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## What Would Jesus Do?

(Continued from page 321.)

How often in cheap novels the hero is described as a miracle of wisdom, but when he opens his mouth he talks like a jackass. Mr. Sheldon's hero, the Rev. Henry Maxwell, belongs to this noble family. When we are first introduced to him in the pulpit, we are told that his sermon was "interesting" and "full of striking sentences." We might have believed it, had the author stuck to description; but he gives us samples, and they are full of disillusionment. "Men and women wept as he spoke," but his recorded utterances touch no fount of tears. Being a minister, portrayed by a minister, he is represented as speaking with the very voice of God. When he prays the place is filled with "a distinct presence of the Spirit," which all feel "as plainly as if it had been visible." Again, it is said that "a distinct wave of spiritual power moved over the congregation." When extracts, however, are given from his inspiring addresses, he speaks pure Sheldonese. So easy is it to carve and paint a fine puppet, and so difficult to make him act his character.

The Rev. Henry Maxwell has been minister of the First Church of Raymond for ten years. He preaches elegant sermons to a high-class congregation. But after his "Amen" one Sunday morning a starving tramp takes the floor and asks whether it is real Christianity to live in luxury and sing about the Cross of Jesus, while thousands of poor people cannot find work and are perishing for want of food and shelter. Having put this question in a long-winded speech, the starving tramp drops down exhausted. Never has such a scene been witnessed in that church. The congregation are in a state of excitement, and the minister takes the poor devil home, and piously nurses him for a week, at the end of which he dies, feeling that there is some real Christianity in the world after all. Of course that tramp had to die. He was not wanted any further in the story, and his presence would only have been an embarrassment.

The harangue and collapse of this unfortunate tramp, so expeditiously killed out of the way, stir up the dormant Christianity of the minister and congregation of the First Church. What they proceed to do we shall see presently. Meanwhile, we have to observe how beautifully this incident displays the saving grace of the Bible and the Christian religion. For ten years the Rev. Henry Maxwell has been preaching to his elegant congregation; for ten years they have been listening to his elegant sermons; yet a semi-miracle has to occur in their midst before they wake up to the claims of that form of Christianity which it is the present fashion to call *real* Christianity, and a starving member of the great army of the unemployed has almost to die under their very eyes before they appreciate the fact that there is too much suffering and misery in the world, or that such a thing exists as a social problem calling for study and solution. Would a congregation of "infidels," addressed every Sunday by a "blaspheming Atheist," have taken all that time to learn so simple a truth? Or would they have needed a tragedy in their meeting-place to make them recognise it effectually? The truth is that Christians in general, and Christian Churches in particular, are always waking up a hundred years or so behind date, and talking in a pathetic but belated way about evils which have long been commonplaces to unbelievers. Now let us see what is done by the Rev. Henry

Maxwell and his congregation, or rather a portion of it. They pledge themselves, at least for twelve months, to ask themselves in their daily lives, "What would Jesus do?" and to do it regardless of results. It does not appear that much sacrifice is involved on the part of the minister. He has nothing particular to lose, for his stipend is pretty secure. Indeed, he is just as safe as his Master, who advised the rich young man to sell all he had and give to the poor, having nothing himself to dispose of in that peremptory fashion. But the pledge involves the most unpleasant consequences to others, and especially to Mr. Edward Norman, the proprietor and editor of the *Raymond Daily News*. This gentleman begins by shutting out a three-column report of a great prize fight, which all the citizens, including most of the Church members, are dying to read. This has a disastrous effect upon his circulation. But he does not stop there. He knocks out all the tobacco and whiskey advertisements, which is surely a very extreme measure. Jesus did not smoke, it is true; but then he never had a chance of smoking; and, if he had, it might have toned down his virulent denunciations of his religious rivals, the Scribes and Pharisees. Nor did Jesus drink whiskey. But this only means that he was not a Scotchman. He drank what was going in his own country. It was an accusation against him that he consorted with winebibbers. On one occasion he turned a vast quantity of water into wine to keep up the merriment at a feast; and this miraculous liquor was not poor, despicable stuff; on the contrary, it was of a strength and flavor to be appreciated by persons already "well drunken." Assuredly the editor of the *Raymond Daily News* is too fastidious. But not satisfied with excluding the reports of prize fights, and dropping all the tobacco and whiskey advertisements, he also discontinues his Sunday edition. Jesus would do these things, and Edward Norman follows suit. And what is the result? Why, in a few weeks he is face to face with bankruptcy. Following Jesus is the road to ruin; that is to say, it is so without an opportune miracle. But in this case the miracle is wrought. A wealthy Christian lady, a member of the First Church congregation, having a tremendous lot of dollars she positively doesn't know what to do with—a way they have in America—hands over half a million of them as a free gift to the distressed editor, who continues to tread the road to ruin with a fresh heart.

Another person who follows Jesus is a young lady, named Rachel Winslow, who is very beautiful (of course!) and the possessor of a lovely and highly-trained voice. She concludes, no doubt justly, that Jesus would not sing on an opera stage. Accordingly she refuses an eligible public engagement, and sings Christian hymns at slum revival meetings. Whenever the minister fails to hold the crowd she is turned on to discourse sweet music, and she never fails. Naturally she is a magnificent success; for if Adelina Patti sings in the streets, the crowd will listen, whether she sings an air from Mozart or "Tommy Make Room for Your Uncle." And if a handsome girl, with a glorious voice, follows Jesus, it is pretty certain that a lot of fellows will follow Jesus too—after her; although her marriage to one of the said fellows is likely to stop the procession. Rachel Winslow does get married to a converted young man, to the disgust of another suitor, Mr. Jasper Chase, a literary gentleman, who writes only for fame when the girl he loved refuses him. The novel he is then finishing is "without a purpose"—probably nothing like Mr. Sheldon's sublime production; and thus he finally answers the question, "What would Jesus do?" by

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"denying his Lord." According to which judgment, every literary artist is a candidate for hell.

It would be a waste of time to follow this poor "sermon story" carefully to the very end. What we have already instanced may be taken as a sample from bulk. We desire, however, to draw the reader's attention to a curious passage in the last chapter. A Chicago Bishop—they seem to have such things in Porkopolis—works a social "settlement" in that great city; and a special assembly was held one evening in honor of the Rev. Henry Maxwell, and a few other ladies and gentlemen of his congregation who had been doing what Jesus would do.

"The Bishop invited into the Settlement Hall meeting for that night men out of work, wretched creatures who had lost faith in God and man, anarchists and infidels, freethinkers and no thinkers. The representatives of all the city's worst, most hopeless, most dangerous, depraved elements."

This remarkable passage throws a flood of light upon the real character of Mr. Sheldon's sentiments. Throughout his book there is a great parade of altruism and tenderness, of "Christ-like" love for the poor, the miserable, and the degraded. Nowhere does it strike us as thoroughly sincere, but the words just quoted settle all our doubts on *that* point. Drunkards speak the truth in their cups, and men of God in their moments of forgetfulness. Mr. Sheldon lets us see, in this unguarded utterance, how he actually looks upon the unfortunate. He regards "men out of work" as "wretched creatures," who are "hopeless" and "dangerous"—to whom he does not say, but he probably means to men *in* work, including ministers of religion. In the same category he places "infidels" and "freethinkers." What exquisite charity! What wonderful wisdom! What subtle knowledge of human nature! What profound knowledge of the causes of social distress! Mr. Sheldon need not have included the "no thinkers" in this black list, for a great many Christians belong to that division, and he himself may claim a distinguished place in it.

