

Freethinker

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

The Rev. Annabel Lee.

EDGAR ALLEN POE, the most finished and quintessential of American songsters, died miserably in a hospital at the early age of thirty-eight. His life was marred by weakness, but not stained with crime; and, as brilliant James Hannay wrote, in a delightful little preface to the first edition of Poe that was launched in England, "He never profaned his genius, whatever else he profaned." His beautiful and affectionate wife died, leaving him a childless widower. Whatever his failings, they had loved each other truly, and he embalmed his recollections of her in his lovely "Annabel Lee." A poem so personal and sacred might well be immune to parody or plagiarism. Poe's darling, his life, and his bride might be left to sleep peacefully

In the sepulchre there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea,

Least of all should another versifier desecrate her repose. But this is evidently not the view of Mr. Robert Buchanan, who has "lifted" Poe's title and given it a prefix which makes it ineffably ludicrous. Fancy the sweet, retiring bride of the American poet assuming the style of reverend, dressing herself up in a sort of clerical garb, and orating from open-air platforms! It is enough to send a shudder through the proverbial French *sapour*.

The Rev. Annabel Lee: A Tale of To-Morrow, is published by C. Arthur Pearson, Limited, whose telegraphic address is "Humoursome, London." There is a special fitness about this in view of Mr. Buchanan's novel. Without a smile upon his face, he has managed to perpetrate a long joke of two hundred and fifty pages. Mr. Buchanan did not mean it to be a joke. He is never precisely a wit or a humorist, and he is always a little heavy-handed. On this occasion he is intensely serious. He writes: "a propagandist. His object is to refute the growing materialism of modern civilisation; unless, indeed, he is merely bent on exploiting the temporary reaction which has set in against it, after the fashion of Hall Caine, Wilson Barrett, and Marie Corelli. Now a novel of refutation is sure to be a failure. It may be a dull failure or a brilliant failure, but a failure it must be from the very nature of the case. A pre-emptive dominant purpose is the death of art. It necessarily turns the artist into a partisan. His characters become puppets, his distribution of vices and virtues amongst them is arbitrary and unnatural, and the course of events flows not from the reactions of his characters upon each other in a certain environment, but from his own personal predetermination. Instead of holding the mirror up to nature faithfully, he uses a double reflector, like some of the cheap eating-houses in London, where the visitors see themselves long and thin as they enter, and broad and fat as they go out. All the personages who represent the novelist's own sentiments are handsome, wise, and good; or their very failings—and it is judicious to give them a few—lean to virtue's side; while the personages who represent the opposition are heavily handicapped by being endowed with just the very qualities that are sure to bring about their own discomfiture, and to heighten by contrast the merit and prosperity of their antagonists.

Mr. Buchanan's plot may be briefly summarised. Annabel Lee, a little girl of eight, living in an age when Science has triumphed and Superstition is scotched if not slain, loses her brother, a couple of years older than herself. His death is a dreadful shock to her sensitive nature. She cannot believe, as all about her do, in

consonance with the Religion of Humanity, that her brother is really dead. She fancies he still lives "up there." By and bye, after a magnificent education, she reads old Christian documents, becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ, and goes about preaching his religion. One of her companions is a musician named Uriel, whose body was injured by an accident in childhood, and who has been classed amongst the Unfit—persons forbidden to marry and produce offspring to the detriment of the race. But he is a Christian, after all, and she resolves to marry him, in spite of the law. She is therefore arraigned before the great Tribunal, which sentences Uriel to death and herself to a period of seclusion. But a number of her adherents are in Court, mostly superstitious people from the remote North, and her exclamation, "Save us in the name of God!" stirs up a tumult, in which Uriel is killed by the hand of her rejected suitor, Eustace Combermere. The Rev. Annabel Lee thereupon walks out of Court in triumph, her followers bearing the dead body of Uriel as the "first martyr" of the Man-God's religion, which seems destined to carry everything before it. But at this point Mr. Buchanan writes "Finis." He stops where the interest really begins. To go farther would have overtaxed his powers.

The woman preacher of the religion of Jesus Christ might have been depicted as a Catherine Booth or an Annie Besant. But that would not have interested the general run of novel-readers. Mr. Buchanan knows his public, and gives them what they want. Here is the description of Annabel Lee at the age of eight:—

"As she sat there the dim light crept in and touched her on the hair—hair of a rich reddish hue with waves of gold in it, falling in ringlets on her shoulders. Her forehead was low and broad, her face a perfect oval, her nose delicately shaped on Grecian lines, her lips full and passionate, her grey eyes full of wonderful agate gleams..... Her hands and feet were small, the fingers long and delicate, and tipped with the faintest rose."

Here is her description twelve years later:—

"Annabel Lee was now twenty years of age, and she was as beautiful as her name—perfect in form and face as one of those Greek maidens so much beloved by painters and sculptors. Slightly yet strongly built, tall and graceful, with rich red-golden hair, dark grey eyes full of agate gleams, a broad, low forehead, a delicate nose and lips, and a firmly moulded chin."

Considering the task this young lady has before her—namely, that of upsetting the splendidly-organised Humanitarian civilisation of the Twenty-first Century—this description is worthy of a penny novelette. A "delicate nose shaped on Grecian lines" is no sign of power, nor is a "low forehead," however "broad," a sign of intellect. No woman, or man, shaped in that fashion, ever wrought a revolution—unless accidentally. Cleopatra had a Grecian nose, for she was a Ptolemy, not an Egyptian; and she had a broad, low forehead; but the tumult she made in the world was not by intellectual or moral force, but by the sensuous witcheries of the "serpent of old Nile."

We do not wonder that Mr. Buchanan felt it necessary to give her a powerful colleague in her evangelising. Preaching chiefly in the open air, her extraordinary beauty and enthusiasm "held her hearers spellbound," but the samples afforded of her eloquence are not very formidable, and it is not surprising to hear that her "chief help and stay" was the musician Uriel. "What her words failed to effect," we are told, "his music constantly wrought—it was so soul-compelling, so wonderful, so full of the power of the Unseen." It was

a Moody and Sankey arrangement, carried forward from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first—so unoriginal is Mr. Buchanan's share of "the prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come." We are even treated to a whole page of poetry, sung at one of the Rev. Annabel Lee's meetings. Here again originality throws up the sponge. The hymn is by the late Roden Noel. Like the Psalmist's body, it is fearfully and wonderfully made. Take the following sample:—

We are fain, we fain
Of mortal pain,
We are fain of heavenly sorrow,
As a gentle rain,
She will sustain—
Wait only till to-morrow.

"Whether it was the words or the music that wrought the spell," we are informed, "none can say, but many who listened were strangely moved, and more than one hearer broke into sobs and tears." Surely, Mr. Buchanan, it could *not* have been the words, unless the Twenty-first Century population were reduced to something like cretinism.

The cream of the joke is that the lady who revolutionises society with the aid of such hymns is the "most brilliantly intellectual woman" of her time. She has studied all sciences. She knows everything worth knowing—and evidently some things *not* worth knowing. She has even studied all the great religions. Amongst other achievements, she has "brooded over the sadness of Death with Buddha." We suppose this must be reckoned a fine expression, but it betrays a superficial acquaintance with Buddhism. It was the sadness of life, rather than the sadness of death, which Buddha pondered. Life itself was to him a curse instead of a blessing; and the great thing to be aimed at, after any number of reincarnations, was not Immortality, but the snapping of the ties of personality, and the absorption of the individual into the Whole from which he emerged.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued.)

Missionary Jottings.

THE conclusion of my winter lecturing season leaves me with little to chronicle in the way of fresh developments in Secular activity; but this circumstance is compensated for by the fact that I have not to record any diminution of Freethought propaganda. During the past ten weeks I have been wandering up and down the country lecturing in town and village, and if the record of so much lecturing is apt to prove monotonous reading it is, at least, a monotony of good work in a good cause, and with, all things considered, satisfying results.

In Scotland it is pleasing to find that the development of Freethought still continues. Glasgow is still more than maintaining its position, and, with increased membership and larger meetings, is able to pay considerable attention to the surrounding districts and to open up fresh fields of propaganda. The Motherwell Branch has also quite justified the favorable opinion I had formed of its members, and, besides carrying on its own regular propaganda, arranged, with the assistance of Glasgow, for meetings in Wishaw and Carlisle. Unfortunately it rained heavily during the time I was in this district—a circumstance that interfered considerably with the meetings. Still, there was a fair attendance on each evening, and a good sale of literature; while several new members were enrolled. When I was at Wishaw last I was opposed by a gentleman who put a number of questions that were evidently inspired by a sincere desire to understand the principles of Secularism. I replied to them as well as I was able in the brief time at my disposal, and after the meeting had a further conversation with the questioner. The result was that when I returned I was gratified by the news that he had become a member of the Motherwell Branch, and had the further pleasure of seeing him act as chairman for me at one of my meetings. Before I leave the Motherwell Branch I may mention that the members have set to work to form a library, and as the bulk of them are reading men those who have any books to spare might do worse than send them to the secretary.

At Paisley, besides lecturing on two week-nights, I tried the experiment of two meetings on a Sunday. These were the first Sunday lectures that had been tried in Paisley, and were more successful than any one had anticipated. There were good meetings both afternoon and evening, the audiences following with commendable attention all that was said. The opposition was confined to a couple of sermonettes from two Christians, to whom Secularism was evidently something new and wonderfully strange, and a few words from a quack doctor, who, among other remarkable things, had listened to my father lecturing on behalf of Christianity a few months previously. This circumstance was all the more remarkable, as my father had never trodden a public platform in his life, and has been dead these nine years. This is the second time this year I have heard of my father—or ought I to say my father's ghost?—wandering about as a Christian Evidence lecturer. I have been accused of starving my mother to death at Chatham—much to her surprise on hearing of the circumstance; some three months before I was married it was publicly announced that I had nearly killed my wife by my ill-treatment, and now I find that I am haunted by a parental ghost striving to counteract the effect of my Secular advocacy. Verily, the ways of the Lord's followers are past all comprehension!

At Dundee, where I delivered three lectures, I again found the audiences larger than I had anticipated. Of late years the movement here has been under a cloud, but there is now every sign that the Secularists of the town are preparing for as vigorous a campaign as circumstances will permit. My audiences were large, and there was a much more sympathetic feeling displayed than on my last visit, although there was nothing to complain of on that occasion. Still, the meetings that had been held in the open air by the local friends since I was last in the town had evidently borne good fruit; and, despite the fact that Dundee is not the most promising place in the world for Freethought propaganda, there is little doubt that steady plodding will suffice to build up a good branch there. Practically my only opponent was a man who, after plentifully distributing handbills containing the old-fashioned lies about "Infidel death-beds," etc., ventured a few minutes' speech at the conclusion of the evening meeting, and ran away when I rose to reply.

South of the Tweed I travelled over most of my old ground in the Midlands and Tyneside. In the North an attempt is being made by Mr. J. Bartram to revive the old North-Eastern Secular Federation, and if that were successful it would be the means of carrying the work into places where at present nothing is being done. It is impossible for small towns, where only two or three Freethinkers are living, to carry on a continuous propaganda. If this is to be done, these places must be worked either from London or from some town that acts as a centre for the district; and it is, therefore, to be hoped that Mr. Bartram's efforts will be crowned with some measure of success. I shall be going to Newcastle in June to hold the annual meeting on the Town Moor, and that might, perhaps, be a fitting time to convene a meeting of Durham and Northumberland Secularists, and thus try and put the movement on a sound footing.

