

Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

PECULIAR PEOPLE.

AN OPEN LETTER
TO
Mr. Justice Wills.

SIR,—You have sentenced an honest man to four months' imprisonment, and added to it the degradation of hard labor. This man is a Christian. He is a member of the Peculiar People, whose chief peculiarity seems to be their simple sincerity. I am not aware that he has committed any other crime than obeying Jesus Christ, and I am shocked at his being subjected to punishment and indignity for this in a Christian country. I am no less shocked at the silence of the ministers of religion. They utter no protest against this man's treatment. They leave it to me, a Freethinker, who has been imprisoned for bringing the Holy Scriptures and the Christian Religion into disbelief and contempt, to raise a voice in reprobation of this infamous injustice.

If it be a crime, sir, to bring the Holy Scriptures and the Christian Religion into disbelief and contempt, you are a greater criminal than I am. What I did in comparative obscurity, you have done in the full blaze of publicity. You have declared from the judicial bench, before all the world, that, according to the law of England, of which you do not disguise your approval, it is a penal offence to act upon the religious teaching of the Bible, and especially upon the Christianity of the New Testament. In my judgment, this is more damaging than miles of argument or cataracts of ridicule.

How strange that, in one and the same country, an action and its opposite should both be crimes! If an Englishman attacks the Bible and Christianity in any way that is offensive to orthodox susceptibilities, he is a blasphemer, and is liable to imprisonment. If he believes the Bible to be the Word of God, and Christianity to be a divine revelation through the mouth of God incarnated as man; if, I say, he believes this—not to the extent of mere profession, but to the extent of personal practice—he is also liable to imprisonment. Belief and disbelief are equally criminal, and only hypocrites and time-servers are in a position of safety.

This man, Thomas George Senior, whom you have sent to gaol like a common felon, lost a child who was unattended by a doctor. It is admitted that he bestowed upon it every attention that parental love and common sense could suggest. But on religious grounds he declined to call in medical assistance. The child's death in these circumstances led to an inquest. Medical witnesses testified, necessarily as prophets and not as doctors, drawing upon empirical conjecture instead of scientific prevision, that the services of one of their craft would have saved or prolonged the infant's life. Accordingly the father was prosecuted by the authorities. He was tried at the Old Bailey, and found guilty of manslaughter. Quietly, but firmly, he refused to promise that he would not act in the same way again.

No. 910.

He said it was his duty to obey God rather than man, and he was ready to suffer the consequences. The judge, however, did not pass any sentence upon him. He was simply bound over in his own recognisances to come up for judgment when called upon, and solemnly warned that he would be treated more severely if he repeated his offence. Of course it was certain that he would repeat it on the next occasion. About a year later he lost another child. There was a second inquest, prosecution, trial, and verdict of guilty; with the result that, under your sentence, this honest Christian is languishing in a Christian prison, where his spiritual wants will be ministered to by a State-paid Christian chaplain, and where for some time he will have nothing to read but a State-purchased Christian Bible.

Let me say here, sir, that I have no desire whatever to be disrespectful to yourself. You are doubtless an upright judge, and you may tell me that it is your duty to administer the law as you find it. As a matter of fact, you took the point of law to the Court of Crown Cases Reserved before sentencing the prisoner; and that Court, consisting of six judges, with Lord Chief Justice Russell at their head, decided that the conviction was to be upheld, as the prisoner had been guilty of criminal negligence in not providing his child with medical assistance. His counsel contended that he had done everything he could for the child. "Yes," said Lord Russell, "everything but the one thing necessary." According to which judgment medicine is a necessary and prayer a luxury; the doctor coming first and God afterwards, wherever he can find room and entrance. This, sir, is a doctrine I am not disposed to quarrel with, as far as it places science and religion in their relative positions of utility. But I am strongly disposed to quarrel with it, as far as it implies that Thomas George Senior's sentence is righteous. And as you, sir, justified that sentence with arguments which I conceive it my duty to criticise, I make this open letter to you the vehicle of my objections.

I love science, but I also love liberty. Nothing is good out of its proper place. Tyranny in the name of science is as bad as tyranny in the name of anything else. Priestcraft is odious, whatever its denomination. To flog a man to heaven is no more unjust than to compel him to subject himself, or his child, to the medical nostrums of the hour. When the doctor comes to me persuasively, and offers his services for a proper consideration, I will treat him with respect; when he comes with an act of parliament in his hand, and a policeman and a gaoler behind him, I will treat him with contempt and defiance. If the State compels me to call in a doctor, it should also guarantee his skill. But this is not attempted, and indeed is quite impossible. A doctor's skill is necessarily more or less a matter of opinion. The skill of a schoolmaster can be tested by the examination of his pupils. But how are we to test the skill of a medical practitioner? Some of his patients recover, but how can we tell whether they might not have recovered without him? When a certain Dr. Rush, in Philadelphia, pointed to a list of

patients he had saved from the yellow fever, William Cobbett replied that he had no doubt there were some constitutions strong enough to survive even his treatment. What about those who die under the doctors' hands? Thomas George Senior has lost several of his twelve children; true, and this is a common occurrence in very large families, otherwise there would be limited room for the human species. But how many parents have lost nearly all their children, and received the regulation doctor's certificate that they died a natural death? To die in that way is all right—it is proper and decorous; and this Peculiar Person's crime was, apparently, that he let his children die in a disorderly manner.

In passing sentence on this prisoner, sir, you condescended to argue, which is always dangerous on the bench. You remarked that there were people in this country who conscientiously believed that weakly and deformed children should, in the interests of mankind, be allowed to perish. I have not heard of these people before, in England; but, even if they are to be found, I cannot see any force in the argument you based upon their existence. You argued that their "conscientious considerations" were entitled to be treated with as much respect as those of the Peculiar People. This is strange reasoning on the part of a presumably Christian judge. It is also, in my opinion, quite fallacious. Surely there is a great difference between positive and constructive negligence. In one case there is an intention to kill; in the other there is every desire to preserve life. It is one thing to expose an infant to cruel conditions which are known and meant to be fatal; it is quite another thing to show it every kindness and attention, and only to withhold one assistance of really uncertain value, and that upon a ground of principle and conviction. I do not believe, sir, that a judge of your ability would find it difficult to convince the stupidest jury in England of the vast difference between two such cases.

It appears to me that your remarks on "parental obligation" were very inappropriate. The prisoner's standard of parental obligation was, in general, an admittedly high one. He was proved to be honest, industrious, and temperate; a good husband and father, in the ordinary meaning of the words. He may be guilty of an error of judgment, but it is absurd to talk as though he were guilty of what is commonly meant by parental neglect. There are many grossly neglected children, whose parents are careful enough to call in a doctor at a time of serious illness; and when such children die, as they frequently do in spite of medical attendance, the doctor's certificate covers all the faults of their parents.

In many respects it was a pity that Lord Russell presided in the Court of Crown Cases Reserved when legal judgment on this case was delivered. He is a Roman Catholic, and is therefore unfavorable to indiscriminate reading of the Bible, or at least to its free interpretation by laymen. According to his religion, it is the business of the Church to tell us what the Bible means; and he would naturally regard the private judgment of these Peculiar People as insufferable impertinence. But this is after all a Protestant country, while the succession to the throne is barred against Roman Catholics, and while the Church of England remains established by law. His lordship might have been reminded of this by some of the other judges. There are Protestant judges, of a pious turn of mind, who occasionally declare that an open Bible is the secret of England's greatness. I do not believe them, but I think they ought to stand up for the open Bible when it is attacked. Even if the law were express and clear—which it does not seem to be, judging by Sir Henry Hawkins' directions to the jury in a similar trial—that parents must call in a doctor to their sick children, Protestant judges should recollect that the law also declares the Bible to be the Word of God; and when the law contradicts itself they should be chary of imprisoning an honest man who chooses one alternative where he cannot possibly take both.

Let us turn to a still graver aspect of this matter. You declared that you were "not going to discuss the tenets which the prisoner professed." This enabled you to evade the real crux of the problem, and to condemn the man instead of his creed.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

A Christian Fallacy.

WHY evil exists in the world is a problem which philosophers and theologians have frequently endeavored to solve. Thinkers in nearly all ages have given the subject their profound attention, without arriving at a very satisfactory conclusion. The question, however, does not present any serious difficulty to those who are willing to consider things as they are, and to commence an honest investigation without any preconceived theory occupying that place in their minds which should be reserved for the legitimate conclusions drawn from calm reasoning. But it is a lamentable fact that frequently an idea embraced in childhood, and which is adhered to most tenaciously, is allowed to interfere with the formation of a fair and impartial judgment based on facts. This is particularly the case with many professed Christians, who are continually propounding the most palpable fallacies in reference to the nature of man. When they come in contact with difficulties they avoid entering upon the tedious task of endeavoring to untie the Gordian knot, and proceed to divide it by a much shorter process. Accepting the theory held by their "spiritual pastors and masters," they do not allow themselves to see any contradictions or absurdities that it may contain. Instead of trying to solve a difficulty, they call it a mystery, and refuse to investigate it; and when it is shown to be incompatible with facts, they exclaim: "So much the worse for the facts." It is, therefore, seldom that they will admit an appeal to reason. There is only one doctrine, probably, in the whole range of popular theology that its advocates are willing that it should be tested by experience, and in the discussion of which they would consent to an appeal to any other source than the Bible. That doctrine is the assumed depraved nature of man. Orthodox Christians proclaim that all history confirms their view of this question. They draw pictures of human nature which represent every kind of crime, and then exclaim: "Behold the results of Adam's sin." This is the Christian fallacy that we here intend to expose.

The theory of the Fall of Man, as it is called, may be summed up in a few words. It is this: God created Adam pure and holy; there was no disposition in his mind to sin; his every thought was of the purest character, and the whole bent of his inclinations was to goodness and truth. A temptation was presented, he sinned and fell, rendered himself subject to death, and at once his whole nature became thoroughly corrupt and wicked. It was decreed that his posterity should share in his transgression, and hence every child born, from that time to the present, has been naturally depraved and under the curse of God. It avails not to say that the smiling infant upon its mother's knee has committed no actual sin, and therefore must be as pure as Adam was supposed to have been before his Fall; we are told that its nature is depraved, that it was "born in sin," and steeped in iniquity, even before it saw the light. Now is not this a libel upon humanity? It is a doctrine as degrading as it is false, born of priestcraft, and perpetuated by ignorance and credulity. Let us examine this monstrous fiction of Christianity, with a view of showing its absurdity and its gross injustice.

Supposing the statement made about Adam to be true, it is evident that his original purity and holiness were of little service to him, inasmuch as he yielded to the first temptation that came in his way. Men of the present day, whose natures are said to be tainted with their first parent's crime, and whose inclinations are, therefore, naturally to do evil, are expected to withstand temptation, however often it may present itself. Yet the very man made by God himself, and into whose mind no taint of sin had entered, and whose heart was filled with goodness, love, and truth, could not resist the temptation to partake of a little fruit, though he knew that by giving way he was breaking the commandment of God. Holiness is indeed worth but a trifle if it cannot stand a more severe test than this. Purity that could be so easily lost would not in modern times be considered the genuine article. But the theory is utterly absurd. No person can pass at one step from purity to crime; there must be the inclination to sin before its actual commission. Whence came this inclination in Adam? To say that he experienced it is to admit that

he was not perfectly holy ; to say that he did not is to make the effect precede the cause. The truth is, that the description given in the Bible of Adam's state before the Fall is clearly not one of a high degree of intelligence and morality, but one approaching most closely to barbarous or savage life. A couple who roamed in a state of nudity through a garden, and whose highest delight appears to have been in eating fruit, could not have been very civilised or highly cultivated. Modern society, bad as it is, is preferable to such a condition.