Let us now venture a few words on the question, "What would Jesus Do?" Why should Christians begin by troubling their heads about this question? Their first duty is not to find out what Jesus *would* do, but to follow him as far as possible in what he *did*, and to carry out what he plainly *taught*. But this is a very difficult task; indeed, it is an impossible task in a civilised community. Everyone taking Jesus for his exemplar has to love poverty and hate wealth, to despise this world and set his heart on the world to come, to pray for what he needs instead of laboring for it, to trust to God for everything, to take no thought for the morrow, to trouble himself in no wise as to what he shall eat or drink or wear, to give to everyone that asketh, to submit to evil and violence, and even to turn his right cheek to anyone who smites him on the left. Of course it is highly inconvenient to do these things. The man who tried to do them would soon be in the workhouse, the lunatic asylum, or the prison. Indeed, the Peculiar People *are* sent to prison for obeying Jesus. They pray to God instead of calling in a doctor to their sick children, as they are commanded to do in the New Testament. And the professed Christians who send these real Christians to prison for doing what Jesus *ordered*, and what Jesus *did*, amuse themselves by asking "What would Jesus do?"

Those who believe that Jesus was God should do what he taught. That is their only duty. Those who do not believe that he was God need not trouble themselves to inquire what he would do if he were living now. A great many answers might be given, and all of them might be wrong. Moreover, the question is absurd as well as unpractical. John Stuart Mill, it is true, in an essay he never revised for publication, said that it would not be easy for an unbeliever "to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavor so to live that Christ would approve our life." But this is a weak and sentimental concession to Christianity. Why take Jesus instead of any other great and good man? Why take *any* single character as a model, or as an imaginary guardian angel? Instead of asking others what we should do, we should ask ourselves. Every man should, as far as possible, think and act for himself. This amount of

originality is requisite to our moral development. Let us throw away our crutches, whether they bear the name of Jesus or any other label. Let us learn to walk firmly on our own feet. Let us be scholars without being disciples. Let us be men.

G. W. FOOTE.

## Bible Biography.

THE study of biography affords the advantage of presenting to the students traits of character so noble and useful in their nature that to emulate them tends to enhance the personal and general good of the community. On the other hand, such study occasionally brings to view features in character which are ignoble, and detrimental in their influence upon conduct, that to avoid emulating them should be the aim of one and all. So much has been said by orthodox exponents about the grandeur of Bible morality, and of the excellent example shown in "holy writ" by God's special favorites, that a candid examination of Biblical biography may be profitable. It will no doubt demonstrate the extravagance and fallacy of Christian claims, and should induce those Bible defenders, who occupy their time in slandering Freethinkers, to cease telling gross falsehoods in reference to honest sceptics, whose lives are far superior to the lives of those whose biographies we intend to notice. It will not be difficult to prove, notwithstanding the allegation that the Bible personages were under "Divine influence," and in direct communication with their Deity, that their lives, from an ethical standpoint, were, to say the least, very questionable. And what is more significant is the fact that those individuals who appear to have been God's chosen companions—men with whom he is said to have walked and talked—were the worst of Bible characters, and their immoral deeds received either his tacit or positive approval.

Man's criminality has been largely incorporated in the world's literature. Its record in biography has been for a special purpose—namely, to make it serve, as it were, as a foil to virtue. It has been employed with legitimate and salutary effects in novels, poems, and dramas; but as a rule, all reference to crime, save of a condemnatory character, has been rigidly excluded from works of a professedly moral and didactic character. The Bible is an exception to this rule. The Jews incorporated into the books containing their sacred and theological opinions a record of the vices, as well as of the virtues, of those prominent persons whose lives furnished materials for their national history. Moreover, it should be observed that the crimes of most of the Bible heroes were not deprecated by the God, but, on the contrary, received his sanction. Murder, brutality, adultery, falsehood, intemperance, deceit, and injustice were all approved, if the Bible be true, by the Christian Deity. For proof of this the reader is referred to the following passages in "God's Word": 2 Kings x. 11-30; Exodus xxxii. 27; 1 Samuel xv. 3; 1 Kings xvi. 6; 2 Samuel xii. 11; 1 Kings xxii. 23; 2 Thessalonians ii. 11; Deuteronomy xiv. 26; Proverbs xxxi. 6; Ezekiel xiv. 9; 2 Chronicles xviii. 18-22; Jeremiah xli. 14; 1 Samuel xv. 2, 3; and Exodus vii. 3, xi. 10. Here we have a record of authorised Biblical crime with a vengeance. It is not a sufficient answer to say that the divine sense of right and wrong may differ from that of the human. Many years ago Professor Jowett showed the fallacy of this subterfuge. If God's idea of morality is contrary to ours, how are we to obey his injunction to act fairly and honestly? When we do what we consider the proper thing, it may happen that, from God's standpoint, we are doing the very opposite. This is one of the specimens of the alleged "Christian certainties."

The conduct of Bible characters has been a considerable difficulty to theological moralists. Unable to harmonise the actions of Moses or David with the principles of human morality, Christians assure us that the "sacred" accounts given of these men are only "police reports" of the Bible; that, like our newspaper "police reports" of the Bible, the "inspired Word" gives a record of the crimes and follies of the saints, but does not endorse them. Unfortunately, this is not correct, inasmuch as the Bible sanctions many of the immoralities and injustices which disgrace its pages. It is unfair to compare what is termed the "police reports of the Bible" with the "police reports of our newspapers." They are not in any way



threatened with loss of custom should they expose anti-Christian literature for sale. But the boycott has, recently at least, been applied more or less surreptitiously and individually; in this case we have the same thing openly and generally. Numbers, which make treason respectable, have enabled intolerance to regain some measure of its old-time effrontery; and the Christianity, established and dissenting, that has of late years been—like a jackass in a lion's skin—apeing a freedom that was foreign to its nature, no sooner finds it profitable to throw off the disguise than it stands "naked and not ashamed," wielding its historic weapon of terrorism in defence of a creed that cannot well be perpetuated by any other method.

But the most significant feature of the agitation has been the demonstration of how much power the Christian clergy can command if only they can cease quarrelling among themselves long enough to wield it. It is not often that one can see the "men of God" engaged in a fraternal combination such as we have witnessed during the last few weeks. The sight is as touching as it is infrequent; and their protests against "secularising the Sunday" are, to any well-balanced mind, about as significant as publicans protesting against the prohibition of alcoholic liquors. But, whatever be the motives of the clergy in conducting this agitation, there can be no question that their efforts have, thus far, met with a considerable measure of success. The Press is no mean power nowadays, and the proprietors of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* are no weaklings. Yet, as a result of this agitation and threatened boycott, the first-named journal has suspended its Sunday issue, although it is to be hoped that the latter will not follow the example of its boastful but unsteadfast rival. Some part of this result must be placed to the credit of other papers anxious to improve their circulations by frantic advertisements that they do not intend to publish a Sunday edition; but, when we have allowed for this, it is still painfully apparent that the clergy can still wield enormous power under certain conditions. Forty thousand professional parsons, with a large or even larger army of local preachers and the like, and all who are looked up to for advice and guidance, cannot but represent a tremendous power in the fashioning of public opinion.