At Liverpool I lectured for three Sundays to capital audiences. Unfortunately, the Branch here is experiencing some difficulty due to the laws against charging for admission on Sundays. The hall in which the meetings are held has a music licence, it is let for various purposes during the week, and the police have threatened the lessee of the hall that, if he allows the Secularists to charge for admission, the licence will be cancelled. The result is that the lessee, who has no interest in our work, has refused to allow the hall to be used unless admission is free. This necessarily throws a greater strain upon the resources of the members, as collections seldom or never yield what a charge for admission brings. However, up to the present the Branch has had more special lectures than usual, and, by the kind offer of a friend, it is likely that ere long the Branch may be meeting in a hall that will be practically its own, and, in that case, the threats of the police will be treated with what they deserve. The incident, combined with what has recently occurred at Birmingham and West Ham, should prove an instructive lesson to those who regard

Christianity as no longer inimical to Freethought. Our propaganda is bound to suffer until we secure fair play, and it seems only possible to obtain fair play from Christians by putting it beyond their power to behave unfairly.

I lectured at Birmingham twice on April 9. Driven from the Board schools by the bigotry of the Board, the Committee, nothing daunted, succeeded in securing a comfortable hall in a good thoroughfare for the continuance of the propaganda. Thanks to the persecution, the members are more energetic than ever, new converts are being made, the meetings are larger than ever, and the annual Conference on Whit-Sunday is being looked forward to with pleasurable anticipation. The Town Hall has been secured for the evening meeting, and there should be a great gathering on that occasion. My own meetings were much larger than usual. Although it rained heavily all day, there was a good muster in the afternoon, and in the evening all the seats were occupied, and a good number were compelled to stand during the lecture. The lecture, too, was well received, and the applause was long and hearty at the finish. The Birmingham friends appear to thrive on hardships, and there is little fear for Secularism in Birmingham while the present Committee rules.

One noticeable feature of my meetings has been the almost complete absence of opposition. Nineteen out of every twenty lectures pass off without the least opposition being offered from Christians, and when at the twentieth some fight is shown, it is of the tamest, silliest kind imaginable. A courteous, clever opponent is, in these days, an exception, the defence of the faith being usually left to those whose best excuse for the opinions they hold is their ignorance of how they came by them, and their imperviousness to what may be said against them.

I have lectured also to fair audiences at Blackburn, Preston, Huddersfield, Failsworth, and other places, on week-nights; but these meetings have not been as numerous as hitherto, nor as I should have liked them to have been. The inability of the Treasurer's Scheme to assist these meetings financially, owing to the inadequate support given to it, put a stop to new places being opened, as well as curtailing the work in places already established. And although I did what I could to carry on the meetings—rather more, in fact, than my circumstances altogether warranted—my efforts in this direction were necessarily very limited. It is impossible for one to keep on giving free lectures and paying expenses besides, and it is equally impossible for perhaps two or three working-men to undertake the inevitable loss consequent on the carrying on of an unpopular propaganda.

Still, taking all things into account, our movement is, as I have said, making steady progress. There is much that might be done, and much that must be done, in the way of organisation, but it is necessarily a difficult task to build up an organisation among Freethinkers. It appears to me that large and enduring organisations depend upon the presence of either sectarian feelings or pressure from the outside in the shape of direct persecution. So far as the latter element is concerned, it bids fair to become weaker as time advances, while the very thoroughness with which bigotry and intolerance have been lashed, and their anti-social character exposed, has done much to weaken it in the present. It would be wrong to say that persecution has died out; that, unfortunately, is not true; it exists, but it no longer manifests in a direct and easily recognisable shape, with the result that a great number of Secularists have not the necessity for organisation brought before them as clearly as it was in the stormy days of the Bradlaugh struggles.

So far as the second element is concerned, our propaganda necessarily and properly weakens that. I am not one who believes it to be the object of Secularism to build up a new sect with substantially the same sectarian feelings that animate and maintain the various religious organisations. That would be only emulating the example of the gentleman who formally renounced the errors of the Church of Rome in order to embrace those of the Church of England. The whole of our teaching seems to me to weaken party or sectarian feeling, and properly so. We neither claim to be the exclusive possessors of the principles we preach, or assert that salvation cannot be found outside the ranks of the

Secular Society. Our policy is, above all, to use a somewhat hackneyed phrase, a policy of permeation; and, so long as we can broaden the public mind by our presence, and make the value of Secular truths apparent to the mass of the people, our existence will be more than justified.

I do not wish it to be understood that I undervalue organisation, only that I do not regard it as an end, and am indicating some of the difficulties that stand in its way—difficulties that are, to some extent, inherent in the nature of our principles and the success of our propaganda. An organisation we must have if we are to do our work thoroughly; it is one of the instruments by means of which our battles are fought and our victories secured, and it were well if those who call themselves Freethinkers recognised this much more keenly than they do at present. The Secularists of Great Britain are by no means a small body, nor would they be unimportant, if only the proper amount of combination could be effected. So long as we have to fight religious organisations that have at their command practically unlimited funds, that are powerful enough to mould the developing minds of children in the interests of Christianity, and to obtain the assistance of public funds in the work; so long as there is a huge fund of religious feeling, ignorance, and prejudice for the Churches to appeal to, it is simply madness for us to leave things to individual initiative, unsupported by any organisation, and lacking the requisite funds to secure decent meeting-places and effective speakers, and then expect our principles to gain the recognition they deserve. That we have progressed as much as we have done speaks volumes for the truthfulness of our position; but, if we are ever to progress as rapidly as we would desire, it can only be done by all who value the name of Freethinker and the cause of Secularism reviewing their position and circumstances, and doing whatever lies in their power to secure the permanent triumph of the principles they profess to follow.

C. COHEN.

America's Gain.

FRANKLY, I admit that during my nearly four months' sojourn in America my communications to the *Freethinker* have not been what I intended. The fact is, I have been too ill to do anything. The second week after my arrival on this side of the Atlantic *La Grippe* caught me, and ever since I have been prostrate. I purpose sailing from New York, if I have gained sufficient strength to undertake the voyage, either on April 5 or 12.

Under the circumstances just narrated, I have naturally not been able to collect any special news; but one event has happened which I mentioned in a former article that calls for a few further comments—I mean the retirement from public life of the Rev. Dr. Talmage, which is regarded by most intelligent persons as a gain to America. The people here will have one less perverter of the truth, one less misdirector of the youthful mind, one less vulgar exponent of orthodox Christianity.

Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the present age is its love of the sensational. We see it in literature, in art, in the drama, and even in the pulpit. Hardly anything escapes its influence. The effect it produces upon the human mind is highly prejudicial to sober reflection and solid thought, and must to some extent be even incompatible with the true habits of business. It creates an unreal world, and fills the mind with pictures of things which have no counterpart in actual, every-day life. It is, in fact, a kind of intoxication, almost as objectionable as that resulting from the use of alcohol. The excitement to which it gives rise is, of course, pleasurable for the time being, and hence we do not wonder at its being sought for by large classes of persons, especially amongst those whose minds have not been trained by the systematic methods of science, or have received a warp by false systems of education. But it is the duty of every public teacher, who has the well-being of society at heart, to stem this objectionable tide as far as lies in his power.

That those who cater for the public in the way of

amusement or entertainment should take advantage of the prevalent love of sensationalism is, of course, to be expected. One consideration naturally stands out conspicuously in their minds, throwing all others into the shade—*i.e.*, to produce what is likely to be profitable. The aim of the novelist is to write what will sell, and of the theatrical manager to put upon the stage such pieces as will draw the largest crowds to his house. Neither of them, as a rule, is governed, or even professes to be governed, by any higher motives than the desire to furnish his patrons with amusement; and of course the taste of the public must be considered. But there are other men who have the ear of the people, and who profess to be actuated by far higher motives than to merely supply amusement; and with these there should be no pandering to a morbid taste, which must be admitted on all hands to be prejudicial to the mental welfare of those in whom it exists. This applies to every kind of public teacher, but most of all to the religious teacher, if the claims of his religion are true. The pulpit professes to be the highest moral agent in existence, and consequently we should expect it to be quite free from a tendency to sensationalism in any form whatever. The aim of the clergyman is, he tells us, solely to supply religious instruction, and to impart to mankind a knowledge of the great truths upon which his eternal welfare depends. His teaching, therefore, ought to be characterised by seriousness, sobriety, and, above all, by mental culture and intellectual power. Of course it is only fair to say that in many cases this is realised. Mistaken in their views as we believe ministers of religion to be, there are, nevertheless, among them honest, conscientious men, who do their duty according to the best light they possess. But there are exceptions to this—exceptions to which many of the others would probably object as strongly as we ourselves should do.

Those who heard the late C. H. Spurgeon know that he was not over particular in his choice of language, any more than he was philosophical in his preaching; but he was refinement itself compared with Dr. Talmage. The latter is a sort of pulpit Miss Braddon, and for years he has week by week regaled his hearers with such sensational sermons as would throw into the shade half the novels of the day, and even the chief works of fiction of American origin that every traveller on the railway-cars is tormented with by the newsboys. There is hardly any subject on earth, or, indeed, in heaven and that other place which is the antipodes of heaven (if there be such abodes), that has not occasionally furnished a pulpit theme for the Doctor to expatiate upon. The dark and seamy side of New York and the bright and gilded side of the celestial regions he professes to be equally familiar with. His symbols and figures—and he is always an adept at these—are drawn from the most gaudy and the most glittering scenes of human life. His notion of heaven appears to be that of an earthly court with its tinsel display, its florid embellishments, its imposing grandeur, and its tawdry decorations. Regiments of spiritual soldiers parade its golden streets, and its denizens shout and clap their hands like the supporters of a successful Parliamentary candidate. This is not sober advocacy, but uncontrolled frenzy. It is usual for fanatical orthodox believers to dabble with subjects upon which they are least informed. This was so with Dr. Talmage when he delivered what was termed “a profound and scientific discourse upon the Flood.” Of course the ark was made a peg upon which to hang a great deal of nonsensical talk about saints and sinners and the way of salvation, all of which may be passed over on this occasion. The point which does concern us is the following passage:—

“We do not need the Bible to prove the Deluge. The geologist’s hammer announces it. Sea-shells and marine formations on the top of some of the highest mountains of the earth prove that at some time the waters washed over the top of the Alps and the Andes. In what way the catastrophe came we know not; whether by the stroke of a comet, or by flashes of lightning, changing the air into water, or by a stroke of the hand of God, like the stroke of the axe between the horns of the ox, the earth staggered. To meet the catastrophe, God ordered a great ship to be built. It was to be without prow, for it was to sail to no shore. It was to be without helm, for no human hand should guide it. It was a vast struc-

ture, probably as large as two or three Cunard steamers. It was the Great Eastern of olden time.”

As large as two or three Cunard steamers? Why, all the Cunard fleet, the White Star, American, and all the other fleets put together, could not carry a quarter of the freight which that ancient vessel is said to have contained, “without prow” and “without helm.” And yet Dr. Talmage ought to have known that the size of the ark was not equal to two or three Cunard steamers. It was about five hundred feet in length, ninety feet in breadth, and less than fifty feet high. It was certainly without prow or rudder, and it was also without some other things, the absence of which must have made it a very inconvenient vessel in which to sail. It had one door in the side, and one window in some part or other; but, as there were three stories, it is difficult to imagine how those who resided in it for so long a time could obtain either ventilation or light. But did Dr. Talmage really believe that this story of the Flood and the Ark is anything more than a mythological fable? If so, his intelligence must be even of a lower order than we estimated.