But it is urged that the effects of the Fall are observable in humanity under each of its phases. It is further alleged that all history testifies to man's corruption, and that universal experience proves that the inclinations of the human heart are continually to evil. If that were so, it would by no means establish the theological fable of a Fall through the eating of a particular kind of fruit ; but it will be seen, on calm investigation, that only exaggerated views of the existing vice, and looking at society through a distorted medium, can convey any such impression. The advocates of this objectionable hypothesis draw frightful caricatures of human nature, and hold them up as truthful representations of society. One would be inclined to think that these Christians spent their time amongst the worst characters to be found on earth, and judged of the entire race from such persons. Truth and goodness are in the world, but they discover them not ; there is much beauty, but their eyes are closed against it. Profligate dens of iniquity they love to describe, but human virtue they care not to acknowledge. Thieves, murderers, and scoundrels of every type do them great service, since they can be appealed to as living facts in proof of the truth of this theory of man's depravity ; philanthropists and men of honor are an eyesore to them, because their acts demonstrate some goodness in the world. Humanity is degraded because it is convenient to have it shown to be as corrupt as possible. The worst acts of bad men that history can furnish are raked up, and where they are not bad enough worse are invented. These orthodox Christians revel in the darkest pages of history, grope in the sewers of antiquity, pass by the beauties of nature, and avoid her golden sunshine. They feel themselves to be "miserable sinners," and they wish others to be like them.

This is worse than a Christian fallacy—it is an injustice to the human kind. Moreover, it is not the way to look at mankind, nor is such a method ever resorted to in any other matter than in this theory of our inherent depravity. As Dr. Taylor very justly observes : "We must not take the measure of our health and enjoyment from a lazar house, nor of our understanding from a Bedlam, nor of our morals from a gaol." The true plan is to look at society as a whole, and to take it as we find it ; and, in drawing our conclusions, we should "nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice," but acknowledge whatever goodness and truth we meet with, and ascribe the credit of it to human nature. Jonathan Edwards once wrote : "Man has a prevailing propensity to be continually sinning against God." If this be so, it is as natural to sin against God as it is to eat when one is hungry, or sleep when drowsy. And it certainly can be no crime to do that to which all the tendencies of our nature impel us. It is not a fact, however, that man universally has a prevailing disposition to sin. Virtue has flourished in all ages, and found illustrious disciples in every clime. There is no land that cannot boast of noble-minded, self-denying, disinterested men and women, whose greatest pleasure it has been to save their fellows. If humanity is to be held responsible for the crimes of scoundrels, let her also have the credit of producing the good and the great.

The ancients, who are often referred to in proof of the utter depravity of mankind, never arrived at such a monstrous notion as this doctrine of universal corruption. They no doubt saw sin and wretchedness around them, but they also saw much virtue. Their history has been made illustrious by the names of men who, through all time, will give the lie to this miserable theory. Solon, Lycurgus, Aristides, Epictetus, Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, and many others who might be named, have left behind them a record of acts which serve to adorn humanity. "Stupidity and indocility," said Quintillian, "are no more characteristics of nature than prodigies and monsters." "The seeds of virtue," he affirms, "are sown in us by nature, and some image of justice

is apparent even to rustics and barbarians." Juvenal declares that "none became all at once vile." Plutarch said : "No man is, or was, by nature a wild and unsocial creature ; but some have grown so by addicting themselves to vice contrary to the laws of nature." Aristotle remarks : "Man is by nature a mild creature, and to find what is truly natural one must seek it from those who are perfect in their kind, and not from those who are corrupted." In the words of Cicero : "Specimens of nature should be taken, not from what is bad or imperfect, but what is most beautiful and excellent." These men, despised by many Christians, indulged in no such fallacy regarding man's nature as taught by Christianity.

In our own land there is no lack of names of men and women whose lives give a flat contradiction to the Christian doctrine of human depravity. The history of our country is full of examples of the practice of the highest virtues. No state of society worth living in could exist if vice predominated over virtue. The whole fabric would tumble to pieces, and universal anarchy would be the result. Courts of justice and law abound wherever civilisation has planted its foot, and, although these may do their duty imperfectly, they are on the side of virtue. In truth, go where we may, we shall find no proofs of the doctrine of universal depravity. Shakespeare knew how to estimate man when he wrote : "What a piece of work is man ! how noble in reason ! how infinite in faculties ! in form and moving how express and admirable ! in actions how like an angel ! in apprehension how like a God !" Had his mind been tainted with the Christian notion of natural depravity, how differently he would have written of humanity. Fortunately this fallacy of Christianity, like many others, finds less and less adherents as time goes on. Ere long we hope that human nature will be entirely free from such theological slanders, and that its goodness, potency, and grandeur will receive their proper acknowledgment, and be rightly appreciated by minds for ever emancipated from the humiliating influence of Christian fallacies. CHARLES WATTS.

Missionary Jottings.

I USUALLY commence my provincial lecturing early in September. This year, however, owing to various causes, I did not leave town until the first day of October ; but since then, with the exception of a fortnight in London, I have been wandering about the provinces and Scotland preaching the gospel to all who cared to listen. Looking back over this three months' work, I find little to complain of. I have delivered between sixty and seventy lectures ; the audiences have been, on the whole, good ; I have been unusually fortunate in the matter of press reports, have opened up a new and promising place for future work, besides restarting the propaganda in a town where, from various causes, it had lapsed, so that I feel able to face the Christmas holidays free from any sense of disappointment or failure.

After leaving London on October 1, I went direct to Motherwell, and delivered three lectures there on the following day. The Motherwell Branch was only formed about two years ago, but has already more than justified its existence. These were the first Sunday lectures on Secularism ever given in the town, and I was informed that prayers were offered up for me in several of the churches. I do not know what the people prayed for, but I had very good audiences and a severe toothache. The greatest attention was paid to my lectures ; there was a large sale of literature, besides a quantity being distributed ; and, I believe, several new members were made. The bulk of the opposition was offered by a Christian who told us what a terrible blackguard he had been in his youth—his recovery was by no means as perfect it might have been—and who spun a yarn concerning someone who had been completely demoralised owing to his parents being Freethinkers. It is strange how frequently this story turns up. I meet it in every town, and directly an opponent lowers his voice, turns up his eyes, and, in a thrilling whisper, says, "I knew a man—," I know what is coming. If universality is any test of truth, this

story is unimpeachable. Perhaps, however, these speakers all read the same tracts, and belong to the class that—

Keep on till their own lies deceive them,
And, oft-repeating, at length believe them.

The Motherwell Branch is fortunate in possessing a number of strong, energetic members, who are evidently resolved that, if Secularism does not make its presence felt, the fault shall not be theirs. There are few places in which the movement has been set going of recent years that hold out stronger hopes than Motherwell.

After paying Paisley a visit, I broke new ground at Wishaw, a place some sixteen miles from Glasgow. Both in number and in behavior the audience was all that could reasonably be desired. The questions asked at the close of my address showed the interest taken in the meeting, and, besides a good quantity of literature being put in circulation, the names of five or six people were handed in to form the nucleus of a Branch. The opposition was confined to one individual, who seemed terribly anxious to find out who taught Moses astronomy. I was at a loss to discover the reason of his anxiety on this head, unless he felt in the same humor as a little boy named Shadruch Abendigo Jones, who, when asked by his Sunday-school teacher, "Who gave you that name?" replied: "I don't know, but, if I find out, when I grow up there'll be a fight." The local paper gave a very fair report of my lecture on "Secularism," so that much good would probably be done by that method likewise.

After lecturing to first-rate audiences at Glasgow, and a fair gathering at Law Junction, I travelled farther north to Dundee. The Dundee Branch had been very quiet for two or three years, but had resolved to set to work again. I was announced for three lectures, one in the open-air and two indoors. I had my misgivings about the first, but was agreeably disappointed. The meeting went off capitally, although a united demonstration of soul-savers had been organised to take place as a kind of antidote to my lecture. While their crowd prayed, and sang, and moaned, mine laughed and cheered; and, on the whole, seemed to be getting far more enjoyment, and, I dare wager, far more information. The hall was well filled on each of the following evenings, the majority of the audience apparently being in agreement with the lectures delivered. The opposition was of a very tame character indeed. I was informed that one clergyman had announced his intention of replying to my lectures, but we looked in vain for him at the meetings. I shall be visiting Dundee again early in the new year, and then, perhaps, I may be more fortunate (?).

Altogether, Freethought seems to be making good headway in Scotland. Scotchmen may be slow to move, but when they do move they can be depended on, while the fact that religion north of the Tweed is of a sterner and more uncompromising type than it is further south may account for the reaction being more decided when it takes place.

Coming south, I paid Newcastle a visit on October 16, and lectured at Preston for two evenings on October 20 and 21. Preston is one of the most Catholic towns in Great Britain, but it has provided good audiences on each occasion I have been there. What the Society lacks chiefly here is a good meeting place. If that were obtainable, I have no doubt that a strong Society might soon be pulled together.

The following Sunday I lectured at Sheffield, and during the week held three meetings at Derby. The meetings were good both in numbers and enthusiasm. The committee is energetic and hopeful, and faces every difficulty in a cheerful, optimistic spirit, which is bound to tell sooner or later. After leaving Derby I received several letters from strangers who had come from Trent and other places to the meetings, thanking me for my lectures and making inquiries concerning the nature of Secularism; so that the seed had evidently fallen on fruitful ground. At Leicester, where I lectured on October 30, I had the largest audience I have yet had the pleasure of addressing in my native town. I was pleased to learn, too, that right through the year the audiences had been much above the average, both in quantity and quality. The Leicester Society is also trying an interesting and much-needed experiment in the shape of a resident lecturer, teacher, and general organiser. The services of Mr. Joseph McCabe have been

secured, and from what I saw of that gentleman I do not think that a better selection could well have been made. Of course it will be some little time before the new venture produces tangible results, but I do not doubt for a moment that anything but good can be the effect of a move of this description.

After spending a fortnight in London and addressing capital audiences at the Athenæum, Tottenham Court-road, I paid a visit to Chatham. Here again I was told that there had been a general improvement during the past year. Some alterations had been made in the tasteful little hall belonging to the Secularists, and the fact of the success of their work was amply demonstrated by my meetings. Neither Chatham nor New Brompton would seem to an outsider a promising field for Free-thought. Naval and military centres are usually very snobbish and very religious—the two words often mean the same thing nowadays—and the band of Secularists at New Brompton deserve the warmest congratulations on the gallant fight they have maintained for so long. The temper of the district was shown by the fact that a civic dignitary in the neighboring city of Rochester was avowedly excluded from the office of mayor because he had honestly told the Corporation that, if elected, being an Agnostic, he would not attend church. Of course, if he had been hypocrite enough to go to church without believing in any portion of Christianity, the Council would have been satisfied. Conformity is all this class of people ask for; whether a man is a liar or a coward troubles them but little.