And this demonstration of clerical ethics and clerical power comes as an apt rebuke, on the one hand, to those who regard a weakening of the old direct form of persecution as a reason for slackening anti-Christian propaganda, and, on the other hand, to those who hail the mouthing of liberal-sounding phrases by a popularity-hunting priesthood as a proof that the right to freedom of thought and speech is now recognised by the leaders of Christianity. It is just this mouthing of liberal sentiments by the religious world that constitutes a grave danger to real Freethought. That an open enemy is better than a false friend is an old adage; and we may feel tolerably certain that our liberties never need such careful watching as when their ancient enemies suddenly profess for them a friendship that neither history nor personal experience would lead us to expect.

A Christianity that showed itself in its old and true colors would stand but little chance of gaining support to-day. The clergy, alive as ever to their own professional interests, know this as well as we do, so the pill of superstition is given a democratic or ethical coating in the hope that people may swallow it quietly, and thus fail to discover the nature of the dose until it is too late to eject it from their system. The real danger to Freethought is that Christianity, by offering a slight concession here and there, or by modifying the tone of its utterances, tends to deceive the unwary, to act as a sedative to the short-sighted or luke-warm reformer, and thus succeed in perpetrating the old evils and the old injustices under new forms.

But, fortunately for Freethought, it is very seldom indeed that the different Christian sects are sufficiently in unison to utilise in one direction the religious power of the country. The sneer that England was a country with a hundred sects and only one sauce was far more profound than its author imagined, and, omitting the sauce, really indicated the principal condition of our religious freedom. The secret of our comparative freedom in religious matters is, that not only have we

less religion, as such, than many other nations, but also that what we have is so divided and sub-divided into sects, each anxious to prevent the other rising higher in the State than itself, that there is hardly enough co-operation among them to altogether suppress the common enemy. Whether it be true or not that "a multitude of counsellors lieth wisdom," it is unquestionable that in the multitudinous sects of Great Britain there lies a certain guarantee of safety for advanced thought. Next to getting rid of them altogether, the best thing is to see them always fighting. It is not possible for any one of the Christian sects to swallow like Aaron's rod, the bodies of its competitors, and Freethought in England would be doomed.

It is, in brief, the old story of the struggle between barons and kings during the Middle Ages. So long as these two parties were at loggerheads the people were bound to be gainers by the disagreement. It was when both parties, each of whom was equally interested in keeping the people down, joined hands that the outlook grew black and threatening. So it is with the different religious sects to-day. Every Christian sect in the world hampers freedom of thought and speech to the exact extent of its power and political opportunities. But in the competition of sects popular favor counts for much; and thus, while Dissenters are at bottom much opposed to real freedom of thought as Episcopalians, and Episcopalians as Roman Catholics, each sect seeks, in the strife for converts, to give its program as liberal an air as possible. But, wherever and whenever any one body feels strong enough to show its real spirit, or whenever—as in the case of the present agitation—the interests of each are identical, then, with rare individual exceptions, we find the old spirit of historic Christian bigotry and persecution breaking forth, the same in essence, modified in form only to meet the requirements of a changed environment.

Recent events have shown that Dissenters, who are clamoring for Disestablishment, are as ready to ask the State interference and seek State help in matters of religion as are Episcopalians. Their objection to State patronage is very largely based upon the fact that others are getting a larger share of it than they themselves; and one may confidently predict that, in giving the Dissenters a larger share of public money, or by lifting their leaders into the House of Lords, as was suggested by Lord Hugh Cecil, the cry for Disestablishment would be narrowed down to a solitary voice here and there crying a message to the ears. The present agitation has also shown the enormous amount of religious power that lies latent in the country ready to be worked into activity by a combination among the leaders of different sects. No Rationalist can deny that these things constitute an ever-present threat to our national advance and to the existence of our intellectual liberties. And if we are to act upon this lesson, as well as learn it, it can only be by strengthening such Rationalistic organisations as exist, and by bringing home to the public mind the value and urgency of Freethought principles, thus offering to religious encroachments the only barrier that can ever be of any real service.

### The Exodus from Egypt.

THE last matter connected with the alleged sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt which may, perhaps, be worth noticing is that of the Exodus or departure from that country. The Hebrew brickmakers, it is stated, their wives and children, their flocks and herds, their household goods, all marched out of Goshen on the day following the slaying of the firstborn of the Egyptians, and took their way towards the Red Sea, led by a moving cloud which appeared dark and solid by day and luminous by night. Arrived at the sea, the waters divided to permit them to cross, forming a path unto them on their right hand and on their left. The Israelites reached the other side in safety; the Egyptian army that pursued them, and entered the sea after they were every man drowned. This is the story we are asked to believe without the smallest scrap of evidence, and for no other reason than that it is recorded in the book of Exodus—a book ascribed to a mythical legislator.

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Moses, who is said to have been an eye-witness of the occurrence. When, however, it is proved beyond question that the before-named book was not composed until many centuries after the time of this supposed Moses—as has been done by more than one Biblical critic—even this apologetic assumption, which does duty for evidence, falls to pieces. We have to consider, then, but the question of the knowledge and the veracity of the writer. The first point, when the late date of the book is taken into consideration, may be dismissed at once; the writer could have no personal knowledge of the events recorded. As regards the sacred pen-man's veracity, it need only be said that every detail of the Biblical account of the sojourn in Egypt which we have examined has been found to be a deliberate fabrication.

As a last test, let us see when the alleged Exodus from Egypt is said to have taken place. This we can easily ascertain; for the Bible itself gives the date. All we have to do is to add together a few figures.

We will commence with the generally received date of the taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar—viz., B.C. 587. Next, if we take the sum of the years reigned by the twenty kings of Judah (from Rehoboam to Zedekiah), as recorded in the books of Kings and Chronicles, we get a total of 393 years. This gives us the date of the death of Solomon and the accession of his son Rehoboam—viz., B.C. 980. Lastly, in 1 Kings vi. 1 it is stated that "the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt" was "the fourth year of Solomon's reign." The duration of the latter reign is given as forty years; consequently, according to this statement, the Exodus took place 517 years (480 + 37) before the date of the accession of Rehoboam—that is, in the year 1497 B.C.