But the “geologist’s hammer,” he says, has proved the deluge apart from the Bible. Now, it is really too bad that a public man should thus attempt to mislead and hoodwink those who place themselves under his teaching and look up to him for instruction. Dr. Talmage should have known that not only has geology not announced a universal deluge, but it has proved the contrary by demonstrating the utter impossibility that such an event ever happened during the existence of man upon the earth. Can any name be mentioned of any geologist of any note who believes in the fabled universal flood? If there be any, we have not heard of them. Their names certainly are not Lyell, Murchison, Mantell, Page, Geikie, Ramsey, or even Hugh Miller—the last-named of whom tried very hard to reconcile geology and Genesis. There are no doubt, we are told, “sea-shells and marine formations on the top of some of the highest mountains.” This may be true, but it does not prove Dr. Talmage’s conclusion. The flood was not caused by sea-water, but by rain; and how a heavy fall of fresh water could cause a deposit of sea-shells and marine animals it will require all the ingenuity of a theologian to explain. Besides, the merest tyro in geology knows that these deposits point to a time long anterior to the existence of man upon the earth, and that at no period were all the high mountains under water. No doubt every spot of dry land on the earth has been, not once, but many times, under the waters of the great ocean, but certainly no such total submergence of all the land at once, as is described in Genesis, ever occurred. This geology has demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt. Besides, why should these water animals have perished and left their remains on the tops of the mountains in consequence of an increase in quantity of the very element in which they lived? Why, these are the very organisms that would have been preserved. It is the land animals that would have perished, and for their remains we look in vain in the localities and under the circumstances named. It is fortunate, however, to know that men of intelligence no longer believe this story, and that such a man as Dr. Talmage, who held the sway over thousands of uninformed persons and who has for years perpetuated this gigantic fable, has retired from his work of delusion. His retirement, therefore, as I have already said, is a distinct gain to the intellectual power of America.

CHARLES WATTS.

The Plagues of Egypt.

As an example of Bible miracles which, supposing they really occurred, exhibit a useless expenditure of divine power, the most notable, perhaps, is that of the alleged plagues of Egypt. In the inspired narrative in Exodus we are told that “the Lord,” after appearing to Moses in a burning bush, said:—

“And now, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me; moreover, I have seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.....and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.....And thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king

of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, Yahveh, the God of the Hebrews, hath met with us; and now let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to Yahveh our God. And I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will put forth my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders.....and after that he will let you go" (Exodus iii. 9-10, 18-20).

This oppression commenced before the birth of Moses, when "there arose a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph," and Moses was at this time eighty years old. The "cry" of the Israelites for deliverance had therefore taken nearly a century to make a favorable impression on "the Lord." But if this deity was somewhat slow in coming to the assistance of his people, he was at least sure when thoroughly roused to action. In the present case he decided to send a series of plagues on the Egyptians, so as to let them see the wonders he was able to perform; but, in order to afford a pretext for the infliction of such a number of terrible scourges on the people of Egypt, he found it necessary to "harden" the king's heart after the removal of each plague. As an Omnipotent Being he could, of course, have inclined the heart of Pharaoh to do his will without bringing any afflictions upon that monarch's subjects; but, had he adopted this course, the people of Egypt would have known nothing of his power to work "wonders." In accordance with this admirable plan, the Lord said to his servant Moses:—

"When thou goest back into Egypt, see that thou do before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in thine hand; but I will harden his heart, and he will not let the people go.....And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not hearken unto you.....and the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahveh, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt," &c. (Exodus iv. 21; vii. 3-5).

Later on, after the Lord had "stretched forth his hand" and shown the Egyptians some of his "signs and wonders," it is stated:—

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart, and the hearts of his servants, that I might show these my signs in the midst of them; and that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and thy son's son, what things I have wrought upon Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know that I am Yahveh" (Exodus x. 1-2).

From this passage we learn that "the Lord" had another purpose to serve in bringing his plagues upon the Egyptians besides displaying his supernatural power to that people. He desired also to convince the Israelites, who, up to this time, had never even heard of the name Yahveh, that he was more powerful than any of the gods of Egypt, and that he was a god not to be trifled with. Of this fact the narrative leaves no room for doubt.

With regard to the "hardening" of Pharaoh's heart, Christian advocates tell us that the Biblical writers were in the habit of attributing to God himself the evils which that deity, in his wisdom, simply permitted, and that, in the case of the king of Egypt, these writers merely meant that Pharaoh was left to the bent of his own obstinate disposition, which incited him to stubbornly resist the God of the Hebrews. It is also said that the words, "I will harden his heart," "the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh," should read: "I will permit his heart to be hardened," "the Lord suffered the heart of Pharaoh to be hardened."

It is very good of these apologists to attempt to explain away the barbarous acts of their Lord; but we can only tell what the sacred writers meant from what they say. In some passages in the story the narrator says that "Pharaoh's heart was hardened"; but in all the others it is distinctly stated that "the Lord" was the agent who caused the "hardening." Still, even if that deity merely "permitted" this obduracy, when he could just as easily have prevented it, he is responsible for it all the same. The very fact of anyone "permitting" a thing to be done implies that he need not have allowed it unless he chose. And in this case the Lord did choose that the king should be obdurate, for he had fully decided that the Egyptians should be witnesses of his "signs and wonders." It was, then, in complete accordance with this determination that Moses was commanded to say to Pharaoh:—

"I will this time send all my plagues upon thine heart,

and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth" (Exodus ix. 14).

Thus, the whole population of Egypt, men, women, and children, were to be plagued in order that Yahveh might show himself to be more powerful than any of the gods of Egypt, or than any other local deity. The permission to let the Israelites go rested solely with the king; his people had no voice in the matter. Whether the king's slaves remained in Goshen or left the country was no concern of theirs, nor did they reap any benefit from the enforced labor of the Israelites. Now, it is scarcely necessary to say that no god with any sense of justice would even dream of punishing the Egyptian monarch for a condition of heart which he himself had created. What, then, are we to think of a deity who not only does this, but who inflicts punishment upon the whole nation for an imputed offence of the king? Of course, there are apologists who are not ashamed to assert that the people of Egypt deserved to be plagued because some of them, the taskmasters, obeyed the orders of their sovereign. One might as well say that the down-trodden serfs of Russia are responsible for the acts of the Czar.

The matter, however, for which these visitations were sent on the Egyptians was not the oppression of Israel in the past, but the refusal of Pharaoh to allow that people to leave the country. The truth is that the Lord's treatment of the Egyptians was in strict accordance with his habitual method of dealing out justice. When King David committed a "sin" in numbering the people, "the Lord" slew 70,000 of that king's subjects; when David committed adultery with Bathsheba and caused her husband to be slain, the Lord punished him by decreeing that ten of his own wives should, at a later period, be publicly outraged; when Solomon "sinned" by sacrificing to strange gods, the Lord punished him by taking away more than half the kingdom from his son, Rehoboam; when King Saul wrongfully slew some Gibeonites, the Lord brought a famine upon the whole land for three years; when Achan took of the spoils of Jericho, the Lord commanded his sons and daughters, and even his cattle, to be stoned to death with him; when, upon one occasion, a man put out his hand to prevent the sacred ark from being jolted out of an ox-cart, the Lord struck him dead. Without citing further examples, it must be admitted by every rational reader that it is simply impossible to justify the senseless acts attributed to the Hebrew deity. If the Jewish God did not do these things, it is high time that he woke up and settled matters with the unreasoning Christians, who libel him in asserting that he did.

We have also in the inspired narrative a sample of the low cunning characteristic of many oriental peoples. The Lord, though he fully intended to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, never to return, tells Moses to ask Pharaoh merely to allow them to go "three days' journey into the wilderness" to offer sacrifices to their god, thereby implying that, after this short holiday, they would come back and resume work. Such an act of duplicity does not say much for the boasted high moral character of "the Lord."

We come now to the "signs and wonders" which the Lord was so anxious that the people of Egypt should know he had power to perform. These are given as follows: (1) All the water in Egypt, including the river Nile, was changed into blood; (2) the whole land of Egypt was covered thickly with frogs; (3) all the dust of the country was turned into lice (or sand-flies or fleas), which settled upon man and beast; (4) the whole land was filled with dense swarms of flies; (5) all the cattle of Egypt was destroyed by a "grievous murrain"; (6) boils and blains were sent upon both man and beast, "and the Magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils"; (7) the land was visited by a tremendous storm of thunder, lightning, and hail, "such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation"; (8) the whole country was covered by a consuming swarm of locusts, which devoured all the vegetation left uninjured by the hail; (9) the land was visited with a thick darkness, during which the Egyptians "saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days"; (10) the firstborn in every family in

Egypt was struck dead. For a detailed account of these plagues, and all the absurdities and contradictions connected therewith, see *Bible Romances*, No. 7 (R. Forder).

In looking at these alleged miraculous occurrences, a most important point to be noted is that the magicians or "sacred scribes" of Pharaoh are represented as possessing the power to work miracles also. Thus, it is stated that these scribes, following the example of Aaron, "cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents; but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods" (Exodus vii. 12). Here the writer would have us believe that Aaron's serpent swallowed several other serpents, say half-a-dozen, each presumably about its own size. That it might manage to put itself outside one snake may, perhaps, be conceded; but after that feat, even were it made of india-rubber, it could do no more than lie and gasp at the other snakes that were waiting to be swallowed. The writer evidently never took into consideration such a small matter as possibility. Again, imitating Moses, the magicians are represented as turning water into blood, and bringing frogs upon the land. The miracles wrought by Moses and Aaron are said to have been performed by the power of the God Yahveh, while those worked by the sacred scribes are stated to have been done "with their enchantments" or "secret arts." From these statements we have proof, if any were needed, both of the fictitious character of the narrative and the crass ignorance of the sacred writer who records as facts the crude notions prevalent in his time. Christian apologists, it is true, tell us that the Egyptian magicians wrought miracles only in appearance, by sleight of hand or some other means; but there is not one word in the account in Exodus which lends support to this assertion.

Another indication of the fabulous nature of the story is the fact that the writer was unacquainted with the name of the Egyptian king. He calls him "Pharaoh," an appellation not found on any of the monuments or inscriptions of the kings of Egypt, and on which the word "king" appears as *suten*. Apologists, however, tell us that "Pharaoh" was a title common to all Egyptian monarchs, analogous to that of Cæsar, Czar, or Kaiser; but there is not a scrap of evidence that can be adduced in support of such an assertion. As a matter of fact, in later, and to a certain extent historical, times we do find mention of the names of the kings of Egypt—*e.g.*, Shishak (1 Kings xiv. 25); So (2 Kings xvii. 4); Necho (2 Chronicles xxxv. 20); and Hophra (Jeremiah xliv. 30). These names are not altogether reliable; *Hophra*, for instance, is said to mean *Apries*; but at least they are given. It is inconceivable that Moses, who is alleged to be the writer of the narrative in Exodus, and who, according to that account, had frequent interviews with the Egyptian king, should not know that king's name, and has, therefore, never once mentioned it; for there can be no doubt that, had the writer known it, he would certainly have recorded it. Of this remarkable omission there can be but one explanation—*viz.*, that the story of the sojourning in Egypt is a fabrication, composed long after the time of Moses. And, as a matter of historical criticism, it has been conclusively proved that not one of the books of the Pentateuch was written as early as the period assigned to that mythical lawgiver.

Let us now look at the story from a Rationalistic point of view. We know, both from history and monumental inscriptions, that the Egyptian monarchs cared nothing for any of the gods of the surrounding nations. We know, also, that they made war against, and reduced to subjection, all the petty kings of Canaan, entirely regardless of the local deities worshipped. They had no more fear of the god Yahveh than they had of Baal or Khemosh. Their sentiments are correctly expressed in the following passage:—

"And Pharaoh said, *Who is Yahveh*, that I should hearken unto his voice to let Israel go? *I know not Yahveh*" (Exodus v. 2).