The next two Sundays (November 27 and December 4) I lectured at Manchester. My audiences here were as good as usual, and there was a marked improvement in the second Sunday's attendance. During the week I lectured at Failsworth and Blackburn. At Failsworth I was pleased to find that the friends had grown too numerous for their meeting-place, and were contemplating an enlargement. Several hundred pounds had been collected for that purpose; and I was informed that since 1881 the Committee had spent nearly a thousand pounds on various schemes of improvements. At Blackburn I had fair meetings, but no opposition, although that had been anticipated. The *Blackburn Times* gave a lengthy report of one of my lectures, so that much good might be done by that means.

On December 11 I concluded my lecturing work for 1898 by a visit to Stockton-on-Tees. Considerable interest had been shown in my lectures by the clergymen of the town, five or six of whom had taken my titles for their sermons. It was, perhaps, the easiest way of replying. They had not heard the lectures; but what did that matter? It is usually considered necessary to hear what is said before replying; but it is evidently not essential. I had hoped that some of these valiant soldiers of the Lord would have turned up at my meetings, but I was doomed to disappointment. The opposition was limited to two individuals. One of them told, amid much laughter, how he had "found God" at a particular time; the place, date, and hour were given, and, although he was heavily in debt just then, he was able to pay all he owed soon after. "Once a man has found God," said he, fervently, "the money comes in." There may be some truth in that, anyway. The second opponent was of a different type. He was a Russian Jew, converted (?) to Christianity, and who was at present combining the defence of the Gospel with the selling of quack medicines. He was allowed to go on for some time, until it was impossible to bear it any longer; and, when it came to deliberate lies, such as he had personally assisted to drive me out of Hartlepool—a place I had never visited in my life—with other lies of even a viler character, he was induced to leave the meeting in a manner more hurried than dignified. And these were the only two who could be brought forward in the pious town of Stockton to defend "the faith once delivered to the saints"!

Taking my tour all round, it was quite up to the usual level, if not above it. One thing struck me very forcibly: wherever there is a continuous propaganda being carried on, with a regular meeting-place—as in Leicester, Failsworth, Manchester, and Glasgow—there is a steady growth in the attendance at meetings, and the interest taken in the work. This seems to me the main thing needed—steady, plodding propaganda, by lectures, by the distribution of literature, or by any

other legitimate method that will keep our principles in front of the public. There are many new places, too, where good work might be done if only the necessary funds were forthcoming. It is impossible for an individual lecturer, living from hand to mouth at the best, to carry the movement into places where no organisation exists; and, even when a few friends can be found, they are usually among the working classes, who necessarily are not in a position to sustain a lengthened pecuniary loss in carrying out the work. If this difficulty can be surmounted—and it surely should not prove insuperable—a really influential organisation might soon be built up. One thing is certain—organisation or no organisation, our ideas are gaining ground on every hand; and, even though people may be slow to publicly announce themselves as among those who have outgrown Christianity, there is at least the satisfaction of seeing how much the world has been changed by the Freethought propaganda of the last half-century.

C. COHEN.

Profane Parables.

XIII.—UNANIMITY.

AN angry mob pelted an aged man with heavy stones, while their victim faced them with his shield, and defended himself mightily withal.

But one of meek and tender disposition passed by the way; and he wept in sympathy.

"Why do ye use him thus unfairly?" sobbed he.

"What evil hath he done that ye maltreat him so?"

"Peace!" cried the mob. "Knowest thou not he is a Rationalist?"

"What!" said the meek man, firing up. "Give me a stone! *I'll e'en have at him myself!*"

XIV.—ENCOURAGEMENT.

A hoary sinner went to church. And the parson fixed him with his eye, and spoke of the loving kindness of God, and his great affection for sinners, and salvation at the eleventh hour, and so on, and so forth.

Till the hoary sinner arose, at length, comforted and refreshed, and entered with a thankful heart upon next week's catalogue of sins.

XV.—APOTHEOSIS.

In early winter a traveller reached a strange land. And all around him were the bodies of slaughtered beasts and birds; and from gaily-lighted windows came the sound of music and merriment, while ragged, shivering vagrants looked and listened with stupefaction in their eyes.

"Why do they gorge and dance and sing, and flaunt their luxury in the poor man's eyes?" said the traveller.

"I will tell thee," said one. "There was once a poor beggar who taught the wickedness of wealth, and the virtue of poverty, and who believed it right to mortify the flesh."

"Well?" said the traveller, looking thoughtfully at the lighted windows.

"Well, these are his followers. *They made a god of him!*"

XVI.—ELUCIDATION.

A Theologian chanced upon a Philosopher.

"Thou dost not believe in miracles?" said he.

"Hardly!" said the Philosopher.

And forthwith the Theologian explained, with much gusto, the bearings of certain prodigies, to the end that they might seem reasonable and true.

"Tarry a moment," said the Philosopher. "Since thou canst show these things to be natural and in reason, prithee tell me wherein lies the *miracle* thereof."

And the Theologian wagged his head sadly, as who should say: "This man hath no sweet reasonableness."

XVII.—CLAIRVOYANCE.

A party of dreamers met in a darkened chamber.

And they gazed fixedly at a brilliant light through a globe of crystal, till their eyes were dazzled, and their brain whirled, and they saw things that were not.

And there was a certain wine-bibber who looked too earnestly upon the liquor when it was red.

And he, too, saw things that were not.

XVIII.—LAW.

In olden time the sun shone by day, and the moon by night; and the stars laughed as they flew, each in his accustomed course; and darkness followed light; and winter succeeded autumn; and the life of all things was merged in death.

While from the earth came the clamor of a million voices, offering a million prayers to a hundred gods, in a hundred different tongues.

But still the sun shone by day, and the moon by night.

E. R. W.

The Polytechnic Kaiser's Pilgrimage.

THE great panurgic Kaiser sailed
To view the Holy Land;
But first he called on Zion's foe,
And pressed his bloody hand.

"Of course," said he, "my colleague, God,
Will watch o'er me and mine,
And do his best, till I return,
To guard the German Rhine."

On reaching Zion's gates, he said:
"O doubly-blest are ye!
For ye have seen my colleague's Son,
And now ye gaze on Me!"

He stood where once his colleague, God,
Had chartered Joseph's lass;
At least, we read, a lass he leased,
Whence Jesus came to pass.

The damsel made her Maker, thus,
A proud and happy pa,
By being, first, her Maker's wife,
And then her Maker's ma.

The parsons know these gospel truths
Are not delusive lies,
Because, with humble faith, they know
Their stipends thence arise.—

He stood where once his colleague's son
Was skewered to a post,
And tapped of thirteen pints of blood,
To cool his colleague's ghost.

This spot, where Mrs. Jahveh's boy
Had died for thirty hours,
Is held to-day by Christless Turks,
Who jeer at Christian giaours.

He stood upon the very spot
Whence Christ, his colleague's son,
Had jumped his famous "record" jump;
And wondered how 'twas done.

Said he: "I'm pretty smart, myself—
Which God, I think, admits—
But Christ—at least, at 'standing jump'—
Can lick me into fits!"

The godly Kaiser, doubtless, said:
"By right, this land is mine!
For God and I are 'hand and glove,'
And I'm of Mary's line!"

"The Bible says that Mrs. God
A German cousin had;
That is, her cousin-german, Bess;
And God's my 'heav'nly dad'!"

When home returned—to God's relief!—
The Kaiser quickly quoth:
"For weeks, the Rhine's had God for guard,
But now 'twill have us both!"

G. L. MACKENZIE.

The Familiar God.

The manner in which all religions talk of God revolts me; they treat him with so much certainty, levity, familiarity. The priests, who have this name always on their lips, irritate me above all. It is with them a kind of chronic sneeze—"the goodness of God, the wrath of God, to offend God," these are their phrases. It is considering him as if he were a man, and, what's worse, a middle-class man. They are further wild to decorate him with attributes, as savages put feathers on their fetish. Some paint infinity blue, others black. Utter savagery all that. We are still cropping the grass and walking on all-fours in spite of balloons. The ideal that humanity forms for itself of God does not go beyond that of an oriental monarch surrounded by his court. The religious ideal is, in fact, several centuries behind the social ideal, and there are heaps of mountebanks who make a pretence of falling down faint with admiration in its presence.

—GUSTAVE FLAUBERT.

Acid Drops.

CHRISTMAS has come and gone again, and the doctors are busy upon Christian constitutions that have been disordered by over-eating and drinking. How curious it looks, upon the face of it, that people should celebrate the birth of "the Savior" by devouring roast beef, turkey, and plum pudding, and liquoring themselves with copious draughts of beer, claret, and whiskey. Unless he had been born, as they profess to believe, all of them would have gone to everlasting blazes; and the anniversary of this event ought to fill their minds with very serious reflections; instead of which they eat and drink, and sing and dance, and play cards, and kiss under the mistletoe. But this contradiction between faith and practice is easily understood when we remember that Christmas customs have nothing whatever to do with the nativity of Jesus Christ. They are inherited from the older days of Paganism, when the new birth of the Sun—the lord of light and heat and life—was celebrated with joyous festivities; and the evergreen decorations were symbolic of the imperishable powers of nature, which were only dormant, not dead, under the snow and ice of winter.

Christmas is the fashionable time for unlimited cant. Believers in Christ are asked to do something for the poor; and many of them, after spending pounds on themselves, give a shilling or two to their unknown poorer brethren, and feel highly virtuous and benevolent for the rest of the year. What they really do is to subscribe for a little ointment to spread over social sores. It rarely occurs to them that these sores are only symptoms of the bad blood of society, and that constitutional remedies are, after all, the only ones worth applying.

Jesus Christ being the Prince of Peace, we naturally hear more than usual at this time of the year about the coming millennium—it has always been *coming*—when swords will be turned into ploughshares, and the lion will lie down with the lamb and eat grass instead of mutton. But after all the Christmas cant about peace is over, the Christian nations go on spending more money than ever on guns, rifles, explosives, and battleships.

Mr. W. T. Stead, who is always working a new "boom" for all it is worth, and has a wonderful knack of combining fine sentiments with personal advantage, is engaged at present in "organising public opinion" in favor of the Czar's proposals to Europe. Churches and chapels are having a high old time, and the prospect is absolutely rosy. But of course the enthusiasm will die away without doing any appreciable good. Mere enthusiasm for peace may be succeeded at any moment by enthusiasm for war. It is reason, common-sense, that is wanted. As a matter of fact, it is the Freethought party all over the world that is most opposed to war between nations, and most in favor of the cultivation of international friendship by means of free commerce and the free exchange of ideas. This is not because Freethinkers are naturally any better than Christians; it is simply because they *think*.

Mr. W. T. Stead has done a deal of screaming in his time, but he never screamed to better purpose than over the Disarmament Scheme. Since the Czar joined the ranks of the reformers the Peace Movement has received a great impetus; and, as usual, now that the movement has become fashionable, we find the sky-pilots making their appearance, and attempting to "noble" it.