But, it may be asked, can we rely upon this as the sole and unquestionable Biblical date of the Exodus? No, we cannot; for if we add together the various periods between the departure from Egypt and the accession of Rehoboam, as given in the Hebrew historical books, we shall get a totally different result. These periods are the following: Exodus to death of Moses, forty years; Governorship of Joshua, eight years; freedom after Joshua's death, twenty-five years; Servitude under Chushan and judgeship of Othniel, forty-eight years; Servitude under Eglon, eighteen years; Judgeship of Ehud and freedom, eighty years; Servitude under Jabin, twenty years; Judgeship of Deborah and Barak, forty years; Servitude under Midianites and judgeship of Gideon, forty-seven years; Abimelech king, three years; Judgeship of Tola and Jair, forty-five years; Servitude under Ammonites and judgeship of Jephthah, twenty-four years; Judgeships of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, twenty-five years; Servitude under Philistines and judgeship of Samson, forty years; Judgeship of Eli, forty years; Judgeship of Samuel, forty years; Reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, one hundred and twenty years; total, 663 years. The Exodus, then, according to this computation, took place 663 years prior to the accession of Rehoboam—viz., in B.C. 1643.

For the length of the reign of king Saul we have to go to the New Testament (Acts xiii. 21). In the case of three of the foregoing periods the exact number of years is not stated. These are: (1) governorship of Joshua; (2) freedom after the death of Joshua; (3) years of war are mentioned; therefore, eight years cannot be said to be too long. With respect to the second, nothing less than a generation of liberty is implied in Josh. xxiv. 31 and Judges ii. 10: this period would be at least twenty-five years. As to the third period, it need only be stated that Eli is represented as an old man when Samuel was a child, and that the latter had passed middle age, with grown-up sons, when he anointed Saul king. This interval could not be less than forty years.

Comparing the two Bible accounts, we find that the Israelites departed from Egypt in the year 1497 B.C., or they left that country about a century and a-half earlier. All orthodox believers are thus at liberty to take their choice, and, as a matter of fact, we find that they take full advantage of that liberty. Canon Girdlestone, in a letter to the *Times* (Sept., 1892), had been declared by some eminent Bible reconciler to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus. "Nothing certain," says this apologist, "can be affirmed, but most of the

evidence points to a late period in the eighteenth dynasty."

Many people, after reading this statement, would think that there exists *some* evidence, if not exactly of the Exodus itself, at least of something connected with the residence of the Israelites in Egypt, which would render the occurrence of such an event highly probable. But there is no evidence whatever—not the smallest scrap. Not even the name of the Israelites, nor that of Goshen, where they are said to have lived, has yet been discovered. The difficulty is not as to which way any evidence points, but to find a reign in which the mythical Exodus can be inserted without conflicting with all the other events of the reign.

The editor of the religious newspaper, the *Rock*, after drawing attention to Canon Girdlestone's letter, says (Sept. 16, 1892): "In the twenty-third year of his reign we know that Thothmes invaded Palestine, and at this time it can be shown that the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness on their way from Egypt to Palestine."

Now, it is scarcely necessary to say that it can *not* be shown that the Israelites were wandering in the desert in the time of Thothmes III., nor can it be shown that they were doing so in the reign of any other Egyptian king. The statement in the *Rock* is therefore an apologetic falsehood, for which there can be no possible excuse.

There is one fact, however, in connection with the conquests of the before-mentioned monarch which completely disproves the Biblical story of an exodus of Israelites, either in his own reign or in that of any other Egyptian king. Among the list of towns in Canaan captured by this Thothmes, and inscribed on the temple walls of Karnack, is one named Beth-Yah. In other words, there existed, about 1600 B.C., a city in Palestine devoted to the worship of Yahveh, or Yah, whose inhabitants were made to acknowledge the supremacy of the king of Egypt. The god Yah being thus shown to be powerless to save or protect his people, it follows that the stories of this mythical deity sending plagues on the land of Egypt, dividing the waters of the Red Sea, and drowning the Egyptian army, are silly Jewish legends, destitute of the smallest foundation in fact.

Again, in a misleading work entitled *The Bible and Modern Discoveries*, the author, after describing a number of brick walls enclosing a large area at Pithom, which are said to have been built by Rameses II., says (p. 99):—

"The photographs taken by M. Naville for the Egyptian fund show brick chambers of huge size—in the lowest course the bricks are well made; in the higher courses, rough straw and rushes in the bricks; last course, neither! *What a confirmation of the Bible history!*"

The facts stated furnish, indeed, a truly wonderful confirmation of the Bible story. Straw to mix with the bricks was, according to the sacred narrative, withheld from the Israelites; bricks badly made, and without straw, are discovered in Egypt; it follows, therefore, that the Israelites made those bricks. This is a sample both of Christian evidence and of Christian Evidence reasoning. In the first place, the author, Mr. Harper, adduces no evidence to prove that the Israelites ever lived in Egypt. In the next place, he ignores the fact that for rough buildings it was a common custom with the Egyptians to make bricks with little or no straw, and allow them to dry in the sun. Thirdly, the writer appears to have forgotten that Rameses I. carried on long wars in Syria and Palestine, and, after subjugating the Hittites, Amorites, and other nations, took a large number of captives, whom he carried back with him to Egypt. Mr. Harper has not even attempted to show that it was not some of these captives who made Rameses' bricks. Fourthly, if the Israelites were the makers of the strawless bricks found at Pithom, then Rameses II. was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, who, according to the Biblical account, lost his eldest son in the tenth plague, and was afterwards drowned, with his whole army, in the Red Sea. This is evident, for straw was withheld from the Hebrew brickmakers only a few weeks before their departure from Egypt. Mr. Harper has not informed his readers that no such calamities as those mentioned in the Bible came upon Rameses, who could not, therefore, be the Pharaoh of the alleged Exodus. Lastly, anybody but Mr. Harper would have known that, since Rameses II. was not the

Pharaoh who deprived the Israelites of straw for brick-making, it follows of necessity that that people could have had no hand in fashioning the bricks discovered at Pithom.

I have stated, it may be remembered, that not even the name of the Israelites has yet been discovered on any Egyptian monument. This statement, according to Mr. Petrie, is incorrect. That Egyptologist has recently unearthed a slab upon which is engraved a long inscription of the wars of Merenptah, the son of Rameses II. From this we learn that that king, like his father, over-ran Syria and Palestine, and re-conquered all the nations who had thrown off the Egyptian yoke. A portion of the inscription reads as follows:—

".....ravaged is Kanum with all violence; taken is Askadni; seized is Kazmel; Yanuh of the Syrians is made as though it had not existed; *the people of Ysiraal is spoiled, it hath no seed*; Syria hath become as widows of the land of Egypt; all lands together are in peace."

Mr. Petrie claims that the words italicised refer to the Israelites, who were at that time (about 1200 B.C.) in existence somewhere—either in bondage in Egypt, or wandering in the desert, or settled in Canaan, or somewhere else. Wherever they were, they had been "spoiled" and left without "seed"—a substantive used to denote either *corn* or *progeny*. In the sentence quoted Mr. Petrie takes the word to mean "corn"; but the second meaning is evidently that intended—viz., "the people of Ysiraal is spoiled; its young men have all been slaughtered." Whichever reading be taken, the inscription adds no confirmation to the Bible stories; it tends rather to prove that those stories are not historical.

