? Why does he advertise catchy subjects and employ a military band? No one knows better than Mr. Hughes that the old-fashioned Gospel is out of date. Hell has cooled down, and the "blood" has dried up considerably, this last few years. Now anything is preached and practised except the "old-fashioned Gospel."

Thirdly, says Mr. Hughes—and he adds that this is the most important reason (more important than the old-fashioned Gospel)—John draws because he is backed up by the whole of the Evangelical Free Churches. That is, this mission is run by a sort of trade combination. All the churches are suffering alike; so they club together, and hope they will all reap some of the benefit. Mr. Hughes gives his case away by his last reason. If John McNeill has got the churches behind him, they will find him an

audience. The amusing part of it is that they will not see that they are packing the meetings, and not the outsiders. Ah, well, our friends love delusions. After all, it is a staple part of the business. If they dealt only in realities, they might shut up shop at once. So, mainly for the sake of £ s. d., they keep the good old game going. ALERT.

BOOK CHAT.

THE proposal to celebrate the Jubilee of "The Men of 'Forty-eight" reminds us of the stirring lines by Gerald Massey:—

They rose in Freedom's rare sunrise,
Like Giants roused from wine;
And in their hearts and in their eyes
The God leaped up divine!
Their souls flashed out, naked as swords
Unsheathed for fiery fate:
Strength went like battle with their words—
The men of 'Forty-eight.
Hurrah
For the men of 'Forty-eight.

The Kings have got their Crown again,
And blood-red revel cup;
They've bound the Titan down again,
And heaped his grave-mound up.
But still he lives, though buried 'neath
The mountain—lies in wait,
Heart-stifled heaves and tries to breathe
The breath of 'Forty-eight.
Hurrah
For the men of 'Forty-eight.

* * *

By the way, it is said that John Kells Ingram, the author of "The Men of 'Ninety-eight," with its rather monotonous "true men, like you, men," is now a staunch Conservative opposed to Home Rule, and detesting, above all things, to be reminded that he ever wrote a revolutionary poem. Gerald Massey, himself a "Man of 'Forty-eight," is of very different calibre, and his latest lyrics have the same Radical note as his earlier ones.

* * *

We wonder if Massey's lines on Annie Besant ever reached that lady. They do not seem to have produced much effect, but they may linger and work. Here are the last stanzas:—

Now, there's woe and wail for her,
True hearts ache and ail for her,
Poor wee faces pale for her.
And the deeds she might have done,
Not as Sophist, but as one
Worker in a Million.

Ignis Fatui of the fog,
Lured and led her all agog
Into the Blavatsky Bog.

Cursed fraud that could entice
Her to that great Sacrifice!
Priceless SOLD without her price.

Is she dreaming? Let us make
One more call for Love's dear sake;
Annie Besant, won't you wake

* * *

Frank Podmore, W.I.A., in his *Studies in Psychical Research*, has some severe slaps at Blavatskyites. He concludes a chapter thereon by saying: "It would be rash to prophesy even now—notwithstanding all the damning evidence of fraud, notwithstanding the loss of the unique personality of the foundress—that the movement is near dissolution. To most men [and women] who have given themselves over to a false belief there comes a time when the ears are deaf and the eyes are closed and the heart is hardened, so that they will not believe even the testimony of the false prophet against himself. For are there not, as we have seen, black magicians and other powers of darkness who may transform themselves into the likeness of angels of light? With such men, and against such a contention, argument is no longer even possible."

* * *

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace's *Vaccination a Delusion: Its Penal Enforcement a Crime*, just published by Swan Sonnenschein and Co. (1s.), will certainly increase the dissatisfaction with the existing law. Dr. Wallace contends that in all previous legislation people have been misled by facts and figures that are untrue, and by promises that have been unfulfilled. Much of the evidence adduced for vaccination he shows is worthless, and from the statistics of small-pox mortality, whether of England, Scotland, and Ireland, of the best vaccinated continental States, of unvaccinated Leicester, or of the re-vaccinated army and navy, maintains the absolute inability of vaccination. A large number of diagrams accompany the volume. A strong case is made out by putting the unprotected population of Leicester against the specially-protected army and navy. Dr. Wallace's facts and figures go to show that infantile

mortality and the general death-rate are increased by vaccination. Dr. Wallace writes with the earnestness and solemnity warranted by the subject, and he certainly gives the medical profession something to tackle.

* * *

Dr. Russel Wallace's *Vaccination a Delusion* amounts to an indictment of the entire medical profession as upholding a practice which demonstrably increases infant mortality by various painful and often lingering diseases, while itself demonstrably of no efficacy to guard against disease. His own conclusion is that vaccination "has never saved a single life, but that it has been the cause of so much disease, so many deaths, such a vast amount of utterly needless and altogether undeserved suffering that it will be classed by the coming generations among the greatest errors of an ignorant and prejudiced age, and its penal enforcement the foulest blot on the generally beneficent course of legislation during our century." All we here say is, Dr. Wallace's indictment demands an answer.