In his *Right of War* Voltaire complained that the clergy in his day did not lift up their voices against war. On the contrary, these followers of the Prince of Peace bless the standards of murder, and sing Jewish songs when the earth is inundated with blood. So it was through the years. Henry Richard, the apostle of peace, expressed his heartfelt regret that the teachers of religion could never be relied upon to work earnestly against the wickedness of war. The different Peace Congresses that have taken place have mostly been very successful; but if they had been left to the clergy they would never have been other than failures. Sky-pilots are numbered by tens of thousands in England, yet never more than a handful, at any time, ever cared to put into practice the precepts of the alleged Founder of their religion.

In our own day the most popular of religious celebrities have been Christian warriors, like Gordon, who combined the trade of bloodshed with religion. The leading popular religious movement actually dubs itself an Army, and uses the vocabulary of the military profession. The most warlike of Christian monarchs, the German Kaiser, like his never-to-be-forgotten grandfather, combines religion with militarism. In Christian Europe we find whole populations in the grip of militarism; whether the nation be Russia, Germany, Italy, or Austria, it is the same. No one is better than his neighbor. Maxim guns, shrapnel shells, nitro-glycerine, and torpedoes are the practical issue of the Gospel of Peace all over the world. Countless millions have been spent by Christian

nations on weapons of destruction, and men, women, and little children die of starvation in the cities of these very countries. Who can help hating this state of affairs, which pours out wealth at the feet of the Moloch of murder and grudges every farthing given for Humanity?

The clergy are acting precisely as they did with the Anti-Slavery Movement. Their little game is to come in at the last moment, and claim the victory. Freethinkers must see that due recognition is given to those who bore the heat and burden of the day, and not allow these lazy impostors to get the whole credit. A movement in which every leading Freethinker, from Voltaire to Bradlaugh, has taken part must not be permitted to be "nobbled" in the name of Christianity.

It is vastly amusing to find papers like the *Daily Twaddle-graph* professing to find the essence of human wisdom in the Czar's utterances on the Peace question. The same sentiments in the mouths of reformers merely excited the ridicule of the newspaper men. We must not, however, be too hard on the journalists. They evidently know on which side their bread is margarine.

"Providence" is giving the Czar plenty to look after at home. Famine prevails in those districts where the crops failed. Children haunt the high roads in flocks begging for something to eat, and "starvation bread" is being baked, consisting of bad flour and sand. In face of this, how ironical is the news from Berlin that Russia is spending £15,000,000 on the reorganisation of her artillery.

A pauper in the little German town of Koswig went to his father's funeral, and, lingering at the graveside after the ceremony, he exclaimed: "Farewell. We shall never see each other again in this life." This was regarded as shocking to the religious susceptibilities of all within hearing; further, as suggesting a doubt of the Church doctrine of immortality; and the man was therefore sentenced to a fortnight's imprisonment. You have to be very careful of what you say in the land of pious Emperor William.

What a great thing it is to be "much used by God in the salvation of souls"! Here is the Rev. L. W. Minshall relating in the *Christian Herald* champion performances in the way of converting "infidels." If we may believe his account, he has brought to his knees "an infidel who was a most prominent business man and a pronounced opponent of Christianity." Two doses of Mr. Minshall's rhetoric were sufficient to effect a cure.

At the first meeting the "infidel" who had gone there to mock became "seriously thoughtful." At the second meeting he remained to pray, and "went home a saved man." He closed his place of business for the two weeks "I" remained in the town, and in consequence of what "I" told him he visited every house in the town and apologised for having ever advocated infidel views. Poor man, he died; but his "funeral was largely attended," and Mr. Minshall feels happy in the thought that he has saved his soul. Mr. Minshall invites funds.

Really, it is very wonderful what a number of conversions are taking place—when the sky-pilots tell the tale. A "bright and well-educated Mohammedan young man came to my tent," says a Gujarat missionary. When natives, from mercenary motives, are proposing to become religious turn-coats, they are never otherwise than bright and well-educated and intelligent.

This native came, seemingly, as an inquirer, but really as a disputer. But "what price" his brightness and education and intelligence against the Gujarat man of God? Under proper tuition, the young man withdrew his objections to the Christian religion—and now there will be joy in heaven and amongst the mission-subscribers on earth—the bright and well-educated young man has given up praying Mohammedan prayers, and prays the Lord's Prayer instead. The Gujarat missionary invites funds.

Saved on a telegraph-pole! The Rev. H. B. Gibbud, another of the clerics who carry conviction in their utterances and their clothes, says: "I noticed, while speaking in the open air one day, a man on a telegraph-pole." The man listened attentively, climbed down, and threw himself at the feet of Jesus. He was converted. The Rev. Gibbud invites funds.

Lizzie M—, one of the prettiest girls in the parish, engaged to a sturdy young farmer, was led to Christ. It was Christmas time, and the sturdy young farmer proposed to lead her out at a ball. "No," she said, "I promised you, John, to attend that ball, but that was before I was converted; so I cannot go." John invited her to a walk in the starlit night, and during that walk John was gently led to put his trust in the living and true God. The Rev. Matthew Brown invites funds.

A man, against his will, was brought to a meeting of Mr. D. L. Moody's. He heard a hymn, "Come, Oh Come to Me." The words fixed themselves in his mind. He went into a saloon, and drank whisky to drown them. He said: "What a fool I am to allow myself to be troubled in this way." When he got home, he took up a little hymn-book, found the hymn, and read it over. He set fire to the hymn-book; but the words remained in his mind. He is now converted. Mr. D. L. Moody invites funds.

A Korean school-teacher expressed a great desire to have a Chinese Bible, and it led to his conversion. He said he would starve if necessary in order to be a Christian. The Rev. Mr. Collyer, instrumental in this conversion, invites funds.

Sick children, we are informed, have been cured in Austria Hungary by chewing up and swallowing little pictures of the infant Jesus. There is nothing so very extraordinary in this when we are assured as to eternal possibilities in connection with chewing Christ in the form of wafers, and drinking his blood in sour sacramental wine.

The *Christian Herald* supplies a biography of a great Christian worker, with an account of his travels in Africa and South America. Lest there should be any doubt as to his full designation, that interesting print describes him as "Dr. Harry Guinness, D.D." During his voyage from New York to Panama he held services on the ship, and had the joy of knowing that some of the passengers were turned from darkness to light.

"Two infidels, recognising the value of mission work as a civilising agency, of their own free will gave some help towards the work." Which was very kind of them, and might be inconsistent of them if "Dr. Harry Guinness, D.D.," could prove that they ever existed. Meanwhile the double "D.D." invites funds.

A 500,000 guineas' New Century Fund. This is the mild proposal of Dr. Guinness Rogers. He says: "Questions of administration, and even of allocation, may be safely postponed." Quite so. But he is warned—apparently by Christian friends—that the administration must not be in the hands of a committee taken from the churches in the metropolitan area. He and his advisers are probably wise in time. But might not a suggestion be made to Dr. Guinness Rogers that, when he has collected the 500,000 guineas, he should devote them to some really useful purpose?

Boxing lessons, under the patronage of the rector of an Episcopal church in Jersey City (New Jersey), are carried on in an institute connected with the church. Members of the congregation are said to approve of the idea, as they think it will tend to make the pupils more manly. They do not explain how they reconcile the fisticuff practice with the Scriptural command to turn "the other cheek" when smitten.

Mr. Hall Caine, who is working what he calls Christian Socialism for all it is worth, and making a big pile of money by it, says that "the whole Christ idea has never been so strong in the world as it is at this moment." We suppose Mr. Caine means something by this enigmatic utterance, but his style is rather perplexing. What is the whole Christ idea? From the context it appears to mean caring for the poor. This is a form of virtue which Christianity has always patronised. In the first place, it is easy; in the second place, it is safe; in the third place, it provides for continuity of opportunity. You help the poor to keep poor and be just above the level of desperation. That is the Christian notion of keeping the world up to the mark. But it is all rottenness, and is thoroughly condemned by history. What we really want is justice and common-sense. Apply these to human society, and its worst evils would soon disappear; whereas the sentimentalism of Jesus Christ and his self-denying apostle, Hall Caine, only mitigates those evils in order to perpetuate them.

"The Christian Social Movement," Hall Caine says, "is, I think, in its infancy." Precisely so. It talks and thinks childishness.

According to the *Catholic Directory*, the Romish Church has in England and Wales 17 archbishops and bishops, 2,769 priests, and 1,1509 churches and chapels. In Scotland it has six bishops, 3,212 priests, and 1,854 churches and chapels. We commend these figures to the attention of those Freethinkers who fancy there is no longer any necessity for aggression against theology.

Salem Church, Longford, has been nearly burnt down, owing to a new central gas chandelier being placed too close to the roof. The Lord had no concern about his conventicle, but the fire brigade were speedily on the spot. So the house of God remains practically intact, and nothing more serious has resulted than the postponing of the re-opening services, which will be to the praise and glory of God, who, perhaps in consequence of Continental difficulties, had momentarily overlooked Salem Church, Longford.

The Newquay Urban Council, Devon, have "reluctantly" resolved to apply for consecration of a new cemetery under the Burials Act. The Council have applied only on the advice of Mr. Asquith, to whom a case was submitted. The *Christian World* observes that "this should be a warning to other burial authorities to acquire cemeteries under Marten's Act, which does not necessitate consecration." The Council have protested against the Bishop's action.

The *Bury Times* reports a lecture to working men by the Rev. T. J. Worrall on "Woman." The reverend gentleman took the position that men had more brains and women more heart. Well, if deficiency of brains is the mark of a woman—which we are far from admitting—it is clear that Pastor Worrall was born of the wrong sex; unless, indeed, he belongs to the third sex, as Sidney Smith called the clergy, in which case both brains and heart may easily be lacking. Pastor Worrall took the improved position of women in England of to-day, and put it down to the credit of Christianity. He mentioned, however, that woman was "only just recovering from centuries of crippled powers and shameful neglect," but he forget to say that those centuries were intensely Christian. He even said that Christianity had made possible such women as George Eliot, forgetting, if he ever knew, that George Eliot was a thorough-going Freethinker, who translated Strauss's *Life of Jesus* and Feuerbach's atheistic *Essence of Christianity*. Altogether it must have been a great relief to the better-informed members of the audience when the band began to play a hymn; for music is music, even if Christian apologetics are usually rubbish.

Lieutenant Hobson, of *Merrimac* fame, has been on a sort of kissing tour in America. In Kansas he is reported to have kissed seven hundred ladies in public; how many in private is not stated. His official superiors grew alarmed, either because they feared there would be no kisses left for them, or because they fancied the gallant Hobson was in danger of imitating the wisest man in the Bible. Anyhow, they have sent him off to Manila, and lots of Christian young women (and some old ones too) in America are left disconsolate. All they can do is to cry after him—well, see the Song of Solomon i. 2.

Miserable collections are becoming a frequent theme of complaint. The vicar of Driffield declares that people put in his collection-boxes what they would not offer a railway porter, and what would be an insult if offered to an hotel waiter. He has our sympathy.

Joseph Phillips died recently at Southgate. He was seventy-one years of age, and had formerly been a City missionary in the parish. According to the *Enfield Chronicle*, he was a very hard worker in his time; but when the Evangelical vicar was succeeded by a High Church vicar, and Joseph Phillips was getting old, and his sight was failing, he was "called upon to move on, and left to die without being relieved by those in the parish who could have sustained him and made the worthy old man's latter days pleasant and free from undue care." The *Chronicle* calls it "a standing disgrace to the Christian people of the village." The only remark upon the old man's death in the *Southgate Church Monthly* was the Bible quotation, "They rest from their labors"—which, in the circumstances, sounds quite facetious.