Let us try and imagine, for a moment, one of the scenes imperfectly portrayed in Exodus (vii. 15). The great king of Egypt—Thothmes, Rameses, Merenptah, or whoever he is alleged to be—is taking his morning walk on one of the banks of the river, accompanied by

some of his priests and nobles, and attended by a select body of his guards. As he advances every head is bowed, and every body prostrated before him. Suddenly two strange men appear who approach unbidden, and, standing boldly confronting the king, demand the freedom of some thousands of his slaves then at work in his majesty's brick-fields. And, before the great king has recovered from his surprise at their amazing audacity, they go on to threaten him with grievous, terrible plagues, to come upon him and his people, if he does not immediately accede to their request.

This is what the fraudulent old Jewish romancer would have us believe; and that the despotic Egyptian monarch, who feared no gods but his own, did not order the two presumptuous intruders to be impaled upon the spot. We are further asked to believe that this nameless king allowed plague after plague to be brought upon himself and his people, and permitted the two Israelitish leaders to come half a score of times into his presence, each time with threats of a new infliction, when a sign to his guards would have rid him of them and their plagues for ever. Truly, the tale is only fit for a child's story-book.

ABRACADABRA.

Charles Bradlaugh's Sister.

An inquest was recently held in London on the body of an aged woman who had died of starvation, and the report stated that Miss Bradlaugh, a sister of the late Charles Bradlaugh, had given the deceased two loaves of bread. Mr. Forder recognised the name of the deceased as that of a member of an old Freethought family that he had for some time lost sight of, and with my consent he called at the address given in the newspapers. He found Miss Emma Bradlaugh herself in distressed circumstances, and gave her something from the National Secular Society's Benevolent Fund. Miss Vance has called upon her since, and given further assistance from the same Fund. Miss Emma Bradlaugh, being older than her distinguished brother, is now getting aged, and her failing eyesight does not allow of her earning a sufficient livelihood by shirt-making. She has consented (Miss Vance tells me) to receive any help that can be rendered to her by the friends of her late brother, who was very kind to her when he was living. I propose, therefore, to let a subscription be opened on her behalf. I am far too busy to see to it personally, although, of course, I shall keep my eye on what may be done. Subscriptions should be sent to Miss Vance, at the N. S. S. office, 377 Strand, London, W.C., or to Mr. Forder, 28 Stonecutter-street, E.C. Mr. Hartmann, the N. S. S. Treasurer, will take charge of whatever may require to be held. I start the subscription with my own ten shillings, and hope that many others will aid this disabled old lady, who has more than once suffered in consequence of her opinions and the name she bears.

G. W. FOOT.

Obituary.

We regret to record the death of Mr. John Kennedy, of Coleraine, Ireland. Only a few weeks ago he sent us a memorial-card of his wife's decease, whereupon we wrote him a brief letter of condolence, to which he replied, thanking us for remembering him in the midst of all our work, and enclosing a subscription towards our fight at West Ham. Mr. Kennedy was a Freethinker of long standing. We first made his acquaintance some thirteen years ago, when we visited Belfast in company with the late J. M. Wheeler, and we have corresponded with him occasionally ever since. A eulogistic account of Mr. Kennedy appears in the *Chronicle* of April 8. Our Irish contemporary notes his "quiet humor," his "unfailing courtesy," and the fact that he was "the kind friend, rather than the mere employer, of the workpeople at Coleraine Foundry." Finally comes the pathetic touch that he was a "patient sufferer" in his last illness. He was a true man, and such as he help to keep the world sweet. We say "Farewell," but not to his memory.

Most married theologians agree that it was only the core of the apple which Eve gave to Adam.—*Puck*.

Acid Drops.

JOHN L. SULLIVAN, the slumped ex-prize-fighter, and D. L. Moody, the still-running revivalist, were staying at the same hotel in New York. Sullivan couldn't convert Moody, who is far too old to do anything on the sawdust, so Moody went in for converting Sullivan. The pair had nightly talks over the bruiser's spiritual condition, and at last the Lord took a hand in the business. "Good impressions" were then perceived in the object of Moody's solicitude, and finally Sullivan got converted. He has left off drinking and swearing—so the report goes, and perhaps he and Moody will tour together. It would be a strong combination.

Moody says that Sullivan's conversion is one of the finest compliments he ever received. It is impossible to get hold of a *bona fide* convert with brains, and the next best thing is to get hold of one remarkable for the opposite. American Christians have long been praying the Lord to convert ingersoll, and he has answered them with Sullivan. God Almighty himself can't do impossibilities.

Rev. Hugh Price Hughes recently delivered a "powerful sermon" at Stockton, which is fully reported in the local *Gazette*. Mr. Hughes remarked that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was "the only point worth discussing in this world." Well, has he the courage to discuss it? What he said about it in that "powerful sermon" would be answered in five minutes by any competent antagonist.

Rev. J. Meadows Rodwell, vicar of St. Ethelburga, Bishops-gate, is ninety-two years of age, and does not reside in the parish. His Bishop admits that "he is unable to do any duty." But the dear old man of God won't resign. Oh dear no! The living is worth £950 a year, and clinging to that on earth is a lot better than going off to another situation in heaven.

The parish officers and parishioners of St. Ethelburga have been holding a meeting on this matter, but the Vestry Clerk told them that they could do nothing, and they went home again. Perhaps it would be as well if they stopped there. The old man of God is happy on his £950 a year, and they are happy without his sermons; so it's all right both ways, and what the deuce is there to row about?

Cardinal Vaughan locked himself up against interviewers, who had to make copy out of his secretary. This gentleman denounced as a piece of impertinence the report that his boss was a candidate for the Papacy. "We are not living in the Middle Ages," he said, "when worldly ambitions reigned, and when plots and conspiracies could be carried on. The voting one is done conscientiously and at God's instigation, and no one can tell beforehand who is to be God's anointed to fill the highest position in the world." This is all very well in its way, but it is long odds that Cardinal Vaughan would give anything to wear the purple, and take God's approval for granted if he only got the Holy Conclave's vote.

That reference to the Middle Ages, by the way, is rather indiscreet, for it was just then that the Catholic Church was omnipotent. It has had to be on its good behavior ever since the Reformation.

"There can be no question that in Southwark the Church has lost its hold upon the people, if, indeed, it ever had a hold at all." So says the Rev. W. J. Sommerville, Rector of St. George-the-Martyr. The reverend gentleman adds that the population there is terribly dense—212 persons to the acre, and that "about one in every fourteen of them are born, live, work, and often die within the four walls of one tenement room." Of course they breed freely, the birth-rate being no less than 36 per 1,000, and the death-rate proportionately high.

"Who," asks Reynolds, in view of the Rev. W. J. Sommerville's confessions, "Who will smite the hoary hypocrisy mis-called Christianity in this 'England of God's love'? Who will bell the cat?" Well, the *Freethinker* has been doing it for eighteen years.

The Sunday Newspaper continues to agitate religious circles. Dr. Clifford and other Nonconformist men of God advise the faithful to boycott the week-day editions of the *Telegraph* and *Mail*. Congregations are rising to their feet, by invitation of their ministers, and registering solemn vows in the sight of heaven (or whatever is looking on and listening) not to patronise those Sabbath-desecrating publications. But they'll forget all about the matter presently. When the first excitement is over the Christians will want news, if only to see whether the end of the world is approaching.

The Evangelical Free Churches will celebrate, all over the kingdom, on April 25, the three-hundredth anniversary of Oliver Cromwell's birthday. They are quite mistaken, however, in fancying that Cromwell belongs to *them*. Certainly he doesn't belong in any way to the Presbyterians. He knocked them about terribly, and took the cheek out of them in a most astonishing manner.

At the Battersea Coroner's Court the foreman of an empanelled jury applied to make an affirmation instead of taking the oath. Coroner Hicks did not see how the rest of the jury could be sworn to observe and keep "the same oath that their foreman hath taken for his part," so he asked them to choose another foreman. It seems to us, however, that this was a rather pedantic proceeding.

A New Jersey man has solved the problem of evil—at least to his own satisfaction. According to Genesis, the trees of this world were given to man for "meat"; but man, in his wickedness, has gone making thousands of things out of wood, and hence all the troubles that have befallen him. This is about as good as any other solution of the same problem. Unfortunately for the discoverer, it cannot be patented.

Historians of England have pointed out that when, in the old days, a Jew-Hunt was got up, the Christian hunters always joined profit with piety, and ran the thing for all it was worth. It seems to be much the same in Northern Bohemia. During the anti-Jewish riots at Nachod the crowd broke into the shops of the children of Israel and helped themselves. A Jewish baker had 4,000 florins taken from his safe; a Jewish cloth merchant's stock was appropriated in lengths. That is how the Christians punish the Jews for having crucified Jesus—an act, by the way, which was absolutely necessary to the world's salvation.

James Thomson ("B.V.") once drew a word-picture of poor Jesus Christ, old and decrepit, wandering about the earth and begging someone to kill him, in order to carry through the Atonement—and begging in vain.

The local Freethinkers made a mistake in inviting (Rev.) A. J. Waldron to lecture in the New Brompton Secular Hall. They did not understand their man as we did, but they understand him now. With a fine Christian recognition of their hospitality, he spent his time, not in dealing with principles, of which he is incapable, but in vomiting slander against dead and living Freethinkers. "I have had some experience," writes Mr. W. B. Thompson, the secretary, "but I never heard such an abominable lecture in my life." Waldron, it may be added, pursues this disreputable policy as lecturer for the Christian Evidence Society. What has Mr. Engström to say?

Père du Lac has been named for two years as one of the leaders of the intrigue against Dreyfus. It now appears from the evidence of M. Bertulus, published in the *Figaro*, that Colonel Picquart's lady cousin—whose name was made use of by his enemies, even to the insinuation that she was the Veiled Lady—stated that the only person who could have known of certain facts was her confessor, this same Père du Lac. So much for the secrecy of the confessional. In an ordinary way it is no doubt kept, but the priests have never scrupled to violate it when they thought it necessary, particularly when there seemed little chance of their villainy being detected.

There is a curious quarrel at the village of Ulrome, near Bridlington. The vicar, a Roumanian Jew by birth, has appointed a cobbler named Pearson as his warden, and an appeal is being made to the Archbishop for Pearson's removal, on the ground that, although he regularly attends church, he is an avowed Atheist.

Major G. J. Younghusband, in his new book on *The Philippines and Round About*, gives a very bad account of the Spanish priests in that remote region. The following passage is particularly striking:—"It would be impossible to speak with too great severity of the disrepute into which the action of these dissolute men has brought the Roman Catholic religion in these islands. A man of God, on whom rest the most solemn vows of holiness, chastity, and poverty, living amongst a simple and impressionable race, a monster of iniquity, an extensive landowner, nursing his ill-gotten wealth, a monument of lechery and debauch. Let us hasten to add that the Philippine himself is far from being morally immaculate. The priest may take his daughter or his sister and welcome, for the offspring will be a person of such added importance as European blood never fails to give in Eastern countries. But the islander draws the line firmly at his wife, and equally firmly at his prospective bride, and it is from wanton straying into these forbidden pastures that the good shepherd has been mainly instrumental in bringing his country into trouble."

Colonel Ingersoll says that W. J. Bryan has seen his day, and won't be heard of in the coming presidential contest. Bryan says he won't accept Ingersoll as a prophet. "He is not an authority," Bryan retorts, "on the future. He does not believe that there is a hereafter for anyone."