* * *

Swan Sonnenschein & Co. will issue in April a new work by Dr. A. R. Wallace, entitled *The Wonderful Century: Its Successes and Failures*. While showing that our century is altogether unique, deserving rather to be compared with the whole preceding historical period than with the previous century, he argues that its advances are almost solely material and intellectual, and very imperfect. The work will discuss the intellectual and moral failures of the century, which it is contended are as conspicuous and deplorable as its successes are admirable and unprecedented. We hope Dr. Wallace will have a word to say on the Blasphemy Laws.

* * *

The subject of Dr. Wallace's forthcoming book produces a few thoughts beforehand. What is more certain than that material triumphs aid moral ones? Inter-communication, the great triumph of the century, has broken down insular prejudices and international hatreds. Gas and electric lights have diminished robbery; sanitary science has extended life. Science is breaking down superstition, and, as the cruel creeds decay, society becomes more humane even in its punishment. The overthrow of Bibliolatry has meant the overthrow of the slave-trade and of the subjection of women.

* * *

Major-General Forlong has issued a small edition of his chapter giving *Short Texts in Faiths and Philosophies*. It has a portrait of the author, and is dedicated to his wife.

* * *

There were upwards of a hundred competitors for the prizes of £50, £30, and £20 respectively for the three best essays on the cause and cure of the leakage in Methodism. The accredited sky-pilots came out atop. The first prize was awarded to the Rev. R. Starling Boulter, of Stainland; second prize, the Rev. James Feather, of Wolverhampton; third prize, divided between the Rev. T. F. Rawlings, of Swansea, and Charles O. Eldridge, B.A., of Bolton.

* * *

Chats with Pioneers of Modern Thought, by F. J. Gould (Watts & Co.; 2s. 6d.), has been issued this week. The book is well got up, and will be noticed more at length shortly.

Obituary.

DESPITE the extreme cold which prevailed on Saturday afternoon last, a fairly representative gathering of London Freethinkers assembled round the grave of Mr. Frederick Haslam at the Manor Park Cemetery, to pay their last sad respects to the deceased lecturer, and to show their sympathy with his sorrowing widow. Many lady workers in our movement graced the sorrowful assemblage with their presence. A most appropriate discourse by Mr. George Standing concluded the proceedings. Mr. Haslam was sixty-four years of age. During the major part of his life he was a most active worker in the London open-air Secular propaganda, upon the platforms of which his services were always most highly appreciated, and where, for a long time to come, the loss our party has sustained through his demise will be most keenly felt and deplored. It is almost needless to add that Mr. Haslam died as he had lived—a consistent Freethinker.—T. J. THURLOW.

DR. GERHEAD CHRISTIAN PAOLI, physician and Freethinker, died in Chicago, January 30, aged eighty-two years. He was born at Trondjem, Norway, and began the practice of medicine at Stockholm. Old Bull advised him to go to London, and he did so in 1843, remaining there until 1844, when he came to the United States. He lived in Ohio for a time, and during his residence in the Buckeye State he took an active part in politics. He removed to Chicago in 1855, and was credited with being the first doctor to champion the rights of women. He asserted that woman should be allowed to enter the medical profession. He also wrote against spiritism,

CORRESPONDENCE.

FREETHOUGHT SOCIALS.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I think it would be well if Freethinkers occasionally compared notes as to methods of propaganda. I find a conflict of opinion as to the introduction of the social element. Now if we look at the Churches, which alone contrive to get hold of the masses, we shall, I think, find that, whether Salvationists, Methodists, or Catholics, they appeal not to dry reason, but to love of fervor and excitement. The lives of toilers are so monotonous that church or chapel comes as a break. If we want our movement sustained by women and children, I think we should go in more for festivities, have a little *conversazione* after the lectures, and an occasional tea, or at least concert and dance, as they do with much success at Camberwell. It is safe to say that in every large town there are plenty of people anxious for wholesome Sunday recreation, and who might become workers in the Secular cause if they found an introduction to Freethinking neighbors at such assemblies. Hoping to elicit other opinions.

J. E. B.

THE TREATMENT OF NATIVE RACES.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Some surprise has been expressed that, in the resolution recently passed at the public meeting called by the Humanitarian League in London to discuss the "Rights and Wrongs of Native Races," no reference was made to the atrocious cruelty of the Englishman, Anderson, lately sentenced in Australia to penal servitude for life for the murder of an aboriginal called "Spider," and two other aborigines, "Biddy" and "Polly" (i.e., they were flogged with such violence with a knotted rope that they died).