But do the words, "the people of Ysiraal," refer to the Israelites? It seems to me that they do not; for all the other proper names in the paragraph are geographical. Hence, it is most probable that Ysiraal is the name of a place also—namely, that of the ancient city of Jezreel. The difference between "Israel" and "Jezreel" in the old Hebrew may be represented by the words "Ysral" and "Yzraal," the first standing for "Israel," the second for "Jezreel." The probability is, then, that the words in Merenptah's inscription are "The people of Jezreel is spoiled," etc. This being the case, we have: Kanum ravaged, Askadni taken, Kazmel seized, Yanuh razed, Jezreel spoiled, Syria in mourning, and all lands hostile to Egypt subdued. The desire to find the name of the Israelites on an Egyptian monument appears to have warped the judgment of Mr. Petrie in this matter. ABRACADABRA.

(To be concluded.)

## "The Countess Cathleen."

MR. W. B. YEATS is one of the most promising discoveries of the Irish literary revival. But during the past week he has been the centre of a rather funny discussion in Ireland, which is interesting, both in itself and in what it portends, because it displays at once the bankruptcy of the old religion and the extent to which—in one of the most religious countries in Europe—the effective influence of that religion has been shaken.

Largely by Mr. Yeats's initiative, there has been established in Dublin an Irish Literary Theatre, after the fashion of the Independent Theatre in London and the Theatre Libre of Paris, for the production of other than the ordinary "drama of commerce." And for the first performances of the Irish Literary Theatre there were selected Mr. Yeats's own poetic play, *The Countess Cathleen*, and a play called *The Heather Field*, by Mr. Edward Martyn. But it was round Mr. Yeats's play that the discussion centred. A brief description of the work is, therefore, necessary. It is supposed to deal with a period when there is famine in the land and the people are dying of hunger. Having long endured this hunger, Shemus Rhua, an Irish peasant, grows weary of the praying, and declares:—

The Mother of God  
Has dropped in a doze and cannot hear the poor.

And again bursts out:—

God and the Mother of God have dropped asleep,  
For they are weary of the prayers and the candles—

which, in view of the fact that the people are suffering

and starving, does not seem a very illogical conclusion for Shemus to draw. After a time there come to be two demons disguised as merchants, who offer to buy his soul. And Shemus sells his soul to the demons. Meanwhile, the Countess Cathleen, who owns a great castle close by, is of the most lofty piety, and takes upon herself the task of feeding her people, and, to this end, sends her agents to foreign lands that they may buy herds of oxen and ships of grain. But whilst the Countess is thus engaged, the demons are buying the souls of the peasantry in large quantities, so that one man tells the Countess:—

Now people throng to sell,  
Noisy as seagulls tearing a dead fish;  
There soon will be no man or woman's soul  
Unbargained for in five-score baronies.

Then the demons flushed with their success aspire to the purchase of the Countess's soul. But her piety repel them. Once in her palace, they catch sight of her asleep over her prayers. And one of the remarks that—

She lies worn out upon the altar steps,  
A laborer tired of ploughing His hard fields,  
And deafening His closed ears with cries on cries  
Hoping to draw His hands down from the stars  
To take the people from us.

Yet Cathleen cannot be bought, though the demons would give any price for her soul, since they ask:—

How may we gain this woman for our lord?  
This pearl, this turquoise fastened in his crown,  
Would make it shine like His we dare not name.

At last they tell Cathleen that her argosy is wrecked and her cattle destroyed; they steal her treasure, and leave her unable to help her poor. And then, desolate, Cathleen hears the cry of the poor beating in on her, and she feels she cannot rest. One of her friends tries to comfort her by asking:—

Wherefore should you sadden  
For wrongs you cannot hinder? The great God,  
Smiling, condemns the lost.

But Cathleen cannot be so complacent as "the great God." She feels that all the people's sufferings are hers, and when she hears that they sell their souls a "term of resolve" wakes in her heart. She goes to the cottages where the merchants are buying the souls, and ransoms the people—asks the merchants what price they would give for her soul. They would give a great price—five hundred thousand crowns. Cathleen sells her soul, and, with the money, she rounds the people to buy back theirs. The people round her asking why she should have made such a sacrifice, one of them telling her that all their souls were not worth the price of her great soul. Cathleen has made the bargain, and goes off her broken. Soon they carry her in on a bier—she is dead. She feels "the storm in her hair"—at last she appears at the door and bids them not to weep, for she is passing to the floor of peace."

Mary of the seven-times wounded heart  
Has kissed her on the lips.

The Light of Lights  
Looks always on the motive, not the deed;  
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

Such is a brief description of *The Countess Cathleen* and from it may be judged the strength and the weaknesses of the composition. With all its faults of excess and mystic symbolism, it is a fine piece of work, and contains incidentally some really beautiful verse. And here the symbols the meaning seems sufficiently clear. Hunt has said much the same in his little poem, *Ben Adhem and the Angel*, known, doubtless, to Freethinkers. It is the doctrine that the reverence of God for the love of man is more pleasing to God than his selfish acceptance by those to whom the notion of themselves is the only concern. Mr. Yeats put forward as clearly as it could be through the mouth of his Angel—the doctrine and the motive covers the deed, and that the honest and simple man is justified by his intention—against, be it observed, the currently orthodox doctrine of "salvation by faith." The attack on Mr. Yeats's play was twofold. First, that it was un-Catholic and un-Christian, and, secondly, that it was a libel and outrage on the Irish peasant

for the latter, we had the imbecile and the hypocrite working themselves into great indignation, and declaring that the Irish peasants *never, never* sold their souls; that they starved and died for their "faith" before, and would starve and die for it again—and so forth. Cardinal Logue rushed in with a denunciation of the play and the audience who could listen to it, and thought the Irish Catholics, who could tolerate such a piece, must have "sadly degenerated"; but he *naïvely* admitted in his denunciation that he had not read what he denounced.

It was almost useless to assure these people, as was done both by Mr. Yeats and on his behalf, that the poem "is not historic, but symbolic, and has as little to do with any definite place and time as an *auto* by Calderon."\* It was, of course, quite obvious to anyone that the play could not pretend to be a painting of actual life, and it is difficult to see how any but the most ignorant block-head could take it as such.

At the same time, probably, Mr. Yeats erred in giving the least definiteness to his characters. If you write a novel or a play dealing, say, with drunkenness, it is a confusion and gratuitous defect to bring people on the scene as drunkards who are capable of being identified with particular individuals; and in the case of *The Countess Cathleen* there does not seem any obvious reason why the scene of it should not have been pitched in a Land of Nowhere.

One can, of course, well imagine that a more virile muse than Mr. Yeats would have sung and said all that he said without so many Theosophic accessories of ghosts and goblins and demons and angels. But one need not quarrel with a poet because he is not something else. A man who would take Leigh Hunt's little poem to life," since angels writing in books of gold never appeared to men, ought never to open a volume of poetry or read another poem. For he would lack the very rudiments of the poetic instinct. All poets, I suppose, are more or less dreamers and symbolists; they do not pretend to write philosophical treatises or scientific manuals.

As for Mr. Yeats's doctrine, it seems to strike straight at some of the most cherished of the orthodox doctrines; whilst, quite unconsciously, the spectacle of the love of man so great that human beings would "save" one another from the doom of God, casts an ugly light on the character of the Almighty Devil who doomed them. Incidentally, it brought out that man is always greater and more loving than his God, for, if you observe closely, you will find few men—let them be never so orthodox—who would be as cruel to any of their children as they imagine their God will be to some of his.