The Rev. Mr. Cadman has been giving his Methodist brother ministers in America a dose of plain speaking. It looks as though some Transatlantic sky-pilots were graduating to fill Ingersoll's place when he has to quit the platform. "Why," says Mr. Cadman in *Zion's Herald*, "if you could get a fair understanding of the trend of religious thought to-day, it would make what is called Ingersollism seem archaic." Of course this is great nonsense, for Ingersoll goes "the whole hog," and is an absolute anti-supernaturalist; but it shows how anxious the clergy are not to appear too orthodox. "Half the pages of the Old Testament," Mr. Cadman says, "are of unknown authorship, and the New Testament contains contradictions." Well, Voltaire, Thomas Paine, and Bradlaugh said this long ago, and Christian ministers maligned them for saying it. Now the ministers say it themselves, and pretend to originality. As a matter of fact, they are always a hundred years behind date.

Mr. Bertram Dobell, the devoted friend and publisher of the late James Thomson, calls our attention to a beautiful paragraph which appeared in the *Sunday Special* of March 19. For the sake of those, and they are many, who are interested in that poet of high genius and most tragic fate, we reproduce the said paragraph *in extenso*: "While Mr. Kipling is booming once more, it is amusing to see how all kinds of things get profit therefrom. By accident, Mr. Kipling once used the title of 'The City of Dreadful Night,' which had been used previously as the title of a poem by Mr. James Johnson. By accident, an 'attractive little selection' of the poems of Mr. James Johnson has just been republished 'containing 'The City of Dreadful Night.'" Like Virgil, Mr. Kipling borrows nothing without enhancing its value."

"James Johnson," to begin with, is distinctly good; indeed, the repetition makes it really delicious. Note, in the next place, the high-and-mighty way in which James Johnson—that is to say, James Thomson—is sneered at for being plagiarised by Rudyard Kipling. Note, further, the suggestion that Rudyard Kipling conferred quite a favor upon James Thomson by stealing from him. Note, finally, the insinuation that James Thomson's publisher actually tried to profit by Rudyard Kipling's theft, in putting James Thomson's title on the cover of James Thomson's book.

Now for the climax: "Like Virgil, Mr. Kipling borrows nothing without enhancing its value." But when did Virgil steal titles? What he did was to pass older poetic material through the alembic of his own exquisite genius. And what did Mr. Kipling do? He took the title of Thomson's masterpiece, which had been praised by such judges as George Eliot, and which was known to all real students of the best in modern English literature; and, having filched that title, he tacked it on to one of his own prose stories, and by no means the best of them. It was an act of sacrilege on Mr. Kipling's part; and, to do him justice, he seems to be ashamed of it. The *Sunday Special* scribe, however, has no such compunction. He offers his pinch of rancid incense on the altar of a popular idol, content to earn the deity's smile, or at least the plaudits of his worshippers. This is sufficiently contemptible, but the cringing scribe needn't have damned himself with that ridiculous "Johnson."

Let us have a little plain truth—brutal truth, if you like—on the other side. James Thomson was a far greater poet than Rudyard Kipling is ever likely to be. *The City of Dreadful Night* is magnificent work. It is the poem of Pessimism, and will remain so until a stronger genius applies his whole powers to this tremendous theme. Only age is wanted to make it a classic—though it will never fascinate the multitude, or those who provide literary chatter for them in their beloved periodicals. Mr. Kipling is a man of genius too, in his way; he has force, originality, courage, and an open eye. But he has yet to produce a work of such intellectual power and continuity, such strenuous and comprehensive imagination, and such sustained perfection of style, as will secure it even a relative immortality. Most of his writing is concerned with phases of modern life, and particularly of British imperialism, that must in the very nature of the case be temporary. Thomson, in his masterpiece, concerns himself with what is as eternal as human nature. Not until love and sorrow cease, not until suffering and disaster are no longer known, not until defeat and despair have found their last victim—not until then will Thomson's great poem become obsolete.

The Newcastle Free Church Council has been holding a meeting to discuss the new Catechism. A paper was read

by the Rev. Mr. Chesson, but he appears to have confined himself to stringing together extracts from Mr. Hugh Price Hughes's Preface and *Contemporary Review* article. A discussion followed, in which the Rev. Mr. Glover rejoiced that the Free Churches had now the advantage of having "something to put into the hands of the young people." He said "There was a distinct advantage in being able to give young people something to start their thoughts," and that they should do their utmost to introduce it into their schools. The Rev. Richard Leitch declared that the Catechism was a perfect marvel, a great moral victory. It was wonderful that in such a comparatively short time such a wonderful document should have been produced. He did not think that there was any definition to which one could reasonably take exception.

No reference appears to have been made to the rejection of the Devil and Hell. But perhaps this doctrine is one of the things believed in by the Free Churches not contained in the Catechism, and each Nonconformist body will no doubt still terrify little children into holiness by the fear of the Devil and his fiery furnace.

Bramwell Booth is a good romancer. In the *Daily Chronicle* he tells a story of "one of our Canadian officers" who was pelted with eggs. They were not rotten, but good; so she "caught them and converted them into omelettes for herself and lieutenant." The romantic Bramwell should try catching raw eggs, and see whether they would be in a state for cooking afterwards.

The Brixham trawler, *Vivid*, came across three men in a small boat off Lundy Island. One of them was praying, and the others were shrieking for help. The *Vivid* tried to reach them, but the boat sank and the three men disappeared. Behold how the Lord answereth prayer!

"Colonel Robert Ingersoll, whatever his demerits, never fails to be picturesque." So says the *Westminster Gazette*. But it does not specify Ingersoll's demerits, or one of them. No doubt his chief demerit is being a Freethinker.

Another writer is doing "Our Handbook" for the *Referee*. Naturally he pays a high tribute to his predecessor, the late J. F. Nisbet. In doing so, however, he shows what a flimsy basis supports the common belief in a future life. "It is not possible to believe," he says, "that so acute and brilliant an intellect has passed away into nothingness." Not possible to believe! What an expression! Just as if any man's possibility of belief had anything whatever to do with the realities and necessities of nature! This pathetic absurdity lies at the bottom of all religion—namely, that things must somehow be as we wish them to be. Men find their opinions contradicted, their wishes unfulfilled, and their hopes disappointed, time after time in this life, but they go on believing it will all be very different in the sweet by-and-by.

"Physiology and Materialism" is the title of an article in the *Zoophilist*, a journal edited by Stephen Coleridge and devoted to Anti-vivisection. The writer takes the position that Materialism is "a system of philosophy founded on vivisection." Now this is a very great absurdity. Voltaire and Bentham were amongst the very first to protest against vivisection, and perhaps the most scathing denunciation of it ever penned was written by Colonel Ingersoll. Mr. Foote, humbly following in the wake of these giants, has given his opinion of vivisection in the little volume of essays on *The Rights of Men and Animals* published by the Humanitarian Society. We much regret to find a paper like the *Zoophilist* pandering to a very vulgar prejudice.

Couldn't Express Himself.

A WELL-KNOWN bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church, while on a summer's outing, went fishing with a friend, and, in accordance with an unwritten law of summer fishermen, the provisions included beverages inferior to water in specific gravity. In fact, the bishop, in his fulness of heart, had bought a bottle of wine of ancient vintage. He was very proud of his purchase, and guarded it jealously. When the time came for lunch he brought it out carefully, and placed it in the stern of the little boat. The fishing had been poor, and he turned to his friend and said:

"Look here, I'll try another cast, just for luck, before we open this."

But the cast proved most unlucky for the bishop, for the line caught around the neck of the precious bottle and jerked it overboard. The bishop, without saying a word, watched the little bubbles as they ascended through the water; then, with a sad look, and in a broken voice, he said to his friend:

"Will you please do the honors for this occasion? I can't for unfortunately I am a bishop."

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, April 16, Manchester Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints: 11, "The Dreyfus Affair, and the Catholic Conspiracy against the French Republic"; 3, "What would Jesus Do?" 7, "Souls, Spirits, and Ghosts."

To Correspondents.

E. SMEDLEY.—A ridiculous mare's-nest. The Birmingham Branch never asked Mr. Foote what it should or should not sell on its bookstall, and he has never offered it any advice on the subject. As a matter of fact, the Birmingham Branch is not at present holding its meetings in a Board school. It was turned out of the one it was using, and is now holding its meetings in the Prince of Wales's Assembly Room, where we dare say the paper you refer to is sold like any other. We do not know anything of the old book you refer to. It is probably no more than worthless scandal.

V. PAGE.—See paragraph. Pleased to hear you are sending up members' names to Miss Vance from Nelson.

W. COX (Liverpool).—See paragraph.

A. B. MOSS.—Yes, the weather is trying. Mr. Foote has not yet got rid of the fag-end of his nasty cold. Sorry to hear of your wife's indisposition. See paragraph on the other matter.

R. P. EDWARDS wishes to notify his address to Branch secretaries and others. It is 52 Bramley-road, Notting-hill, W. Mr. Edwards's list of engagements arrives too late for insertion this week.

E. PACK.—We cannot insert such tremendously long lists. Our space is too limited. We cannot go beyond a month or so.

T. J. THURLOW.—In our next. Press of matter this week.

G. W. B.—Pleased that you think Mr. Cohen's article "splendid."

PETER GORRIE.—A very silly publication, as you know, and the February number is too much out of date for notice. Lies about "infidels," dying or in danger, were always plentiful, and are not likely to be scarce for some time.

N. S. S. TREASURER'S SCHEME.—S. Hartmann acknowledges:—H. F. S., £2. Miss Vance acknowledges:—J. Umpleby, £1.

N. S. S. GENERAL FUND.—Miss Vance acknowledges.—Camberwell Branch (collection), 17s.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for your batches of cuttings.

A. E. ELDERKIN.—We will find room for the extracts. Thanks for your trouble in making them.

W. B. THOMPSON.—Your assurance is hardly necessary that Mr. J. M. Robertson's lecture on "Christianity and Character" was a healthy contrast to A. J. Waldron's scurrility. You are quite right in deciding not to attend any of the latter's meetings in future.

Miss VANCE, the N. S. S. Secretary, asks us to remind Secretaries of Branches that all fees and collections should reach her as notified, otherwise they cannot be included in this year's account. Notices of motion for the Agenda should also be forwarded in due time.

J. W. WITTING.—We are obliged to you for the cuttings, but it is quite useless to discuss Spiritualism. Investigating it is quite another matter, which does not seem to be courted. When are they going to have some Freethought meetings at Grimsby?

JAMES NEATE.—Always glad to insert a useful paragraph for Branches.

EROS.—Received and under consideration.

J. HAMPSON.—April 30 booked by Mr. Foote for Bolton.

W. J. M.—Glad to see your letter in the Bradford Daily Telegraph.

RECEIVED.—New York Truthseeker—Sydney Bulletin—Isle of Man Times—Watford Observer—Coleraine Chronicle—Glasgow Herald—People's Newspaper—Ethical World—Sunday Daily Telegraph—Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement—Forward—South London Press—Newcastle Daily Leader—Boston Investigator—North-Eastern Daily Gazette—English Mechanic—New Century—Motherwell Times—Flaming Sword—Sentinel—Two Worlds—Aberdeen Journal—Awakener of India—Freidenker—Stewartry Observer—Crescent—Independent Palpit—Watford Daily Telegraph—Herts Leader—Blue Grass Blade—Zoophilist—Lancashire Daily Post—Torch of Reason—Gloucester Echo.

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

If 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.

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.

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

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

Sugar Plums.

MR. FOOTE delivers three lectures to-day (April 16) in the Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints, Manchester. His subjects are attractive, and he hopes to see a goodly number of South Lancashire friends at the meetings.

The Athenæum Hall platform, 73 Tottenham Court-road, will be occupied this evening (April 16) by Mr. Chilperic Edwards, who will lecture on "Ancient Monuments and the Bible." He is a specialist on this subject, and his lecture is certain to be instructive as well as interesting.