Charles Hill, secretary of the Lord's Day Rest Association, sends a letter to the press protesting against the new series of Queen's Hall concerts as a violation of the conditions of the County Council's licence. This letter is printed in the *Daily News* under the heading of "Still Not Happy."

St. Luke's gospel-shop, Chesterton, Cheshire, is to be "permanently seated," and the cost is being raised by subscription. Some parts of the parish are shelling out fairly well; but Herbert-street and George-street, although canvassed from house to house, have only contributed sixpence between them. This want of liberality is severely commented upon by the Vicar in his monthly magazine. Though these two streets give next to nothing, he remarks that "yet they expect coals and clerical ministrations." "Commercially speaking," he reminds them, "sixpennyworth of such would mean no coals and half-an-hour's visiting *per year*, calculating a priest's stipend at a shilling an hour of ten hours a day, which is about the average priest's reward in these parts." Note the professional bias which devotes the whole sixpence to ministrations, and leaves nothing for coals; and note the implication that church charity means paying for what you get, even if you don't get all you pay for. Parson Micklethwaite should really be more discreet.

John Cotton, recently executed in Derby Gaol for the brutal murder of his wife, appears to have made a very edifying end. The chaplain was in frequent attendance during the last day of John Cotton's residence on earth, and administered the Holy Communion to him. With the body and blood of Christ inside him, as far as it was assimilated, John Cotton

presumably went to glory. What became of the woman he murdered does not seem to excite much attention.

The following is a fact. A large London shipping firm used to get orders from "converted" West African niggers, and the writers of the orders were notorious for two things—the frequency with which they alluded to "the dear Lord Jesus Christ," and the persuasiveness with which they always endeavored to obtain goods on credit. The shippers, however, knew enough about the honesty of converted blacks to invariably refuse to trust them with any sum larger than a halfpenny. One day an order came in the usual fluent style, no money with it; but the writer solemnly assured the firm that "the Lord Jesus Christ will be my reference to you in the proof of my trustworthiness." The shipping clerk shook his head, muttered "Same old game!" and put the order away in its pigeon-hole, merely marking on the back of it, "References not satisfactory."

The following story is told by the *Daily Telegraph*. A Bishop who often travels on the South-Western line had a curious experience while waiting for a train at Waterloo Station. A porter, who often sees that his lordship gets a compartment to himself, came up to him in a state of excitement, and asked: "Your reverence, do you see that gen'l-man standing in the doorway over there?" "Yes," answered the Bishop. "Do you know who it is?" continued the porter. "No," said his lordship. Thereupon the porter whispered: "It's the Coffee Cooler, your reverence. Oh, he ain't proud. He'll shake hands with your reverence, if you like." The Bishop smiled, but did not show any wish to shake hands with the prize-fighter, whom the porter evidently regarded as the greater man of the two.

For ever on the grab. When Christianity was established in Shetland, "fixing the tithes," says the *Scotsman*, "was a most important matter, and the cause of numerous disputes between the wealthy Udallers and the Church. If a landowner complained of his assessment, the Church threatened to excommunicate him, and this compelled him to submit. Excommunication was a most powerful weapon." Nowadays it is rather an agreeable distinction to be excommunicated. At any rate, it is a harmless penalty, which has the advantage of presenting economical barriers.

The *City Press*, in its gossip columns, makes one or two very stinging remarks about the Rev. Mr. Rodwell, the venerable rector of St. Ethelburga, in Bishopsgate, E.C. He has, says that paper, received close upon £20,000 from the parish without fulfilling a single duty. "How anyone," adds the *City Press*, "can be bold enough to justify such neglect is a perfect mystery."

"God's Acre, indeed! Poor Parishioners find it is the Vicar's Freehold." Such are the headings in the *Daily Mail* to a scandalous case recently before the Consistory Court at Norwich. Four poor parishioners of Ilkehall, St. Andrew, Suffolk, were cited to appear, and show cause why a faculty should not be issued, empowering the clergyman of the parish, the Rev. W. J. Wood, to remove certain artificial wreaths placed by them in the churchyard. The Chancellor of the Diocese, apparently with some reluctance, issued a faculty as asked for, observing, however: "I had better not say anything more about it myself."

This comes of burying one's dead in consecrated ground, and paying fees which leave all the privileges with the parson.

Kiss the book, please. Some portion of the contents are dirty enough; but when the covers are dirty also—faugh! In the course of a police-court case at Southwark one of the witnesses refused to kiss the sacred and begrimed volume, on the ground that it was dirty.

He said: "I won't do it unless I am compelled by force." Eventually he was sworn in Scotch fashion, and Mr. Paul Taylor, the stipendiary, said: "I don't think the witness's objection to kiss the book is at all unreasonable, because sometimes police-court Bibles are very dirty indeed"—which is true both as to the inside and the exterior.

A nameless, forsaken baby picked up at Bristol riverside grew to be a big lad, and was taken to the Falkland Islands. After eleven years he returned to England, and was ordained a clergyman. Then he translated, under God, Luke, John, and the Acts into the barbarous language of the Yaghans. And now, says the *Christian Herald*, he has lately died. He cannot himself invite funds, but they may be sent to the Bible Society, and placed to his memory.

A Cornish churchwarden and parish clerk has been charged

before the Archdeacon with dreadful conduct. It was alleged that he had entered the chancel with muddy boots, accompanied by his sheep dog. Once he jostled the vicar, and a variety of other charges were brought about him. He said he was the victim of the vicar's spite; but the case went against him, and he was dismissed from his office.

Dean Pigou, of Bristol, preaching a charity sermon at St. Mary's, Nottingham, said that Atheism was very hard upon the sickly and the poor. Well, we advise him to go to Paris and learn the falsehood of this statement before he repeats it. "Did they ever," he asked, "hear of the Atheists subscribing amongst themselves to establish charitable institutions in the country for the benefit of their fellow-creatures?" This question involves a complete misunderstanding of Atheism. Christian charity is always sectarian, but Atheism will have nothing to do with such narrowness. Atheists believe that charity should be as universal as humanity. They do not want to see Atheist hospitals or Atheist orphanages. At present they subscribe as citizens to more or less worthy efforts towards the mitigation of suffering and misery, hoping that in the course of time even Christians will grow ashamed of their present policy of controlling all such charities as far as possible in the interest of their own faith. We may add that the National Secular Society, at any rate, has a Benevolent Fund, which is always sufficient to meet all legitimate applications for assistance. This is rendered necessary by the fact that ordinary charities are too frequently closed to persons who are known to be Freethinkers.

The daily papers have reproduced a paragraph about the alleged punishment of an American Ananias who had applied for free treatment at a dispensary in Baltimore. He dropped dead, and 1,500 dollars in notes was found in his pocket. The punishment of this class of persons in effete old England is apparently slower, or else the accomplished author of *The Atheist Shoemaker* would long since have joined his Savior in the skies.

Zola's counsel, M. Labori, has plainly told the Paris court that his client will not return to his domicile until the Dreyfus revision is concluded. He expects the judgment of the Court of Appeal to be his vindication. This is very annoying to the bigots who called for his blood. They forget that Zola wants it himself.

The retirement of Sir Henry Hawkins revives an old story. He was once trying a case at the Old Bailey, and the policeman was giving evidence as to the arrest of the prisoner. "I cautioned him, and charged him," said the limb of the law. "Well," broke in the prosecuting counsel, "what did the prisoner say?" The constable brings out his note-book and reads from it: "In answer to the charge, the prisoner said: 'God grant I be not tried before 'Awkins, or he will bring down my hairs in sorrow to the grave.'"

Madame Paulmier, the fashionable Paris lady who riddled poor M. Ollivier of the *Lanterne* with bullets, has been acquitted in the usual way by a French jury. All she had to do was to talk about her mother's heart. That fetched 'em. A woman with a mother's heart, real or imaginary, may shoot as many persons as she pleases. She and her temper are both sacred in La Belle France. Englishmen, however, are likely to regard Madame Paulmier as a spiteful cat. She did not like an article against her husband in the *Lanterne*, so she bought a revolver, went to church, and then proceeded to interview the editor, M. Millerand. As he was not in, she waited for some time, and when she was tired of waiting she determined to shoot *somebody*, so she fired three bullets into M. Ollivier, who had no sort of responsibility for the article, the writer of which was M. Turot.

Prophets in ancient times had easy access to kings, princes, and other rulers. Ehud, for instance, went to King Eglon, and interviewed him in his summer house alone. "I have a message from God unto thee," he said. This message he produced in the form of a long dagger, which he thrust into King Eglon's stomach. But other times other manners. Political and social bigwigs, nowadays, don't let amateur prophets hang about their premises. Last Sunday, for instance, one of these gentry went to St. James's Palace to see the Prince of Wales and give him a letter from Jesus Christ. It took the levelled rifle of a sentry to make him stop, and eight policemen to remove him in an ambulance. The spirit of the Lord is evidently very powerful. It seems to beat whiskey hollow.

We have done with the kisses that sting,
The thief's mouth red from the feast,
The blood on the hands of the king,
And the lie at the lips of the priest.

—A. C. SWINBURNE.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, January 1, Bristol-street Board School, Birmingham : 11, "Let there be Light"; 3, "The Babe of Bethlehem"; 7, "Souls, Spirits, and Ghosts."

To Correspondents.

DURING Mr. Charles Watts's absence from England his address will be, c/o *Truthseeker* office, 28 Lafayette-place, New York City, U.S.A.

REV. A. J. WALDRON writes: "With your kind permission I should like to correct one error in your note about the meetings last Sunday, Dec. 18. The reason I first left our platform was in response to an invitation given me by M. Edwards from his platform. I did so at once; but your chairman said I could do so at end of Mr. Edwards's speech, which I did as soon as my lecture was finished. I grant [it may have been my mistake, thinking Mr. Edwards meant an immediate invitation; and, I may add, most people thought this was offered. The people at East London know me well enough to know that I am a firm believer in fair play and an opponent of anything like rowdyism or the indulgence of personal abuse. Would you allow me to add one word of advice to both sides—viz., abstention from personalities? This would, I am sure, raise the whole tone of the controversy, and furnish both sides with more intelligent audiences."

C. M. LONGLEY.—Thanks. See "Sugar Plums."

T. MACLEISH.—Pleased to hear from you again. Have inserted as you request.

W. J. BATEMAN.—You cannot do better than study Tylor's *Primitive Culture*. It is a magnificent work. We regard Tylor as the soundest of all the thinkers in this field; sounder even than Spencer, though the latter has, of course, done the more colossal work.

J. F. ALLEN (as near as we can make his name out) writes to us from Mapperly-road, Nottingham. He says that he was holding a short meeting amongst some working men on December 23, and at the conclusion of "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" someone put a paper in his hand, saying: "Read this, sir." It was "a dreadful blasphemous parody" on that beautiful hymn. The gentleman now wants to know whether it is manly to mock sacred things, and whether people will be improved by "putting bad and pernicious papers" into their hands. Well, it all depends upon *what is* sacred, and *what is* bad and pernicious. The gentleman can hardly expect us to share *his* opinion of the *Freethinker*, which is a remarkably decent paper in comparison with (say) the Bible.