Under these circumstances, and bearing in mind the atmosphere in which it was produced, the success of the play was remarkable. The attacks simply drew crowded houses, and a "degenerate" Irish audience called the author before the curtain again and again. In fact, the "row" over, *The Countess Cathleen* has helped to make the Irish Literary Theatre an assured success. And if it produces work in any way near the level of Mr. Yates's poem, or *The Heather Field* of Mr. Martyn, it will be quite an epoch-making institution.

Verily we move—even in holy Ireland.

FREDERICK RYAN.

**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.

\* *Beltaine*, the organ of the Irish Literary Theatre, May, 1899, page 8.

**Heresy in the Pulpit.**

"A COWARD'S CASTLE."

A VERY unusual scene occurred during morning service at Snow Hill Congregational Church, Wolverhampton, yesterday. Owing to the absence in London of the pastor, the pulpit was occupied by the Rev. A. Thompson, secretary of Tettenhall College. He denounced the stoning to death of Achan by Joshua as an act more of an untutored savage than of a man whose mind was supposed to be imbued with religious principles. Proceeding to criticise some other points in Biblical history, he remarked that some of the teachings in the Old Testament were calculated rather to drive the young men of the present day into infidelity than cause them to become good Christians. He had no hesitation in saying he did not believe everything he heard from the pulpit. The pulpit was the "coward's castle," where a man could say what he liked without fear of contradiction from the pews. For some minutes the members of the congregation in different parts of the chapel had been showing signs of uneasiness and evident dissent from the views the preacher was expressing. At length the organist, also named Thompson, standing up in his place in the organ gallery, called out in a loud voice: "Will you be good enough to tell me, sir, whether you agree with seven days' journalism?" The other Mr. Thompson, turning round in some astonishment so as to face his questioner, replied that he did not agree with seven days' journalism. He was very glad the question had been asked, although it was a somewhat unusual course to take to interrupt a preacher in the middle of his sermon. On the other hand, he altogether disagreed with the arguments made use of by some of the religious bodies who had taken up the question. The example set by the organist was quickly followed by other members of the congregation popping up, one after another, putting questions to the preacher on his sermon. Some of these were very hard to answer, and he at length got out of the difficulty by bringing the service to a rather abrupt conclusion. —*Birmingham Daily Mail* (May 15).

**Acid Drops.**

THE *Sunday Mail* is dead, and the proprietor represents its demise as a concession to Christian sentiment. Newsvendors tell a different tale. The paper didn't catch on. It only sold moderately at first, and it steadily declined each subsequent week. This was not on account of the Christian boycott, but on account of the failure to hit the public taste. The *Sunday Telegraph* still continues, and is likely to outlast the storm. We should be much surprised to see its proprietor give way, and we do not observe any falling off in the *Telegraph's* advertisements.

After its "concession" to Christian sentiment, the *Mail* publishes a special Saturday edition, which is sold on Sunday morning. This involves as much Sunday labor as the Sunday edition did. But what does that matter? Both the pious agitation and the *Mail's* "concession" are nothing but humbug.

Cardiff County Council has decided to open the Museum and Art Gallery from two to five on Sunday afternoons; but, as the majority was only sixteen to fourteen, notice to rescind has been given. Of course the people who want to close museums and art galleries on Sundays are the same people who object to Sunday newspapers.

The Bishop of Liverpool says he would "go the whole hog," and not allow public-houses to open at all in England on Sundays. But that is not going the *whole* hog. Sunday closing, to be complete, should apply to churches and chapels. If *spirit* is objectionable, let it be barred altogether.

Mr. W. T. Stead has got another "tip from heaven." Instead of disestablishing the Church, he proposes that its pulpits (and livings) should be open to all good men without theological tests. Ministers should be selected by a Commission, consisting (say) of Cardinal Vaughan, Dr. Martineau, Rabbi Adler, Frederic Harrison, Mr. Balfour, and John Morley. Only the genius of a Stead could excogitate such a colossal joke.

Religious imbecility bursts out in the most astonishing places. Down at Falmouth the passengers saved from the *Paris*, or rather those of them who were at the Falmouth Hotel, were addressed by a Philadelphia gentleman, who said they "were filled with gratitude to a kind Providence that stilled the treacherous waters of the Channel in the hour of their recent peril." This gentleman did not explain why Providence stilled the waters for them, while other people were so often allowed to drown in the angry waves. Nor

did he explain why Providence, instead of dealing with the whole Channel weather, had not turned the *Paris* away from the rocks and saved her altogether. That would have been less trouble and better sense.

The *Daily News*, in a leading article, says that the passengers and crew of the *Paris* were all saved "fortunately, we might even say miraculously." The writer of those words knew there was no miracle in the affair, unless it was the presence of the ship at all in that dangerous place, so many miles out of her proper course.

A young man jumped in front of the "Zula" express at Leamington, and placed his right hand on the metals. He was taken to the hospital in a state of collapse. He had told his mother that he would have to get rid of his hand to save his soul, having read in the Bible, "if thy right hand offend thee cut it off." It is very dangerous to take the Bible seriously and follow it honestly.

"No chance for a lost soul." This was the last cry of Mary Wilcock, aged forty, who drowned herself in the Brownhill reservoir, at Colne. We presume this illustrates the consolations of religion.

While the Czar's Love Feast is on at the Hague the fugitive Armenians are being conducted across the Turkish frontier and pushed back into the hands of murderers and ravishers. "It cannot be denied," says the Odessa correspondent of the *Daily News*, "that Russia shows an extraordinary want of humanity in driving these wretched and destitute outcasts, grievously against their will, back into their former misery."

England has many faults, but let us give her credit for being the grand and generous home of exiles. She has never thrust back refugees from tyranny into the bloody murder-pits from which they escaped. She has held her flag over them, and they have felt safe under its folds. Lord Palmerston's famous message to the Sultan about giving up Kossuth to the Austrians, and Carlyle's letter about spying into Mazzini's correspondence, express the feelings of most Englishmen on this subject.

James Thomson ("B.V."), the poet, told us many years ago the story of a German refugee who became bandmaster to an English regiment. He fled from Germany after '48, and walked painfully across France. Every time he showed his passport he was in mortal terror. They detected him in Paris, took him to Calais, and put him on board a boat going to Dover. When the passengers went off the boat at Dover he stopped on board. They asked him why he did not go ashore, and he said he was waiting for his passport to be examined. When they told him there were no passports in England, he threw up his hands, crying "My God, my God, is there such a country!" and wept like a child.

The *Beverley Echo* reports the case of Ethel Burgess, aged twelve, who was charged before the Mayor with stealing. She admitted attending Sunday-school, and Mr. Mills, the magistrate's clerk, uttered some nonsense about education and "all that stuff" doing very little good. But a writer in the *Eastern Morning News*, signing himself "Donovan," points out that Ethel Burgess had religious teaching in the day-school as well as in the Sunday-school. "Our little ones," he says, "are warned against murder, the worship of graven images, coveting their neighbors' wives, and sundry other crimes which they would not dream of committing, but they are not taught the imperativeness of right conduct and the beauty of the good life."