Mr. Charles Watts is on the Atlantic as we write this paragraph. He sailed from New York on Wednesday, April 5, by the "New York" liner, which is timed to reach Southampton on the following Wednesday night (April 12) or Thursday morning. Mr. Watts's health improved a good deal during his stay at Dr. E. B. Foote's, at Larchmont, where he received every attention that could be suggested by the finest hospitality. He will address our readers from British soil in next week's Freethinker.

Colonel Ingersoll spoke at the Actors' Fund matinee in New York, March 23, and was tremendously applauded by the stage people in the audience. At one part of his address he inquired, "Who are the friends of the human race?" and answered: "The citizens of the mimic world, who have delighted the weary travellers on the thorny path, amused the passengers on the fated train, and filled with joy the hearts of the clingers on spars, of the floaters on rafts. With fancy's wand they rebuild the past. The dead are brought to life and made to act again the parts they displayed. The hearts and lips that long ago were dust are made to beat and speak again. The dead kings are crowned once more, and from the shadows of the past emerge the queens, jewelled and sceptred as of yore. Lovers leave their graves and breathe again their burning vows, and again the white breasts rise and fall in passion's storm. The laughter that died away beneath the touch of death is heard again, and lips that fell to ashes long ago are curved once more with mirth. Again the hero bares his breast to death, again the patriot falls, and again the scaffold, stained with noble blood, becomes a shrine. When in the mimic world the shaft of wit flies like the arrow of Ulysses through all the rings and strikes the centre, when words of wisdom mingle with the clown's conceits, when folly laughing shows her pearls and mirth holds carnival, when the villain fails and the right triumphs, the trials and the griefs of life for the moment fade away. The stage brings solace to the wounded, peace to the troubled."

Colonel Ingersoll's new lecture on The Devil is now on sale at Mr. Forder's. It is attractively got up, and the price is sixpence. Ingersoll has never lectured on this subject before, and all his admirers will want a copy of this pamphlet.

"In the silence which I voluntarily maintain my heart is always with those who are struggling for the good cause." Thus wrote brave Emile Zola to the company assembled at the Paris banquet in honor of Urbain Gohier, who was prosecuted by the Government for his book, L'Armée Contre la Nation, and acquitted by a jury of his fellow citizens.

The following appeared in the last issue of the West Ham Herald: "Mr. H. R. Sparkes, secretary of the West Ham Branch of the National Secular Society, sends the following resolution, which was passed at the last meeting: 'That we, the members of the West Ham Branch of the National Secular Society, having noted that the question of the Freethinker was brought before the Town Council at their last meeting, but not allowed by the Mayor to be discussed (which we consider to be a great infringement upon the right of public discussion), whether the above journal should be placed on the tables of the Public Reading-Room, and we desire to enter our strong protest against such bigotry committed by a majority of the members of the Town Council. We claim the same right as any other section of citizens for our journal. At the same time, we wish to return our sincere thanks to those members of the Council who, on this occasion, stood up for the cause of right and justice.'

Will Thorne's name is included in Reynolds' list of Democratic candidates for parliament, his location being S. West Ham. Secularists will bear in mind, however, that Will Thorne voted with the bigots on the West Ham Town Council when the Freethinker question was last divided upon.

Camberwell Vestry has been appointing churchwardens. One waggish member proposed Mr. A. B. Moss, who of

course declined, but in doing so he made a speech against the Church and all its ways, which is fully reported in the *South London Press*, and ought to do good in the locality.

Mr. A. B. Moss lectures at Bolton to-day (April 16), and we hope he will have good audiences. Mr. Foote lectures at Bolton on April 30.

Dr. Henry Muirhead, of Longdales and Bushymill, Lanark, has left a trust of over £35,000 for the founding and maintenance of an institution for the instruction of women in physical and biological science. The trustees propose to call it the Muirhead College, and to locate it in Glasgow. No official, teacher, or student is to be disqualified or prejudiced by creed—political, social, or religious; and clergymen are to be absolutely excluded from the management and tuition. Dr. Muirhead was evidently a man of understanding.

The *Motherwell Times* reports the meetings of the local N. S. S. Branch just as it reports other local events. It is good to see press bigotry breaking down somewhere.

"What would Jesus Do?" was the heading of a satirical piece which recently appeared in the *Freethinker*. We see it is "lifted" in the *Stewartry Observer* of March 31. Naturally we are glad to see such profanity figuring in large type in another journal. But there ought to have been an acknowledgment of its derivation.

Mr. Cohen delivers his first London lecture this season in Victoria Park at 3.15 this afternoon (April 16), and a collection will be taken up for the N. S. S. General Fund.

The Liverpool Branch held its annual meeting on Sunday. Its income for the year had been £100 15s. 3d., and its expenditure £97 12s. 2d. Mr. Rhodes was elected treasurer, in place of Mr. Dequan, who retired; Mr. W. Cox, secretary; and Mr. Roberts, corresponding secretary. This Branch has decided not to have a president and vice-presidents, at any rate for a year. Other Branches that have tried this, we believe, have reverted to the orthodox method.

The Camberwell Branch opens a new outdoor lecture-station in Brockwell Park this afternoon (April 16). The platform will be near the Herne Hill gates. Local Freethinkers should support the platform.

The Nelson School Board elections take place at the end of this month, and there are two "Secular" candidates in the field—one put forward by the Social Democratic Federation, the other by the Independent Labor Party. We are advised that there is no chance for two "Secular" candidates, and that preference should be given to Mr. J. W. Horsfall, the S. D. F. candidate, who is a Freethinker and pledged to do his best to abolish Bible-reading in the Board schools. Mr. Horsfall is at present a member of the Board, and has therefore the further advantage of experience.

Mr. A. E. Elderkin has an excellent letter in the *Watford Observer* in reply to the Rev. A. Bage, who said that the world had "nothing to thank Freethinkers for." We hope the reverend gentleman will have the courage to defend his utterance. Meanwhile we beg to urge upon Freethinkers the usefulness of contributing letters to their local newspapers. Such letters are read by thousands who never see a Freethought journal.

Mr. M. Loafer (East London Branch) and Mr. Harry Brown (Finsbury Branch) are intending to cycle down to the Conference at Birmingham, and would be glad to hear from brothers of the wheel. Birmingham should be a town of special interest for cyclists, and many of the local saints are engaged in the industry. If those who care to join the party will communicate with Miss Vance (also a cyclist), she will be pleased to make arrangements for their comfort upon arrival, and doubtless a Birmingham contingent would turn out to meet them *en route*.

The New York *Truthseeker* reproduces our eulogistic criticism of its handsome new edition of Paine's *Age of Reason*.

How to Help Us.

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

The Glories of this Century.

"THE laurel of the nineteenth century is on Darwin's brow," said Robert G. Ingersoll the other day. "This century has been the greatest of all. The inventions, the discoveries, the victories on the field of thought, the advances in nearly every direction of human effort, are without parallel in human history. In only two directions have the achievements of this century been excelled. The marbles of Greece have not been equalled. They still occupy the niches dedicated to perfection. The sculptors of our century stand before the miracles of the Greeks in impotent wonder. They cannot even copy. They cannot give the breath of life to stone and make marble feel and think. The plays of Shakespeare have never been approached. He reached the summit, filled the horizon. In the direction of the dramatic, the poetic, the human mind, in my judgment, in Shakespeare's plays reached its limit. The field was harvested, all the secrets of the heart were told. The buds of all hopes blossomed, all seas were crossed, and all the shores were touched.

"With these two exceptions, the Grecian marbles and the Shakespeare plays, the nineteenth century has produced more for the benefit of man than all the centuries of the past. In this century, in one direction, I think the mind has reached the limit. I do not believe the music of Wagner will ever be excelled. He changed all passions, longings, memories, and aspirations into tones, and with subtle harmonies wove tapestries of sound, whereon were pictured the past and future, the history and prophecy of the human heart. Of course Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, and Kepler laid the foundation of astronomy. It may be that the three laws of Kepler mark the highest point in that direction that the mind has reached.

"In the other centuries there is now and then a peak, but through ours there runs a mountain range with Alp on Alp—the steamship that has conquered all these seas; the railway, with its steeds of steel with breath of flame, covers the land; the cables and telegraphs, along which lightning is the carrier of thought, have made the nations neighbors and brought the world to every home; the making of paper from wood, the printing presses that made it possible to give the history of the human race each day; the reapers, mowers, and threshers that superseded the cradles, scythes, and flails; the lighting of streets and houses with gas and incandescent lamps, changing night into day; the invention of matches that made fire the companion of man; the process of making steel, discovered by Bessemer, saving for the world hundreds of millions a year; the discovery of anæsthetics, changing pain to happy dreams, and making surgery a science; the spectrum analysis, that told us the secrets of the suns; the telephone, that transports speech, uniting lips and ears; the phonograph, that holds in dots and marks the echoes of our words; the marvellous machines that spin and weave, that manufacture the countless things of use, the marvellous machines whose wheels and levers seem to think; the discoveries in chemistry, the wave theory of light, the indestructibility of matter and force; the discovery of microbes and bacilli, so that now the plague can be stayed without the assistance of priests.

"The art of photography became known, the sun became an artist, gave us the faces of our friends, copies of the great paintings and statutes, pictures of the world's wonders, and enriched the eyes of poverty with the spoil of travel, the wealth of art. The cell theory was advanced, embryology was studied, and science entered the secret house of life. The biologists, guided by fossil forms, followed the paths of life from the protoplasm up to man. Then came Darwin with the *Origin of Species*, *Natural Selection*, and the *Survival of the Fittest*. From his brain there came a flood of light. The old theories grew foolish and absurd. The temple of every science was rebuilt. That which had been called philosophy became childish superstition. The prison doors were opened and millions of convicts, of unconscious slaves, roved with joy over the fenceless fields of freedom. Darwin and Hæckel and Huxley and their fellow workers filled the night of ignorance with the glittering stars of truth. This is Darwin's century. He gained the greatest victory, the grandest

triumph. The laurel of the nineteenth century is on his brow."

"How does the literature of to-day compare with that of the first half of the century, in your opinion?" was asked?

"There is now no poet of laughter and tears, of comedy and pathos, the equal of Hood. There is none with the subtle delicacy, the aerial footstep, the flame-like motion of Shelley; none with the amplitude, sweep, and passion, with the strength and beauty, the courage and royal recklessness of Byron. The novelists of our day are not the equals of Dickens. In my judgment, Dickens wrote the greatest of all novels. *The Tale of Two Cities* is the supreme work of fiction. Its philosophy is perfect. The characters stand out like living statues. In its pages you find the blood and flame, the ferocity and self-sacrifice, of the French Revolution. In the bosom of the Vengeance is the heart of the horror. In 105, North Tower, sits one whom sorrow drove beyond the verge, rescued from death by insanity, and we see the spirit of Dr. Manette tremblingly cross the great gulf that lies between the night of dreams and the blessed day where things are as they seem, as a tress of golden hair, while on his hand and cheeks fall Lucie's blessed tears. The story is filled with lights and shadows, with the tragic and grotesque. While the woman knits, while the heads fall, Jerry Cruncher gnaws his rusty nails and his poor wife 'flops' against his business, and Prim Pross, who in the desperation and terror of love held Mme. Defarge in her arms, and who in the flash and crash found that her burden was dead, is drawn by the hand of a master. And what shall I say of Sydney Carton? Of his last walk? Of his last ride, holding the poor girl by the hand? Is there a more wonderful character in all the realm of fiction? Sydney Carton, the perfect lover, going to his death for the love of one who loves another. To me the three greatest novels are *The Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens, *Les Miserables* by Hugo, and *Ariadne* by Ouida.