Will you allow me to state that the significant reason for this omission was that such cases, though not often so notorious, are unfortunately far from uncommon, and therefore it was felt that to lay particular stress on one of them would be to weaken, rather than strengthen, the indictment brought against our countrymen for their treatment of natives? The *St. James's Gazette* has reiterated the assertion that this is an exceptional case. In this connection I beg leave to quote an interesting development brought by this week's Australian mail. In summing-up strongly against Anderson, Chief-Justice Onslow made incidental reference to a case he had tried eighteen months previously, when a jury refused to convict a white man for having flogged a native to death. The station on which the outrage took place belonged to a Minister of the Crown, and the sensational statement is made that the Government dared not interfere in the matter. I daresay Mr. H. R. Fox Bourne, the secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society, has kept a record of many such cases.

The Criminal Law Reform Department of the Humanitarian League has often had occasion to criticise the severity of judges in straining the law against the accused; but in the Anderson case we have to thank the judge for justly branding, as an atrocious crime, conduct which appears to have been condoned by the race prejudice of the district in which the incident occurred.

JOSEPH COLLINSON.

A CLERGY CENSUS.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Speaking last week at a political festive gathering, the Rev. Canon Whitehead, vicar of St. Peter's, Thanet, made the somewhat astounding assertion that, ".....if the opinion of the world were taken, it would be overwhelmingly in favor of the way in which the clergy did their work, rather than in any hostile demonstration against them." Now, this strikes me as rather a "tall" yarn from a gentleman of the venerable Canon's experience, but of course his audience swallowed it as readily as they did the wine and other good things provided, and signified their appreciation of the remark by vociferously cheering the Canon and his satellites. Surely the rev. gentleman, with all his profound learning, should know that if it were possible to take the opinion of the universe on the subject of Christianity, and the manner in which it is taught—or, rather, crammed down the throats of the credulous—the consensus would be overwhelmingly against every form of Christianity and its professors. It is such statements as these, made by those who are credited with wisdom and learning, that are so grossly misleading, and give to Christianity that false coloring with which it is so gorgeously painted. It is to be hoped that the appearance of the Canon's assertion in the Press recalled to him, in his less excited moments, the error which he committed.

A. I.

FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

I WILLINGLY concede to every man what I claim for myself—the freest range of thought and expression—and am perfectly indifferent whether the sentiments of others on speculative subjects coincide with or differ from my own. Instead of wishing or expecting that uniformity of opinion should be established, I am convinced that it is neither practicable nor desirable; that varieties of thought are as numerous, and as strongly marked, and as irreducible to one standard, as those of bodily form; and that to quarrel with one who thinks differently from ourselves would be no less unreasonable than to be angry with him for having features unlike our own.—*Professor Lawrence, "Lectures on Man."*

Belief is by many looked upon as a thing of choice, as if men could believe what they please. Every man may be convinced within himself that believing is not a thing of choice. What to my understanding is difficult and obscure cannot be made otherwise to me by another's saying that it is clear and easy to him.—*Mandeville's "Free Thoughts."*

True progress is a complete development of the individual, comprehending the improvement of the physical being in strength, beauty, grace, longevity, material enrichment, and increase of knowledge—in fine, the perfecting of character: the becoming more noble, more generous, and more devoted.—*Elisé Reclus.*

If any human soul at all
Must die the second death, must fall
Into that gulf of quenchless flame
Which keeps its victims still the same,
Unpurified as unconsumed,
To everlasting torments doomed;
Then I give God my scorn and hate,
And, turning back from heaven's gate
(Suppose me got there!), bow Adieu!
Almighty Devil damn me too.

—James Thomson.

There can be no doubt that the idea of damnation is anything but disagreeable to some people. It gives them a kind of gloomy consequence in their own eyes. It must be something particular, they think, or God would hardly think it worth his while to torment us for ever.—*George Borrow.*

I know of but one lamp by which to guide my feet, and that is the lamp of experience.—*Patrick Henry.*

PROFANE JOKES.

MR. PERKINS, visiting his wife's relatives in Maine, attended church one Sunday. The sermon was long, and Perkins went to sleep. The sermon came to an end at last, but Perkins slept peacefully on. The deacons began to take up the collection. When the hat was passed to Perkins, his wife nudged him, and Perkins sat up with a start. Gazing in a bewildered manner at the extended hat, and then at the deacon, he shook his head sleepily, and said: "That isn't my hat. Mine had a blue lining."