The righteous were always persecuted. Horace Sandys, of Liverpool, dealer in earthenware and sidesman at St. Catherine's Church, has been ordered to pay £25 to Emily Riley as damages for breach of promise. She was his housekeeper, and he seduced her under promise of marriage. When her brother-in-law waited on him about the matter, after the birth of a child, he declined all discussion because it was Sunday.

The Anti-Semitic Town Council of Vienna is bent on building churches and pulling down schools. The Socialist workmen protest against ratepayers having to pay for places of worship in which they have no interest, and charge the Council with neglecting the welfare of the school children.

One thing befalleth the Christian and the Secularist, and, if anything, the Christian gets the worst of it. "Providence" permitted a sad accident to occur in the Primitive Methodist Chapel, Castleford. Owing to the collapse of a gallery, eighty children were thrown into a heap, and several of them seriously injured. Fortunately the pulpit broke the fall of the

gallery, or the consequences would have been much worse. Even a pulpit is useful sometimes.

Canon Wilberforce is at it again. Writing to the Rev. Thomas Alin, he hopes God will send him forth to "vindicate his character against the slander of Atheists." Canon Wilberforce had better deal with the "slander" of the Bible first. It would be difficult to libel God worse than he is libelled in the "blessed book."

The plague has broken out amongst Greeks at Alexandria. It is believed that the infection was conveyed by pilgrims from Mecca who escaped the quarantine. Allah is like Jehovah in one thing. He never checks the dirtiness of his pilgrims.

According to the *Daily Mail*, six million copies have been issued of Sheldon's *What would Jesus Do?* We wish half the six million readers—if there are so many—would read out criticism of it in the *Freethinker*.

A warrant is out for the arrest of John Thomas, of Taunton, who is charged with stealing £500 from the Somerset Finance Company, of which he was acting secretary. The missing man was a regular attendant at St. James's Church, and at one time superintendent of the Sunday-school.

Two cricket teams got into collision at Bath over a dispute as to whether a player was out or not. Stumps were drawn and used as weapons, and a doctor had to be requisitioned for the wounded. Each side was captained by a clergyman.

An Irish terrier entered Windsor Congregational Church on Sunday, made his way upstairs, and took possession of a vacant seat in the choir. It behaved itself admirably until a certain stage of the sermon was reached, when it gave a loud bark and hurriedly left the building. How many worshippers would envy the freedom of that dog! How many of them would like to be able to get up, when the sermon became intolerable, and go home.

Russians don't forget their piety even when they are drunk. According to the *Church Gazette*, however far gone they are, they are sure to make the sign of the cross on passing a church or a shrine.

Mr. H. C. Frick, head of the new American Steel Trust, is one of the leading representatives of capitalism. No doubt he hopes to die worth one or two hundred million dollars. After that he probably hopes to creep through the needle's eye. At any rate, he seems to have religious leanings. He recently paid a hundred thousand dollars for a picture of "Christ Breaking Bread."

What a ridiculous thing is duelling in France! Camille Mendès and George Vanor go to see Sarah Bernhardt play Hamlet. In the course of the evening they have a discussion as to Hamlet's physical proportions. One says he was fat, the other says he was lean, and from words they get to blows. The next stage of the discussion is a duel, in which Camille Mendès is seriously wounded in the stomach. Fancy going to such extremities over the *physique* of an imaginary character! No wonder the Dreyfus affair has caused such a convulsion in such a country. The French have splendid qualities, but in some things they act like quick-tempered children.

A London Salvationist, named Richard Ballard, diversified his climbing to heaven by trying to climb the cliff at Beachy Head, with the result that he fell and was killed on the rocks below. Perhaps, after all, he fancied it a short cut to his ultimate destination.

## Obituary.

THE cause of Freethought has lost a consistent advocate in the death of Mr. Thomas Woodcock, of Sheffield, who died on May 10, in his seventy-eighth year. Early in life he held the office of secretary of the Sheffield Young Men's Christian Association. In 1861 he was elected to the Town Council, a position which he held for twenty-one years; and he doubtless might have retained it till death but for the fact that with his conscience was stronger than policy, and the principles of Secularism of such importance that he allowed his opinion to become more generally known by accepting the office of President of the Sheffield Secular Society, which position he held for a number of years—indeed, so long as his health permitted. His opinions and his interest in the cause remained to the last. He was a man of kindly disposition and of high moral character; in this the most envious bigot could find no flaw; the word "infidel" was the only missile to be hurled against him.—W. A. LILL.

**Mr. Foote's Engagements.**

Sunday, May 28, Athenæum Hall, Tottenham Court-road : 7.30, Robespierre and His Religion."

**To Correspondents.**

Mr. CHARLES WATTS'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—All communications for Mr. Charles Watts should be sent to him at 24 Carminia-road, Balham, S.W. If a reply is required, a stamped and addressed envelope must be enclosed.

T. SHORE.—Hope to use it. Thanks.  
J. F. JORDAN.—It is not in our May 7 number. You must have mistaken the date. Give us the precise reference, and we will answer your question.

G. V. HUNT.—Under consideration.  
W. B. THOMPSON.—We noticed the Sunday School anniversary last week. Pleased to see it was reported in the local press. We note your statement that Mr. Elderkin's lecture at New Brompton gave pleasure to the audience, and that you think he will make a valuable addition to the platform. Thanks for all your good wishes.

W. P. BALL.—Your batches of cuttings are always welcome.  
PERCY WARD.—Many thanks.

A. E. E.—Sorry we confounded the Rev. Thomas Waugh with the Rev. Benjamin Waugh. We are obliged to you for pointing out the blunder.

CASTOR.—We will deal with the Rev. A. Thompson next week.  
E. G. BAYFORD.—We are obliged to you for the Paine reference, Conway's edition of *Rights of Man*, vol. ii., p. 472, or Bonner's edition, p. 236—"My country is the world, and my religion is to do good." We still think, however, that the same passage, in a somewhat amplified form, appears in the other work we referred to, and as soon as we have leisure we will make a search.

R. P. EDWARDS.—We hope the Hampstead platform will be well supported.  
SAMUEL HOLMAN asks us to notify Porth Freethinkers that a meeting will be held to-day (May 28), at 6 p.m., at 7 Stanley-place, Cymmer.

P. DICKINSON.—Strauss's *New Life of Jesus* is well worth reading. It is not the *Life of Jesus* that was translated by George Eliot, but a later work altogether, in which the analysis was subordinated to the mythical explanation. Strauss was a very able writer, and his treatment of religion was scientific. Greg's *Creed of Christendom* might be obtained for five or six shillings secondhand.

S. H. SMITH.—We have long thought that Croydon offers a good field for Freethought propaganda, but we cannot promise to do anything there, or arrange for anything to be done, just at present. Our hands are too full already.

H. POTTER.—You will find a special chapter on Inspiration in Mr. Foote's *Book of God*.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Boston Investigator—Crescent—Torch of Reason—Two Worlds—Blue Grass Blade—Der Arme Teufel—Ethical World—Birmingham Daily Mail—New Century—Fred Barry's Journal—Financial Times—Croydon Times—Beverley Echo—Birmingham Daily Post—Isle of Man Times—People's Newspaper—New York Truthseeker—Sydney Bulletin—Free Society.