"*Les Miserables* is full of faults and perfections. The tragic is sometimes pushed to the grotesque, but from the depths it brings the pearls of truth. A convict becomes holier than the saint, a prostitute purer than the nun. This book fills the gutter with the glory of heaven, while the waters of the sewer reflect the stars.

"In *Ariadne* you find the aroma of all art. It is a classic dream. And there, too, you will find the hot blood of full and ample life. Ouida is the greatest living writer of fiction. Some of her books I do not like. If you wish to know what Ouida really is, read *Wanda*, *The Dog of Flanders*, *The Leaf in a Storm*. In these you will hear the beatings of her heart. Most of the novelists of our time write good stories. They are ingenious, the characters are well drawn, but they lack life, energy. They do not appear to act for themselves, impelled by inner force. They seem to be pushed and pulled. The same may be said of the poets. Tennyson belongs to the latter half of our century. He was undoubtedly a great writer. He had no flame or storm, no tidal wave, nothing volcanic. He never overflowed the banks. He wrote nothing as intense, as noble and pathetic, as the 'Prisoner of Chillon,' nothing as purely poetic as 'The Skylark,' nothing as perfect as 'The Grecian Urn'; and yet he was one of the greatest of poets. Viewed from all sides, he was far greater than Shelley, far nobler than Keats. In a few poems Shelley reached almost the perfect; but many are weak, feeble, fragmentary, almost meaningless. So Keats in three poems reached a great height—in 'St. Agnes's Eve,' 'The Grecian Urn,' and 'The Nightingale'; but most of his poetry is insipid, without thought, beauty, or sincerity."

—*Truthseeker* (New York). R. G. INGERSOLL.

(To be concluded.)

Startling Symptoms.

A Sunday-school teacher not long ago gave her class a rather graphic description of how Eve was created from the rib of Adam. "Mamma," said the youngest member of the class that same evening, pressing his hand to his side, "I'm afraid I'm going to have a wife."—*The Sun*.

Richard Carlile.

(Continued from page 236.)

CARLILE vigorously set to work at printing and publishing works under the ban of legal prohibition. He was determined, at whatever cost, to defy the Government, and resolved to publish, on principle, every forbidden book. His first step was to resist Southey's attempt to suppress his early poem, *Wat Tyler*, composed in former days of Republican and Communistic convictions, when, with Coleridge, he fondly contemplated the progress of extreme principles, and longed to see them put into practice. Of that poem Carlile sold twenty-five thousand copies in 1817. His next publication was the prosecution and defence of Wooller, of the *Black Dwarf*. Next came a reprint of Paine's political works, edited by Carlile and Sherwin conjointly. Immediately afterwards he reprinted William Hone's suppressed political squibs, called *The Parodies on the Book of Common Prayer*. This forced on the trial of Hone for blasphemy; but happily the old book-worm, after making one of the most remarkable defences on record, was acquitted. The publication, however, of the *Parodies* cost Carlile eighteen weeks' imprisonment in the King's Bench Prison, from which he was liberated on the acquittal of Hone.

By the end of 1818 Carlile had published the theological works of Paine, which, with the political writings and miscellaneous pieces, were collected in two handsomely-printed volumes, forming the only complete edition of Paine ever published. No expense was spared to render the collection as complete as possible. The prosecutions set on foot against him gave to these works an unprecedented sale; and other publications of a similar character were proceeded with, such as the *Doubts of Infidels*, *Watson Refuted*, *Palmer's Principles of Nature*, and the *God of the Jews*. By the month of October, 1819, six indictments were pending against him, two of which were tried from the 12th to the 16th of that month. "When he came to trial," says Mr. Holyoake, "he had no clear understanding of the subject of his defence; it was compiled from the pleadings of others for toleration and free discussion." His defence, however, so alarmed the Emperor Alexander of Russia that he issued a Ukase, forbidding any printed report of it from being brought into his territory. The verdict was gained against him, and he was sentenced to fifteen hundred pounds fine, and three years' imprisonment in Dorchester Gaol, whither he was driven off, handcuffed, in the middle of the night. This imprisonment was, of course, endured with no grateful feelings, but it produced a good result in affording opportunity for patient study of religious questions. "He had taken the impression," says Mr. Holyoake, "from the hint of an aged political friend, that all the evils of mankind rooted in the superstition and consequent priestcraft practised upon them, and was resolved to devote the solitude of his imprisonment to the study of religious mysteries, and fearlessly and faithfully to make the revelation for the common good of man." The brave man was true to his resolve. He did study those questions, and very speedily saw reason to disclaim all belief in dogmas and creeds based on revelation.

The first thing he did after the close of his trial was to publish a report of his defence, in which he had taken care to read the whole of Paine's *Age of Reason*. The sale was immense, and to stay it a prosecution was begun against Mrs. Carlile, but was dropped on her declining the sale. She was not, however, long unmolested. "Under pretence of seizing for Mr. Carlile's fines," says Mr. Holyoake, "the sheriff, with a writ of *levari facias* from the Court of King's Bench, took possession of his house, furniture, and stock-in-trade, and closed the shop. It was thus held from November 16 to December 24. Rent became due, and it was then emptied. Under Mr. Carlile's desire, Mrs. Carlile renewed a business, in January, 1820, with what could be scraped together from the unseized wreck of their property. In February she was arrested; but the first indictment failed through a flaw in its construction. She was immediately proceeded against by the Attorney-General, and became her husband's fellow-prisoner in Dorchester Gaol in February, 1821." The sentence

passed upon her was two years' imprisonment, not one jot of which was abated, although her accouchement in gaol without proper attendance seemed so terrible to her husband that he did for her what he never did for himself, and begged of Peel to grant her a release.

Carlile's sister Mary Ann carried on the business after Mrs. Carlile's imprisonment. She, likewise, was prosecuted by the relentless Government, and in November, 1821, found herself a fellow-prisoner with her brother, under a fine of five hundred pounds. The business was continued by Mrs. Wright, and a troop of other assistants, whose names should be put on record: George Beer, John Barkley, Humphrey Boyle, Joseph Rhodes, William Holmes, John Jones, Joseph Trust, Charles Sanderson, Thomas Jeffries, William Haley, William Campion, Richard Hassell, Michael O'Connor, William Cochrane, John Clarke, John Christopher, and Thomas Riley Perry. All of these were imprisoned for terms varying from six months to three years. A second seizure of house and stock was made, on pretence of satisfying the fines. But no abatement was made from the amount of fines, and, notwithstanding Carlile's persistent applications to "Christian Judge Bailey," he was obliged to serve out the extra three years' imprisonment in lieu thereof.

Carlile's imprisonment was rendered as irksome to him as possible. Inside the gaol the utmost indignities were practised upon him, his wife, and his sister. The chaplain laughed at their complaints, and more than hinted that no degradation could exceed their deserts. He even professed a fear that the thieves confined there might be contaminated by communication with a heretic and Republican, and suggested precautions against such a deplorable contingency. The prisoner's opportunities of exercise in fresh air depended on the caprice of the gaoler; and even when permitted that luxury he was led out as a caged animal, and exhibited to the gaze of the passing curious. In consequence of this he passed two years and a half in his own chamber, for which he paid two guineas and a half a week, without going into the open air. During the whole period he continued to edit the *Republican* as vigorously as before, and made it more decided on theological questions. To spite his persecutors, he dated it in the era of "the Carpenter's Wife's Son." None of his publications had been suppressed, and the Cabinet was reported to have acknowledged Carlile invincible in his course of moral resistance. When he was liberated from Dorchester Gaol in 1825, the freedom of the press was virtually complete so far as Government was concerned. His incarcerated shopmen had still to finish their terms of imprisonment, but no fresh arrests were made. One brave, unflinching man had done battle against the power and wealth of the oligarchy, and issued from the contest victor. His practical sagacity, even while imprisoned, provided against every unfavorable contingency, and devised means to surmount every obstacle. When he found that the Government could not be beaten by straightforward means, he adopted others; laws which could not be broken he eluded. The intention of Government to exhaust his means of resistance by repeated arrests of his shopmen he frustrated by providing a mechanical process of sale. Books were sold through an aperture, so that the buyer was unable to identify the seller. Afterwards they were sold by clockwork. On a dial was written the name of every publication for sale; the purchaser entered, and turned the hand of the dial to the book he wanted, which, on depositing his money, dropped down before him without the necessity of any one speaking. The circulation of his books was quadrupled, and cheering crowds assembled daily around his shop windows. In the provinces, at public dinners, the health was drunk of "Carlile's invisible shopman." The number of copies of Paine's works sold was amazing; from December, 1818, to December, 1822, 20,000 copies were sent into circulation. While in prison his friends liberally supported him; subscriptions to the amount of £500 a year were acknowledged in the *Republican*. The profits of the business also amounted to about £50 per week. Occasionally the trade was prodigious; in one week, while a trial was pending, Mrs. Carlile took £500 over the counter. On his leaving Dorchester Gaol, one friend lent him £1,000 to extend his business in the new shop at 62 Fleet-

street. The triumph was on the side of Right against Might; the war had lasted six years, and Might was worn out and obliged to retreat. Henceforth, although newspaper duties, or "taxes on knowledge," still continued to impede the sale of literature amongst the working classes, Bourbon misrule was absolutely impossible. Editors and publishers enjoyed a pleasant peace, won for them mainly by Carlile's invincible hostility to oppression.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued.)

Hospital Religion.

A SHORT time ago I received an ultimatum from my doctor to the effect that I must have an operation performed; and, as he strongly advised it, I determined to have it performed at one of our big hospitals. Now, the one thing that struck me more than another was the extreme religious tone of the place. From the first ray of the rising sun, which lit up some gaudily-painted text on the wall, to the time when "lights out" was sounded at night, and the Sister read prayers, my ears heard the sound of prayers and my eyes gazed upon tracts, text-cards, etc., which were showered upon me by religious visitors.

The first morning that I was in, and almost immediately after my operation, I was lying in my cot with that sickly, nauseating feeling which one always experiences after taking an anæsthetic, when my first pious visitor arrived. She was a lady of somewhat mature age, with a benevolent but thoroughly bigoted cast of face, carrying a bag from which she extracted a copy of some maudlin, red-hot salvation-and-Pearl-Soap-advertisement paper (which doubtless gave the usual account of the impossible Atheist converted by the equally impossible arguments of some blatant infidel-slayer), which she presented to me with a few platitudes, which, judging by the fluent way in which she delivered them, were constantly on tap. I endeavored feebly to waive her away, telling her I was very unorthodox, to which she replied by presenting me with a card, and saying: "Oh! that doesn't matter, as long as we believe in the Bible!" I was feeling too sick and sleepy to make any reply to this somewhat unexpected answer, so, with a weary sigh, I turned away to shut my eyes. After hurling a few more texts at me, she departed to administer spiritual consolation to the unfortunate occupier of the next cot. The card she left, however, came in very useful to cut the pages of that splendid lecture of Ingersoll's, entitled *A Dying Creed*. While using it as a paper-cutter, I lazily scrutinized the writing thereon. It read: "Three Spared Nots"—see such-and-such a text. Rather curious to see what a "Spared Not" was, I took the Bible, which, in company with a prayer-book and a hymn-book, was in a bag behind my head, and looked up the references. The reader will at once imagine how extremely comforted I was to find that, according to these texts, my lot was undoubtedly in the Lake of Fire. No sooner had I replaced the Bible in its bag than the Sister of the ward came up and asked me what Church I belonged to. On my telling her I was an Agnostic, she seemed a little surprised; but I am bound to say that during my stay in the ward she showed me nothing but the greatest kindness and courtesy. Having read a few pages of Ingersoll, my attention was drawn to the man in the bed opposite, who was groaning as if in intense pain. His bed had over it a frame containing the following legend: "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment, not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." Now I think that is the rankest piece of blasphemy I have ever heard. Imagine a man daring—and, even if he dared, presuming—to address such words to the imagined Regulator of the Universe! Compare this with the article which defines the Deity as without parts or passions, and wonder at the absurd contradictions of Christianity.