GEORGE DIXON.—Accept our best thanks for your kind attention. The parcel arrived duly, with the contents in good condition.

G. S. HOPWOOD.—We have several times explained that membership of the Secular Society, Limited, carries with it no further liability—beyond the annual subscription—than the possible payment of anything up to and not exceeding £1 in case the Society should ever be wound up and the assets are not sufficient to cover liabilities. This is an extremely remote and contingent liability. The Society had to be limited by law in some way. It is limited by Guarantee, and in the easiest way possible.

ENQUIRER.—Mr. Forder can supply you with all the late Charles Bradlaugh's writings that are still in print. Address to him at 28 Stonecutter-street, E.C.

G. J. HOLYOAKE.—Thanks for your pretty and appropriate card "with festive time wishes," which we cordially reciprocate. The fresh alertness of your old age is quite inspiring. You seem almost bent on outliving the next century as well as this one.

SOME lecture notices arrive this week too-late for insertion. We have repeatedly stated that these notices should reach our office not later than Tuesday morning. We cannot upset our printing arrangements for the sake of laggards, and we wish this to be distinctly understood.

RECEIVED.—Nottingham Guardian—Norwood Review—Boston Investigator—New Century Review—Birmingham Argus—Huddersfield Examiner—Yorkshire Evening Post—Secular Thought—Two Worlds—Record—Freidenker—Ethical World—Der Arme Teufel—Blue Grass Blade—Open Court—Torch of Reason—Isle of Man Times—Sydney Bulletin—People's Newspaper—New York Truthseeker—Islington Gazette—Stratford Express—Progressive Thinker—Thetford Times.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

We hope our readers will like the new dress in which the *Freethinker* appears this week. It is our intention to keep abreast with the times in this and other respects. New features will be introduced in the paper during the present year, and we are taking the present opportunity to advertise it in the newspapers and otherwise. Perhaps our friends will recollect our Circulation Fund and aid us as well as they can in this enterprise. We give time and energy and such ability as we possess, but we have no capital to work with. If we had, we could soon double our circulation, which we venture to think would be a good thing for the Freethought cause as well as ourselves and our regular contributors.

Mr. Foote delivers three lectures to-day (January 1) in the Bristol-street Board School, Birmingham, and no doubt will have crowded audiences. He always has large meetings there, and the bigots have given the Secularists a big advertisement lately. Unfortunately, the School Board has thrown a sop to the bigots by prohibiting the sale of Freethought literature at the meetings.

Mr. Charles Watts left Euston on Saturday morning, December 24, at 10.15. A number of relatives and friends saw him off, including Mr. Foote, Mr. C. A. Watts, Miss Vance, and Miss Brown. Mrs. Watts is quite used to these partings. Several members of the Liverpool Branch met Mr. Watts at the landing-stage, and wished him good speed. We have received a brief note from him, posted at Queenstown. He reports all well, and, although he did not like being away from home on Christmas Day, he was very comfortable on board the *Aurania*.

Mr. C. Cohen occupies the Athenæum Hall platform this evening (January 1), and will be greeted, we hope, by a good audience. He lectures there again on the following Sunday, after which Mr. Foote will return for the rest of the month.

London Freethinkers will please note that their Annual Dinner takes place on Monday, January 9, at the Holborn Restaurant. The tickets are 4s. each, and can be obtained from Miss Vance at 377 Strand, W.C., from Mr. Forder at 28 Stonecutter-street, or from any London Branch secretary. Mr. Foote will preside, and be supported by Messrs. Forder, Cohen, Moss, Heaford, and others. Mr. Charles Watts will be represented by Mrs. Watts, who will figure on the program. Besides the dinner, which is sure to be first-rate at the Holborn, there will be some good vocal and instrumental music. We shall be happy to report that the gathering was in every way a great success.

The "Boston Investigator" Company has convened a Congress of Freethinkers for Saturday and Sunday, January 28 and 29, in the Paine Memorial Hall. Addresses will be given, and discussions held as to the best means of organising and propagating Freethought in the district.

The *Torch of Reason* is a bright little paper, published at Silvertown, and conducted in the interest of the Oregon Secular Church. The last number to hand reproduces a column of "Acid Drops" from the *Freethinker*. We are pleased to be read by Secularists out in the far West, and some day or other we hope to make their personal acquaintance.

The Dundee Freethinkers hold a Social Meeting on Sunday evening first, New Year's night, in the Cutters' Hall, Murraygate. Tea will be served at 6.30, and will be followed by a concert and gramophone entertainment. Freethinkers in the town and district should make it a point of being present.

Watson Heston's cartoon in the last number of the New York *Truthseeker* to hand represents the Freethought Monitor cannonading the Old Ship Zion, which is badly knocked about and heeling over alarmingly.

France is slowly but surely recovering from the fever of bigotry into which she was thrown by the clerical intrigues. The Chamber of Deputies has administered a heavy rebuff to M. Drumont, the rabid Jew-baiter, who interpellated the Government in favor of M. Max Regis, the dismissed Mayor of Algiers—the gentleman who was bent on driving all Jews out of the town.

James M. Davey, having seen the *Freethinker* in the Stratford Library, gives it an advertisement in the local *Express*, for which we return him our best thanks. Not that he meant to do us a kindness. Far from it. He demands the exclusion of this journal from the library, for the sake of the "sons and daughters" of the ratepayers, who all know that Christianity is true, and ought not to be questioned. The poor man is in a bad way; still, we thank him again for the advertisement.

The Family Love-Feast.

"Now," said dear old Grandpa Smithkins, "we are a family that sort uv keeps in touch with our relations, and yet we never seem to really git together. Here we are all alone in this great big homestead. What do you say, mother, to us having a big, sociable, family reunion and love-feast Thanksgiving-dinner? We'll invite all our relations, old and young. What do you say to that?"

Grandma Smithkins's face fairly beamed. "It will be the very thing!" she said, enthusiastically.

So the big table was set with forty covers. All the male and female Smithkinses—cousins, uncles, aunts, and nephews—sent fraternal acceptances of the invitation, and for a week Grandpa and Grandma Smithkins kept their servants working overtime in preparation, and gladdened the heart of every provision dealer in the neighborhood by the astonishing purchases they made.

Thanksgiving came, and so did the relatives—just in time for dinner. Grandma and Grandpa Smithkins hugged and kissed everybody, and dinner was announced.

Unfortunately, Uncle George was placed next to Cousin Charley, who had borrowed fifty dollars of his uncle, and had never returned it.

Aunt Emma was placed next to Cousin Fanny—the latter had married into a family Aunt Emma considered beneath her.

Brother-in-law Harduppe Smithkins sat beside Uncle Gottmoney Smithkins, who had foreclosed a mortgage on Harduppe.

Aunt Caroline and Aunt Jane were close together—they always quarrelled on women's rights.

Uncle Abner and Uncle John were respectively for free silver and the gold standard.

Cousin Mary and Cousin Matilda were placed side by side. They had a property division ten years before that still existed as a lawsuit.

Uncle Mumford and Nephew Henry were table neighbors. Uncle Mumford had allowed Nephew Henry's note to go to protest.

Cousin Gertrude and Aunt Ellen always detested each other.

Even the children—most of them good, wholesome American boys, who regarded face-washing as a task rather than a pleasure—were sandwiched between Aunt Stuckupp Smithkins's eight Fauntleroy-dressed sons.

Finally Uncle Bill, whom everybody thought was in gaol, and who had not been invited, came in intoxicated, and made a few remarks about those present, and their failings, and in about five minutes—

"Well," said dear old Grandpa Smithkins, as he viewed the wrecked dining-room, "talk about strained relations! Uncle Gottmoney's collar-bone is broken, and —"

But the hysterical sobbing of Grandma Smithkins, as she gazed on the havoc wrought, broke off his train of unpleasant thoughts.

—*New York Journal.*

"Take in" Jehovah's Journal.

"TAKE in" *Jehovah's Journal*, I advise you;
Read, mark, and learn, and inwardly digest it;
You'll find some news therein that will surprise you—
Come, test it.

You'll find it full of "foreign" information—
More full by far, my dear-beloved reader,
Than *Echo*, *Star*, or "Largest Circulation,"
Or *Leader*.

Upon its pages pore with bended noddle,
Don't keep it on the shelf until it's dusty,
Don't make a "flow'r-pot stand" of it, or Jah 'll
Get crusty.

Don't treat the *Journal* as a "feast of reason,"
For, if you do, you'll find it "food for laughter,"
And swelter through an endless "summer" season
Hereafter.

When reading other works you use your *free* will,
And, when you've finished, make your own deductions;
You mustn't treat "Jah's Word" like that, or he will
Play "ructions."

You mustn't class the stories in its pages
With that of *Puss in Boots* or *Jack that Grew Beans*;
For, if you do, Jah will, in future ages,
Give you beans.

Instruct your babes, as soon as they can toddle,
In "Holy Scripture"—with its "gas" inflate 'em,
Or else their loving Heavenly Father, Jah, 'll
Cremate 'em.

ESS JAY BEE.

Rustic Religion.

Parson and Peasant. By the Rev. J. B. BURNE, M.A., Oxon,
Rector of Wasing, Berks. (Methuen & Co.)

ONE of the problems of the Church is that perplexing person, Hodge up-to-date. Is he "lost, stolen, or strayed"? There is no mistake about his having broken loose. How is he to be re-taken? The Church of his forefathers knows him no more—at least, it sees so little of him that he might be a stranger. He lives so near, and is yet so far. Stray glimpses of him on Sundays are caught from the rectory windows. He is then either moving along to the village Ebenezer to browse on the herbage of Dissent, or he is lazily strolling off, pipe in mouth, in some direction which leads him anywhere but to the "Church that tops the neighboring hill." Personal appeals to the absentee are of no avail. Week-day visits to his cottage do not alter his Lord's Day movements. What is the poor country parson to do? He feels all the pangs of the parent whose wayward son has bolted. He even frames in imagination some such "agony" advertisement as:—

"JOHN H—E.—Come home to your heart-broken Church.
All will be forgiven.—Honeysuckle Rectory, Berks."

But John Hodge shows no inclination to return. Why should he? He has emerged from the old thralldom to squire and parson. Joseph Arch has shown him the way. The book Joseph has written, and the Countess of Warwick has stamped with some indication of approval, is a perfect vindication of Hodge. He no longer feels that he is one of those hat-touching peasantry who are called upon to—

"Love their occupations,
Bless the squire and his relations,
Live upon their daily rations,
And always keep their proper stations."

Hodge up-to-date has dropped his old hat-touching habits. He has become civil instead of servile. He has a soul of his own, and the trouble to the parsons is that he is not at all concerned about its being saved—according to their nostrums. The Rector of Wasing suggests a variety of ways in which Hodge may be best approached. He abandons the old device of following the hard-working "son of the soil" into the field, and preceding some observations on Christ and Him crucified by a little playful chat about mangold wurzels and the latest fall of rain. He recognises that a black coat and a clerical cravat have very much the same effect on the laboring swain as a red cloak on a bull. Therefore he suggests to clerics that, whilst their sacerdotal caste will be readily acknowledged, "the less it is asserted or even implied by themselves, the more good perhaps they will do."