A newly-married couple found themselves in a railway carriage with only one fellow passenger, who appeared to sleep profoundly. Soon the lady commenced to call her young husband all the endearing names that natural history can supply. The traveller roused up, begged the lady to call her partner a "Noah's Ark" at once, and allow him to sleep quietly.

A sergeant at Melbourne police head-quarters received a wire from an Irish policeman: "Please excuse from duty; suffering from eternal pain." When on duty the next day the sergeant playfully pointed out Hooligan's mistake. "Divil a mistake was in it at all! 'Twas pains in me lower raggens I had, right enough!"

Sky-pilot (to bullocky)—"Oh, my good man, it's—ah—fearful to hear you—ah—taking holy names in vain." Bullocky (just after offering up a prayer)—"Lord bless you, mister, 'tain't in vain. The cows wouldn't go a yard without it."

Salvationist (to a Freethinker)—"My dear brother, I pray to God for you every night, and ask him to give you a new heart." Freethinker—"It's my liver that is out of order. If he has a good liver to spare, ask him to send it on at once."

Husband—"My dear, that is a long motto you are working." Wife—"Yes, John." (He reads on it: "While the lamp holds out to burn, the vilest sinner may return.") "Is it to be hung in the vestibule of the church, my dear?" "No, John; I'll hang it on the chandelier in the hall."

Mr. Jones—"Why is it that the ladies of a congregation always present the pastor with embroidered slippers and braces?" Mrs. J.—"The braces are to keep up his trousers, so that the embroidered slippers can be seen. How stupid you are."

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, O. Watts, "The Christian Sunday Crusade."

BRADLAUGH CLUB AND INSTITUTE (36 Newington Green-road, Ball's Pond): 7.15, E. A. Webb, "The Impressions of an Ishmaelite"; 8.30, Adjourned annual meeting, followed by special general meeting, re discontinuance of Sunday evening lectures.

CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, Chilperic Edwards, "The Book of Jonah."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Surrey Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road, S.E.): 11.15, Discussion, opened by J. Hyder, "The Ethics of Land Nationalization"; 7, Stanton Ooit, "Shakespeare."

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall): 11.15, Stanton Ooit, "Shakespeare's Influence."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

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

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM (Bristol-street Board School): Stanley Jones—11, "Buddhism and Christianity"; 3, "Miracles and Medicine"; 7, "Evolution and Re-action."

CARLTON AND NETHERFIELD: Wednesday, March 2, H. P. Ward, "From Wesleyan Pulpit to Secular Platform." March 7, W. Heaford, "The Story of Jesus: Is it True?"

CHATRAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 7, An entertainment.

DERBY (Pollicott's Dining Rooms, Market-place): 7, Mr. Whitney, A reading.

EDINBURGH (Operetta House, Chambers-street): G. W. Foote—11.30, "The Use and Abuse of the Bible"; 2.30, "Man's Origin and Destiny"; 6.30, "God and the Devil."

GLASGOW (Lecture Hall, Brunswick-street): 12, Discussion class—Mr. Chalmers; 6.30, A. G. Nostick, "The History of a Grain of Sand." With lantern illustrations.

HUDDERSFIELD (Friendly and Trades' Societies' Hall, Northumberland-street): Tuesday evening, March 1, at 7.45, H. P. Ward, "From Wesleyan Pulpit to Secular Platform."

HULL (Cobden Hall, Storey-street): 7, C. Hilditch, "The Dismal Science."

LEICESTER SECULAR HALL (Humberstone Gate): 6.30, H. Snell, "Rome: Its History and its Religions." With limelight illustrations.

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): C. Cohen—3, "Crime and Criminals"; 7, "The Case against Christianity."

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): H. P. Ward—11, "A Plea for Secularism"; 3, "The Greatest Lie in the World"; 6.30, "Why I Dare not be a Christian."

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE (Byker Social Club, corner of Raby and Parker-streets): 7, R. Mitchell, "The Birth of Jesus."

PLYMOUTH (Democratic Club, Whimble-street): 7, Meeting of members.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Lantern illustration of Views in Sunny Italy, with descriptive lecture.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7, R. Chapman, "The Legitimation League."

Lecturers' Engagements.

O. COHEN, 12 Merchant-street, Bow-road, London.—February 27, Liverpool. March 6, Liverpool.

H. PERCY WARD, 6 Wawne Grove, Alexandra-road, Hull.—February 27, Manchester. March 1, Huddersfield; 6 to 11, Mission at Derby; 13, Birmingham; 20 and 21, Sheffield. April 17, Glasgow.

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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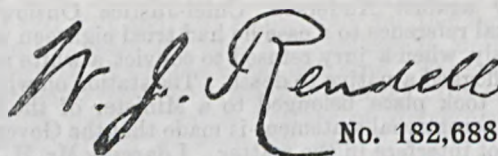
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