Texts of this description point out clearly to the unbiassed mind the low and creeping idea that most Christians have of their deity. Lapses of this description into the phraseology of the East stamp the religion as Oriental and unworthy of the belief of any thinking man; but so bound up are most of us in Christianity,

from our earliest childhood, and so hackneyed have the tales of the Bible become, that, from their very familiarity, they fall on our ears as meaningless; and so the great majority of men never think of examining their veracity with an open mind.

I am afraid, however, the Lord was very busy somewhere else at that time, as the poor fellow over whose cot it stood was writhing in terrible agony. At eight o'clock the sister rang a small muffin-bell, and read a chapter of the Bible and the prayers for the day. Despite the idiocy of the petitions to the deity, this was not unpleasing, as the reader had a beautiful soft voice, which was quite a pleasure to listen to. This short service brought to my mind a lecture I heard a few Sundays ago at the Athenæum Hall, in which Mr. Foote said: "It is no good freeing men from superstition while women remain in the mire." These latter are some of the truest words I have ever heard; for, surely, while sex remains and woman has got such a strong influence over man, the religion of woman will be that of man. Rescue the woman from the hands of the priest, knock off the fetters of priestcraft, and you have gained, not one generation to the cause of truth, but many.

The next day I was visited early by the chaplain, who evidently could see that I was in the habit of doing my own thinking, so he very wisely confined himself to purely secular subjects. After this visit the day was comparatively free from objectionable visitors, so I was able to get through a little reading in comfort, and also scribble a few words of this article.

The day following being Good Friday, the parson arrived on the scene early to deliver a short discourse on the Atonement. Now, I have heard some extremely feeble explanations of this cornerstone of Christianity, but never in all my life have I listened to such a flow of gaudy phraseology as that with which he endeavored to cover up the most idiotic lie that has ever been thrust on mankind. Having got into a muddle over this, he passed on to say a few words on the Fall. Nothing, to my mind, so stamps Christianity as a cowardly superstition as its accounting for the misery in the world by the sin of a woman. A woman, forsooth, the cowardly shame of it all! Let your parson, who is a firm believer of this, cease for a day or two from his work of degrading woman in his church, and go and spend a few days in sickness in a cot in a hospital, under the care of nurses, who are devoting their lives to this work, and if he comes out and again preaches the same lie, then surely that man should be considered out of the pale of civilization. Nothing has ever so impressed me with the goodness of woman as the treatment I received from the nurses' hands while I was under their care. Their eagerness to soothe your suffering, their kindly cheerfulness, and their smiling faces are no small compensation for the pain you are undergoing. And when the lights are lowered, and darkness steals over the ward, when perhaps your pain is eased for a time, listening to the gentle *frou-frou* of their skirts, like the rustle of the wind through the autumn trees, and you watch them flit about easing the pain of some poor sufferer, it makes you think—what is this religion which seeks to degrade woman in our eyes?

DRAGON.

Book Chat.

MISS LILY DOUGALL, a Canadian author of repute, has used Mormonism as the subject-matter for her novel, *The Mormon Prophet* (A. and C. Black). The author's name roused our curiosity. We felt certain that, unlike most books dealing with the Latter-Day Saints, it would be at least worthy of attention, and we were not disappointed. The story revolves round the personality of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism. We see him at the outset of his career as a mere visionary. We find him later as the trusted leader of a religious body, subjected to bitter persecution. Miss Dougall writes extremely well, and has evidently studied her subject closely. She brings out very clearly the fact that Joseph Smith did not advocate polygamy, but the reverse. This was the work of his immediate successor, Brigham Young. At the present time the "Smithite" Mormons are monogamous, and they number many thousands. Miss Dougall gives us some extremely pathetic pictures of the sufferings of the early Mormons. Her pathos rings true; she evidently fully understands the value of reticence. What some lady writers would

have done with a like subject we tremble to think of. A very pretty love-story runs through the book, and the heroine interests us from start to finish. The weakest part of the book is the end, which deals with the death of the Mormon Prophet. The telling of the story by a subsidiary character, merely introduced for that purpose, was an error. Apart from this, the book is excellent. Miss Dougall's portrait of Joseph Smith is not uninviting, and her pictures of the early days of Mormonism are very accurate.

* * *

We turned with considerable interest to the little volume on *Robert Louis Stevenson* in the "Famous Scots Series," by Margaret Moyes Black. It seems ungracious to say hard things about this lady, and we are loth to do so; but she exasperates us beyond words. The business of a biographer is twofold. She should know everything worth knowing about the subject accurately, and she must make a living portrait of her hero. This little volume is overloaded with material, most of which is wholly irrelevant. Endless trivial details meet the reader everywhere. The narrative is disjointed and harassing, and the writing is painfully reminiscent of Marie Corelli and her school. To the admirers of Stevenson the book will prove a great disappointment.

* * *

Messrs. Sonnenschein will shortly publish a *History of Freethought*, by Mr. John M. Robertson. Freethought will be traced from the earliest times through the civilisations of India, Persia, Phœnicia, Greece, and Rome, its existence under Christism and Islam being then described down to our own times.

* * *

The publishers do not seem tired of blasphemous titles. A forthcoming novel by Mr. J. G. Donnelly, dealing with Mexico, will be named *Jesus Delaney*.

National Secular Society.

REPORT of monthly Executive meeting, held on Thursday, April 6, at 377 Strand; the President (Mr. G. W. Foote) in the chair. Present: Messrs. E. Bater, F. Schaller, W. Heaford, E. W. Quay, C. Quinton, M. Loafer, W. Leat, J. Neate, B. Munton, H. Brown, and T. Wilmot, and Miss E. M. Vance (Secretary).

Minutes of previous meeting and cash statement were adopted.

Two applications were before the meeting for permission to form Branches of the Society, and formal authority was given for new Branches at West Ham and Battersea—the former being the outcome of Mr. Foote's visit to Stratford and the recent attack upon the *Freethinker*. Forty-nine applications for membership were presented, and the applicants were duly elected.

The Excursion Committee's report was received and adjourned until next meeting for further details, and to enable the Secretary to ascertain the amount of support likely to be secured from London Branches.

The President referred to Mr. Charles Watts's unfortunate illness, and his probable early return to England.

Indisposition, and other causes, having prevented a full attendance of the Finance Committee, their report on the Open-air Demonstrations stands over until the next meeting, which was arranged for Thursday, April 20.

EDITH M. VANCE, *Secretary*.

The Convert.

WILLIAMSON'S mother admitted her boy was a trifle "dense"; Neighbors called him a Natural, minus a grain of sense. People who chanced to meet him thought that the youth was mad, But the vicar saw in the numbskull "a fine and promising lad."

He cornered his prey one morning. "Do you love the Lord?" said he.

Then Williamson grinned and shuffled: "I dunno who he may be."

"I feared it, my friend, I feared it! You're still on the broad, smooth way;

But read this Bible, beloved, and get converted to-day."

Now Jones had snowballed our hero (for Jones was a little boy),

And Williamson read his Bible, and was filled with holy joy.

"When I am singing in Heaven, Jones will be snug in Hell.

Jones will be lost for ever," said Williamson; "it is well!"

So he was perfectly happy—said he was ready to go—

Yearned for his crown, harp, and mansion—and fricasseed

Jones below.

And glad was the heart of the pastor as he made in his book

a note:—

"Williamson now is a Christian; sails in the Heaven-bound

boat."

JOHN YOUNG.

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, Chilperic Edwards, "Ancient Monuments and the Bible."
BATTERSEA BRANCH: Meetings every Monday at 8.30, at 8 Atherton-street, Battersea.

BRADLAUGH CLUB AND INSTITUTE (36 Newington Green-road, Ball's Pond): 8.30, A Concert.

CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 16 New Church-road): Every Saturday, at 7, Debating Class. Sunday, at 7.30, J. M. Robertson, "Christianity and Character."

EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Bow Vestry Hall, Bow-road, E.): 7, J. C. Millington, B.A., "Theophobia."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Surrey Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road, S.E.): 3.30, Children's Festival; 7, Dr. Washington Sullivan, "Is War a Necessary Institution?"

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall): 11, Stanton Coit, "Byron and the Spirit of Revolt."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, J. Ramsey.
BROCKWELL PAAK (near Herne-hill Gates): 3.15, E. Pack, "Christian Mythology."

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, Mr. Heaford.
HAMPSTEAD HEATH (near Flagstaff): 3.15, Mr. Heaford.

KILBURN (corner of Victoria-road): 7, A lecture.

MILE END WASTE: 11.30, R. P. Edwards.

THE TRIANGLE (Salmon Lane, Limehouse): 11.30, C. Cohen.

CAMBERWELL (Station-road): 11.30, E. Pack, "Forgotten Christian Truths."

STRATFORD (The Grove): 11.30, A lecture.

VICTORIA PARK (near the Fountain): 3.15, C. Cohen.

WESTMINSTER (Grosvenor Embankment): 11.30, F. A. Davis, "Christianity and Slavery."

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): W. Dyson—3, "Is Spiritualism a Delusion?" 7, "Christianity a Borrowed Religion."

BOLTON (Spinner's Hall, Georges-road): Arthur B. Moss—3, "The Drama of Christianity"; 6.30, "His Majesty the Devil."

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school; 7, Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, "A Little Englander's Look Round."

EDINBURGH (Moulders' Arms Hall): 6.30, Mr. Macwaters, "Theism and Morality."

GLASGOW (Lecture Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): H. Percy Ward—11.30, "Is Man a Fallen Angel or a Risen Animal?" 2.30, "Jesus the Infidel"; 6.30, "How Christianity has Cursed Humanity."

GREAT YARMOUTH FREETHINKERS' ASSOCIATION (Freethinkers' Hall, bottom of Broad-row). Thursdays, at 8.30, Elocution Class. Sunday, at 7, A lecture.

HULL (Friendly Societies' Hall, No. 2 Room): W. H. Bailey, "A Few Pen-and-Ink Sketches of my Favorite Authors."

LEICESTER SECULAR CLUB (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, Sydney Gimson, "Secular Propaganda."

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 3, Mr. Small's Philosophy Class—"Mr. Bradlaugh's Doubts and Dialogues"; 7, Mr. Smith.

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): G. W. Foote—11, "The Dreyfus Affair and the Catholic Conspiracy against the French Republic"; 3, "What would Jesus Do?" 7, "Souls, Spirits, and Ghosts."

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): Ernest Evans—3, "How to Spend a Holiday"; 7, "Meat and Milk: How they may Produce Diseases"—with lantern illustrations. Tea at 5.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7.30, A Reading.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—April 16 m., Limehouse; a., Victoria Park; 23, a., Victoria Park; e., Athenæum, Tottenham Court-road; 30, m. Mile End; a., Victoria Park; e., Athenæum. May 3, Mile End Waste; 7 and 14, Manchester; 21, Birmingham Conference.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, S.E.—April 16, Bolton; 23, e., Edmonton. May 7, m., Clerkenwell, a., Victoria Park; 14, a. and e., Brockwell Park; 21, m., Mile End; e., Victoria Park; e., Stratford. 28, a., Hampstead Heath. June 4, m., Hyde Park; e., Hammersmith; 18, a. and e., Brockwell Park; 25, m., Battersea.

H. PERCY WARD, 5 Alexandra-road, Edgbaston, Birmingham.—April 16, Glasgow.

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