The distribution of tickets for blankets, coal, and soup has lost much of its old proselytising efficacy. Hodge up-to-date is not to be subsidised in that glaring, barefaced, pauperising fashion. Nowadays he is easier got at by an invitation to his daughters to visit the rectory, and display their accomplishments in a performance on the rector's piano. The eleemosynary section of parish work is practically limited to village frauds. The strong and lusty, the honest and independent, resent any attempt to bribe them into belief and what they regard as irksome religious observances.

Quite the most interesting chapter in the Rector of Wasing's pleasantly-written sketches is that on "The Peasant at Church." It, of course, implies "first catch your hare, before you cook him." But having your peasant in church, what are you to say to him? Mr. Burne thinks that "English peasants, as a class, are religious *after their fashion*." He writes only of parishes which have from the first been paternal and despotic in their institutions both secular and spiritual. In such a parish Sir Roger de Coverley might nap on the Sabbath day, but he napped in church, and he was religiously particular to wake at odd times and look round severely on his retainers, lest any should have absented themselves, or have presumed to share his privilege of day-dreaming in the parish church. The parson might, or might not, on week-days help the squire to hunt his hounds; but the squire, as a thing of course, whipped in for the parson on Sundays. That

was the traditional arrangement. How sadly are things changed! Parson Burne says:—

"Of late, church-going has lost its character as a mark of respectability among the laboring class, but no doubt there are at this day many parishes in which favoring circumstances still keep alive among them the impression that to attend church is the right thing, specially, because it is, like honesty, the best policy."

Much of the present church-going, Parson Burne is obliged to admit, "rests upon motives unworthy of Him whom it professes to serve." The attitude of our peasant contemporaries in regard to public worship, he says, gives deep concern to good Churchmen, and demands their anxious consideration and best efforts to bring about a change. "In an ordinary parish, whilst the upper and middle classes are fairly represented, the working-people, especially the males among them, are to be found only few and far between." The resident gentry, of course, attend, and the farmers and tradesmen, unless they are Dissenters, put in an appearance; but the peasant class remain away, or only attend with reluctance and as a grudging response to personal appeals.

Parson Burne deplors the grievous falling off, and proposes to look the reasons of it in the face. He does not think that "infidel notions have laid hold of the peasantry yet." But he says the men exult in their freedom, are nervously anxious to assert themselves, and quick to resent interference; they pass the Church in a rebellious spirit, and fight shy of the parson. The influence of the squire and the farmer is no longer exerted in behalf of church-attendance. "The laborers are not even at the trouble to excuse themselves, and the farmer has almost ceased to care whether or not the sharers of his week's toil come to worship with him on Sunday." Parson Burne, looking at his distributing bag to which all the gentry are expected to subscribe, says that, of course, there are loafers and feckless women in every parish "whose ragged destitution appeals to us as shamelessly as ever; there are everywhere sick people and chronic invalids, too, who look for, and with present gratitude accept, all we can give them; but any obligation arising out of this help is in general scarcely acknowledged in the one case, and in the other is soon forgotten; there are also a few partially incapable through weak health, who only find casual employment, and have to be assisted from time to time; they are among the most deserving and thankful of our charges; but, upon the whole, the peasantry are almost independent of us, and behave accordingly."

A very sad state of things! What are the reasons for it? Perhaps a trifle deeper down than Parson Burne dreams of in his philosophy.

FRANCIS NEALE.

Christianity and After.

A WRITER on the origin of our English Bible points to the historical fact of there being a listening, before a reading, public. During the last decade I have been numbered only with the reading public, but learn thereby that Christians raise the question: "If I give up my religion, what have you to put in its place?" By showing the Christian creed incredible, the Freethinker is held to be guilty of cruelty—of robbing a poor man of his belief, without recompense. Those who understand the subject know that such is quite impossible. No one can believe for another, or take his belief away, although the belief itself may vanish when it is seen to be wanting in proof, or destitute of value. But the way Christians put the matter is as though one should say: "If you take away the fever, what other complaint will you give me?" They do not recognise relief, restoration to health, as a good substitute, the deliverance from delusion and error, and being made convalescent by breathing the pure air of freedom. They cannot sever themselves from one superstition with no other in prospect. When they visit the heathen, they offer their new superstition in case he gives up his old one. That's called "conversion," while it is only an exchange.

If we succeed in relieving the minds of Christians from the power and influence of priestcraft and superstition, they need no substitute, no replacing; they are

evils to be for ever banished, in a sure and certain hope that they may never return. Besides, reason once unfettered, working in the light instead of the dark, will fast enough discover substitutes for tyranny and superstition, for unreasoning faith, bigotry, custom, and error. Our object in criticising Christianity is to expose its errors, to change old and erroneous ideas about its value, to show that only what is true and useful deserves to survive. Christianity gives no definition of life, truth, or duty, or what is humanly good. Its theory does not fit in with the requirements of life on the earth, but makes this life only subordinate to another. It proposes to transform the units of our race into divinities, while our aim is, we think, the better one—to humanise them and their ideas. In dealing with the popular faith, our aim is to rationalise it, to divest it of mystery and terror. At the same time, in common with all men, we feel joy and sorrow, but regard them as natural, as necessary conditions of existence in a world constituted as ours is at present. Coming, growing, and parting life—its pleasures and pains—all is in harmony with the unalterable laws of phenomena.

The idea, therefore, that life can be sustained here, or extended to hereafter, by prayer or desire or belief, becomes utterly misleading. No doubt the love of life is instinctive, and its continuity under agreeable conditions may be desirable; but it is not attainable by instinct or desire. Man has many desires, reasonable and otherwise; but they are not realisable because of that—they are seen to depend on conditions, which do not, at all times, favor the individual. The Christian's desire to live for ever is no exception; that, too, must depend on intellectual, moral, and physical conditions. It is fairly open to doubt, however, if any human being ever did or can form any conception of what is involved in the words, "live for ever." Who can realise a never-ending, sleepless life? Who can endure even the thought of an interminable round of enjoyment, an everlasting whirl of excitement? Yet this is one of the dearest items in the illusion derivable from a belief in Christianity—so hard to give up in becoming a disciple of common-sense. But what are the realities concerned in this fiction? Simply that we know no more of an individual future than an infant of a past existence. Neither admits of proof—is not proved by faith, hope, or desire; it can only be accepted or assented to, as a form of words. But it is said there is great relief in leaving the sorrows and cares of this world for a world in which they are unknown. We know that by giving up life we escape from its troubles, and leave others living our share in the inheritance; but a world without any cares is an idea, not a fact. Heavens and hells are ideas; their history may be traced to a dim and distant past, and they have become modified by the genius of some, argued out of existence by others; while a few who still hold to them transform them into spiritualistic visions, in no way distinguishable from pure fictions.

No doubt they are still, to the uncultured mind, the same materialistic places, "above" and "below," as when the universe was as limited as the intellectual capacities of believers made it. After all, the rectification of the wrongs of this world by the invention of another is a clumsy contrivance for making the poor rich and the weak strong; as both worlds are attributed to the same maker, who may not do better in any future world than in this. There is no obvious reason for expecting the maker of all the worlds improving upon the experiment afforded us in the present life. Infinite wisdom cannot be extended or increased.

There is no ground for even assuming that unchangeable wisdom and power will do other, or different, in any other world than is manifested in this. We see that in this world the extent and duration of painful or pleasurable sensations, physical and mental, are determined by the conditions of existence, and there is no valid ground for assuming it will ever be otherwise, here or hereafter. Man is a compound being, having the power to live and think—there are certain known conditions under which he gives manifestations of life and thought; and other conditions under which both manifestations cease. All organisms dissolve; the weed, flower, and man lose their form, color, and beauty; their identity is destroyed for ever.

No belief, however sincere, can set aside this, the observed invariable order of nature. Continuity is only

seen in the species, not in the individual; and this law is not overruled by an assumption that it is otherwise under unknown conditions, in unknown worlds. Nothing is more clear to us than that the dead exist only in the memory of the living.

There is one thing of which we may remind those who cling to the idea of an eternal abode of bliss in the Christian scheme, and that is the equally important idea of an eternal consciousness of grief and pain; the latter rests on the same authority as the former. There is, moreover, the alarming announcement that only a few have any chance whatever of entering the abode of bliss, while the broad road to everlasting destruction is described as a crowded thoroughfare. From a scientific standpoint a future life, above or below, is a purely speculative problem, of no more importance than any other speculation.

It is reasonable to suppose that, in any reappearance of man in another world, he will have to be born again, and will start in the new world with new views and aspirations, if at all. The Pagan doctrine of an immortal soul is purely poetical, the work of the imagination; while the Christian adopted doctrine of the resurrection of the body involves a series of physical miracles too vast for any imagination to conceive. Yet on one or both of these the whole superstructure of a future life depends. The most that the Church assures its members is that they are buried in a sure and certain hope. They all subsist on hope.

CHARLES CATTELL.

(To be concluded.)

Boring.

(Concluded from our last issue.)

O God, thou art indeed a great rock; but thy greatness is not as the greatness of former years. In ages which have passed away, the earthquake and the pestilence were thine; the comet and the rainbow, the twilight and the morning mist, were the work of thy hands. Men ascribed unto thee light and darkness, wind and storm, hail and frost, thunder and lightning, the changes of seasons, and the motions of stars; but, Lord, in these later days men have been boring, and they say that all things come in obedience to the laws of nature. Thy greatness has been brought low, O God; thy greatness has been brought very low. Men do, indeed, with their lips, still ascribe unto thee the kingdom and the power and the glory; but, in their hearts, they have robbed thee of thy kingdom, they fear not thy power, and they give not unto thee the tenth part of the glory which formerly was thine. O God, unto thee will we render all that is justly thy due, for thou art, as ever, but the measure of the ignorance of men.

O thou great and terrible Rock! Thy proud head shall yet crumble in the dust. We are boring, Lord, and our toil shall not be in vain. The work goes on with untiring energy, and, though we see but small result, our sons and our son's sons shall inherit the fruit of our labor. Already do we discern foretokens of the coming time. The daily return of the sun to gladden the earth is sure. No less certain is the dawning of that day when every child of man shall know the "stuff" of which thou, O God, art formed.

Here also, in close proximity, is situated another mighty obstacle, which some men call the Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture. So formidable is this rock that many thousands of our race, because of it, never gain the faintest glimpse of the pathway of progress.

Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture! Countless are the commonplace lives which are such because of thy influence. Unto thee are we indebted for the fact that so few rise above attainments which bear the stamp of mediocrity; that so many rest contented with mean ideals. Why is it that only one here and another there finds the way into the path of progress? It is because men adjust their conduct so that it falls within thy shadow, O Rock. This is the furthest limit of their endeavor. Into their imagination enters no thought of that which lies beyond. O Rock, thou dost bar the way. O Rock, the lives of men are contemptible because thou dost stand betwixt them and the onward path.

Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture! Thy countenance has a lie branded upon it. Thou art not impregnable. No rock is impregnable which blocks the pathway of progress. Already the blast, the drill, and the pick are demonstrating thy vulnerability. Thou art not even rock. Every turn of the instrument affords evidence of the "stuff" which is inside thee. Thou art indeed the veriest plaster made to look like stone.

Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture! Thy doom is sealed. We are only a little company; but no day passes without some addition to the number of those who recognise the hollowness of thy pretensions. We heed not the gibe at the poverty of our ranks, for we depend not upon the huzzas of unthinking crowds; we rely upon the strength of our cause, and we know that, in the end, the victory will be ours.

At no great distance stands the third rock, and this is the foulest of all. It is, indeed, a grave question whether it has not been the cause of more disaster than the other two combined. Bitter is the pain which has proceeded from it; countless are the lives which have here been fatally wrecked. Its name is the "Infallible Rock of Holy Church," and a blazing scroll appears across its surface bearing this inscription: "Upon this Rock I will build my Church, and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

"The Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." The man who caused these words to be here written seems to have been possessed with the pitiful notion that the noisiest forces in the world are the most powerful. It is not so. The wild hurricane blows its hardest, but the powerful railway train stays not in its course. When, however, the gentle snow falls, flake upon flake, covering the ground to a depth of one, two, three feet, then the sturdy locomotive is brought to a dead standstill.

"The Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." Perhaps not. No sane man would ever choose so ineffective a weapon. To begin with, Dean Farrar, and a few other latitudinarian Christians, say that there is no hell. If, then, hell has no existence, it follows that it can have no gates. But supposing there is a hell—where is it? And are the gates to be found on the north, south, east, west, or top side there of? (I was nearly adding *bottom* side, in forgetfulness that this place is said to have no bottom.) And of what material are these gates constructed? Is it timber, or iron, or brass? And, when we meet with the Freethinker, who would be crazy enough to use such an implement, can it be honestly recommended as suitable for a battering-ram?

"The Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." The Churchman is welcome to his vaunt. We know of weapons more trustworthy, and we have learnt how to use them. Therefore, laugh your loudest, O witless Churchman! but forget not that it is written in the pages of your inspired book that, "as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool." Let your boast resound to the uttermost parts of the earth, O proud ecclesiastic! Your challenge falls upon ears which can correctly appraise its worth. You may well affect to despise a hell which your own henchmen have created. You may keep your hell and its gates, for we prefer to use our own tools. We are boring, boring, boring, and success will ultimately reward our labors. We will not cease our toil until your rock is razed level with the ground, and every fragment is cast away into the ocean of oblivion.

Some of the artisans who are engaged in the work of boring into these rocks declare that men find bread in them, and this bread is not that mystical but innutritious article of diet which is known as the bread of eternal life, but is indeed that bread which perisheth. It is even said that gold is found in these rocks, and that men live luxuriously upon the supplies of precious metal derived therefrom. I have indeed been credibly informed that one man obtains as much as fifteen thousand pounds every year from these rocks; also I learn that a countless army of cardinals, bishops, rectors, curates, preachers, bible-men, deacons, pastors, missionaries, hallelujah captains, and the like, secure a more or less comfortable livelihood from these identical

sources. It is further stated that a great multitude, which no man can number, of tradespeople, clerks, merchants, professional men, and others, derive dividends from these rocks. I am disposed to believe that these reports are true, inasmuch as I have myself seen cut in clear characters on the surface of the Impregnable Rock these words: "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Of one fact we have clear evidence. No adequate measures of progressive reform are possible whilst these obstacles remain. The work of unsparing destruction is imperative. The endeavor will of necessity bring with it unpopularity. The man who essays the task must be prepared to face opposition, persecution, ostracism, and contumely.

Brave hearts and willing hands are needed for this service. Men skilled in the use of the drill are wanted. Navvies with arms strong to wield the pick and shovel can render useful aid. Comrades of all degrees who will give ready help in clearing the wreckage out of the way will receive a hearty welcome. Who will this day consecrate himself to the work?

G. DAWSON BAKER.

National Secular Society.

REPORT of Monthly Executive Meeting held on Thursday, December 22 (the President in the chair). There were present: Messrs. E. Bater, C. Cohen, S. Hartmann, W. Heaford, A. B. Moss, C. Quinton, M. Loafer, W. Leat, J. Neate, T. Wilmot, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed, also those of sub-committee. It was resolved, upon the motion of Mr. Bater, that future meetings of this committee should be held when business rendered it necessary, and not upon fixed dates as heretofore.

An application from the Motherwell Branch for assistance in forming a library was considered, and the President kindly undertook to do his best in the matter.

The financial position of the Society was again discussed, and adjourned till after the holidays. It was also resolved to contribute one guinea to the funds of the Moral Instruction League.

It was moved by Mr. Bater, seconded by Mr. Heaford: "That, on the eve of Mr. Watts's departure for America, this Executive of the N. S. S. desires to express to him the hope that he will have a successful lecturing tour in the United States and Canada, and return to England full of health and good spirits." The meeting then closed.

EDITH M. VANCE, *Secretary.*

Book Chat.

THE *Literary Guide* (Watts & Co.) for January is a good number. Mr. C. T. Gorham opens with an article on "Agnosticism and Duty." Mr. F. J. Gould's article on "The Finished Work of Christ" is bright and incisive. There are several interesting and able book reviews. Dr. J. B. Crozier's "Visit to Thomas Carlyle" does not throw any fresh light on the Sage of Chelsea. A number of forcible paragraphs are a welcome addition to the set articles of this publication. The four-page supplement is an excellent summary of Darwin's *Descent of Man*, written by Mr. Joseph McCabe.

Dr. Lionel S. Beale, the old opponent of Huxley and Tyndall, has just published, through Messrs. Churchill, a sixpenny pamphlet on *Vitality*. He calls it an appeal, an apology, and a challenge; and the title-page states that the contents are reprinted from the *Lancet*. Dr. Beale repeats his former argument, that life is not a product or condition of organised matter. He appears, however, to see that he is fighting a forlorn hope. His pamphlet appeals chiefly to specialists.

The New Talmud Publishing Co., 54 E. 106th-street, New York, sends us the prospectus of a new edition and translation of the Babylonian Talmud, which is rightly described as a mammoth undertaking. Rabbi Wise, of Cincinnati, is one of the scholars engaged on this work. Dr. Michael L. Rodkinson is the general editor. The volumes are to be issued quarterly at two and a half dollars each.

Lord Rosebery's address delivered to the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution on Friday, November 25, is now published as a sixpenny pamphlet by David Douglas, under the title of *Statesmen and Bookmen*. It contains many pretty

things in his lordship's best vein. Chiefly it is a eulogy of Mr. Gladstone as the most intensely bookish of great statesmen. There is no reference, however, to the fact that Mr. Gladstone was constantly praising second-rate modern fiction, without saying a word on behalf of a Meredith or a Hardy. Lord Rosebery concludes with a striking contrast (he might have made it *more* striking if he had dared) between Gladstone and Parnell. The latter is said to have neglected books, while the former devoured them. But both were great statesmen and great personalities—and Parnell probably the greater of the two, though Lord Rosebery does not say so. We should add that this address is nicely printed in an attractive form.

Profane titles for novels still appear to be fashionable. Some recent books are named *In the Image of God*, *Shadowed by the Gods*, and *The Scourge of God*.

The man in the street will be astonished to hear that there are about seven thousand ladies and gentlemen considered sufficiently famous to be included in that hardy annual, *Who's Who*. The editor, Mr. Douglas Sladen, must have cast his net widely to have secured so many celebrities, although we have no doubt that the majority belong to the rank of what Shelley satirically called "the illustrious obscure."

The unexpected decision of Messrs. W. H. Smith & Son to exclude *God is Love: A Novel*, by T. Mullett Ellis, from their bookstalls and circulating library, on account of the profanity of the title, has advertised the book in question very widely in all literary circles.

Messrs. W. H. Smith & Son have exercised the boycott in a number of instances, notably in the case of the books of George Moore and the works of Rudyard Kipling. It was, indeed, hoped that the *Esther Waters* controversy had settled this question some four years since, and the literary world believed that this firm would not place themselves in opposition to the idea of free trade in literature, or attempt to dictate to adult members of the public what they should or should not be permitted to read.

The question, after all, is not merely one of this novel or that; it is whether our literature is to conform to the standard of the average Sunday-school, or whether it is to claim the same privileges as every great literature of which we have any record. We already have the censorship of Scotland Yard, which is quite active enough, without having the additional burden of an irresponsible propaganda in a distributor's office thrust upon us.

Mr. Ambrose Bierce, the author of *In the Midst of Life* and other works, has written a book of *Fantastic Fables*, which Messrs. Putnam's Sons are publishing. While fantastic in form, these fables strike many a blow at the foibles and vanities of mankind.

This writer, more widely known under the pen-name of "Dod Grile," deserves a place beside the great humorists like Mark Twain, Bret Harte, and Artemus Ward. Owing, perhaps, to his iconoclastic opinions, he is not popular, although his work is of quite as high a quality as any of the other authors mentioned.

He was for many years connected with the *London Figaro*, and in the columns of the early volumes of that journal much of his most characteristic writing may be found. A little volume, *The Fiend's Delight*, which Mr. Gladstone directed public attention to some years since, contains some delightful humor.

In the Midst of Life, written under his correct name, Ambrose Bierce, appears to be his most popular work. It is a collection of short stories, dealing with soldiers and civilians, mostly tragic, and written with the realism of a Maupassant or Kipling. "Dod Grile" contributed to the pages of *Fun*, *Punch's* really comic rival, some of his best writing. A selection was published some years since, under the facetious title of *Cobwebs from an Empty Skull*.

Bierce's work should appeal specially to Freethinkers, to whom his spicy paragraphs and fatalistic stories should prove very welcome after the lugubrious efforts of the "kail-yard" novelists and the apostles of the new humor.

A creed is a rod,
And a crown is of night;
But this thing is God,
To be man with thy might,
To grow straight in the strength of thy spirit, and live out
thy life as the light.
—A. C. SWINBURNE.

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, C. Cohen.

EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Bow Vestry Hall, Bow-road, E.): 7, G. Spiller, "Shakespeare: I. His Times."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Surrey Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road, S.E.): 11.15, Discussion; 7, Christmas Festival.

WEST LONDON SECULAR CLUB (15 Edgware-road): Every evening 7 to 10.50. The resort of Freethinkers in the district. Visitors invited. Lectures every Thursday. January 5, at 8.15, E. White, "The Man in the Moon." December 31, at 9, Watch-night Smoking Concert.

WESTMINSTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Grosvenor Arms, Page-street): 7.30, W. J. Ramsey, "The Limit of State Control."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, E. Pack, "The Testimony of Lecky."

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Bristol-street Board School): G. W. Foote—11, "Let there be Light"; 3, "The Babe of Bethlehem: A Christmas Fairy Tale"; 7, "Souls, Spirits, and Ghosts."

LEICESTER SECULAR CLUB (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, A Concert.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Willie Dyson, "Sixty Years of Progress."

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—January 1 and 8, Athenæum Hall, Tottenham Court-road; 15, Camberwell; 22, Sheffield; 29, Bradford Labor Church. February 5, Glasgow.

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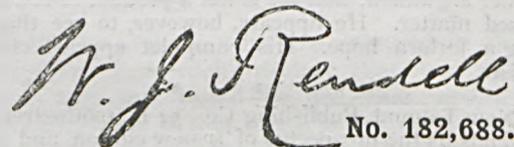
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