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

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

The National Secular Society's office is at No. 377 Strand, London, where all letters should be addressed to Miss Vance. It being contrary to Post-Office regulations to announce on the wrapper when the subscription expires, subscribers will receive the number in a colored wrapper when their subscription is over.

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.

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**Sugar Plums.**

Mr. FOOTE lectures this evening (May 28) at the Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, at 7.30, on "Robespierre and His Religion." This is an interesting and important subject, especially in view of Sir Henry Irving's production of Sardou's *Robespierre* at the Lyceum. Mr. Foote will show that it was the Theism of Robespierre, rather than the Atheism of Mirabeau and Danton, that became a sanction for the worst excesses of the French Revolution.

Fair reports of the N.S.S. Annual Conference appeared in

the Birmingham *Daily Mail* and *Daily Gazette*, and a longer one in the *Daily Post*, which notes the large attendance at the evening public meeting.

Colonel Ingersoll delivered his Shakespeare lecture in the Boston Theatre on the last Sunday in April. The following is an extract from a report which appeared in the *Morning Globe*:—"The bits of reading selected here and there from Shakespeare's plays, both comic and tragic, were one of the chief enjoyments of the evening, for they were given without bombast or affectation, and with that modesty of nature and delicacy of feeling that Shakespeare himself declared indispensable to the genuine artist. They made one feel that, in making a great orator and lawyer of Ingersoll, fate deprived the world of perhaps just as great an actor."

Colonel Ingersoll has just written the following letter to Mr. Foote, dated New York, May 8:—"My Dear Mr. Foote, —I have read with great pleasure your *Book of God*. You have shown with perfect clearness the absurdity of Dean Farrar's position. As a matter of fact, there is no middle ground. The Bible is inspired or it is not. If it is inspired, it is all true. It is foolish to pick out the falsehoods and mistakes, and then say that all the rest is inspired. The man who does the picking ought to be inspired. I think that you have shown that the 'blessed book' was written by barbarians, without the help of any god. The truth is that the people are outgrowing the Bible, and the only way to save the Scriptures is to give new meanings to old words, throw away the most idiotic miracles, and call the cruelties interpolations. I hope that you are well and happy. I congratulate you on your book. It will do great good, because it is filled with the best of sense expressed with force and beauty.—Yours always, R. G. INGERSOLL."

Editor Moore, of the *Blue Grass Blade*, who was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, will be liberated on July 8. President McKinley has commuted his sentence to one of six months, in response to strong petitions from Lexington and other cities. We hope Editor Moore will remain at large for the rest of his life.

The *Croydon Times* is publishing a correspondence on the question, "Has Christianity Failed?" We note a good letter on the Freethought side by Sydney H. Smith. Local Freethinkers, who can wield the pen decently, should take advantage of this opportunity.

The members of the National Secular Society had an amusing discussion yesterday on Sunday-schools. It arose on a proposition concerning the establishment of secular schools of a recreative character. At Manchester, it was said, the children are taught music, biography, and fairy tales! What will the average parson say to Hans Andersen or Grimm superseding the catechism? Although the motion provoked opposition on the ground of the children being "rammed with mentality," it found favor with a large majority, and the parish Sunday-schools may ere long find formidable rivals in the musical and literary attractions of the secular schools. "Pleasant Sunday afternoons" will have a new flavor.—*Birmingham Daily Mail*.

The New York *Truthseeker* publishes an article by Colonel Ingersoll on the Governor of New Hampshire's Fast Day Proclamation. We shall reproduce it in next week's *Freethinker*. Our American contemporary also reprints our paragraphs on Mr. Watts's arrival in England, and his own first words to our readers.

Mr. George Anderson, whose name is known to all our readers, or should be, was asked some time ago by a minister of the Church in Scotland for a subscription towards improving his temple of worship. Mr. Anderson did not send a subscription for that object, but he favored the reverend gentleman with a statement of his Freethought views, and forwarded some scientific books for use in the minister's schools. This led to a longish correspondence, which Mr. Anderson has had printed, after editing by Mrs. Watts, under the title of *Christianity and Agnosticism*, the whole making a very neat little sixpenny volume. Mr. Anderson's share of the correspondence is vigorous and pointed, with many strong arguments and apt illustrations. He is always good-natured, but all the same, intellectually speaking, he worries the man of God with all the pertinacity of a Scotch terrier. The clergyman's letters—fortunately his name is withheld—are very pious and very illogical. His prevailing mood is a prayerful one for Mr. Anderson's conversion, which it will take more than prayer to bring about. Of course there is always a certain interest in a correspondence of this kind, especially when not originally intended for publication; and we believe this little volume would do much good if placed in the hands of people who are already a little shaken in their orthodoxy.

## National Secular Society's Annual Conference.

TOWN HALL, BIRMINGHAM.

MORNING SITTING.

THERE WAS AN excellent muster, many individual members being present, amongst whom were noticed Mr. Thwaites, Stockton-on-Tees; J. Sunderland, Bradford; Mrs. Spiers, Glasgow; Mr. J. Greevz Fisher, Leeds; Messrs. Williams and Perkins, Aberdare. Mrs. G. W. Foote, Mrs. C. Watts, and Mrs. Ridgway were also present. The Society's Branches were represented as follows:—

Camberwell, F. Cotterill; Barnsley, T. Wombell; Blackburn, J. Umpleby and J. Titherington; Birmingham, Miss L. A. Goyne, J. H. Ridgway, and C. H. Cattell; Bolton, T. Halstead and W. Collins; Bethnal Green, C. Cohen; Chatham, George Hood; Derby, W. H. Whitney and W. H. Fletcher; East London, T. Thurlow; Finsbury, E. Bater, H. Brown, and Mrs. Henderson; Glasgow, J. F. Turnbull; Huddersfield, W. H. Spivey, T. Ollerenshaw, C. E. Hall, and Hugh Hobson; Manchester, Mr. and Mrs. Pegg, J. W. Butterworth, and R. Leek; Netherfield, A. S. Vickers; South Shields, T. Horseman and R. Chapman; West Ham, Mr. and Mrs. E. J. Brewster; West London, Mr. Kohn; Stanningley, W. Kay and J. W. Gott.

At 10.30 the PRESIDENT, who took his seat, supported by Messrs. Watts, Forder, Cohen, and the General Secretary, announced, as a slight innovation in procedure, that Mr. Ridgway desired to address the meeting. This gentleman then arose to heartily welcome, in the name of the Birmingham Branch, of which he had the honor to be President, the delegates and members present, and earnestly hoped the arrangements made for the business and the entertainment of those interested would prove satisfactory. He referred briefly to the recent persecution of the Branch, and had the pleasure of announcing that it had not only increased the enthusiasm of the original members, but had resulted in a large addition to the membership.

The PRESIDENT then formally opened the Conference, and read an apology from Mr. A. B. Moss for his enforced absence. It having been moved and seconded that the minutes of the last Conference be taken as read, the PRESIDENT proceeded to read the Executive's Report, which ran as follows:—

### ANNUAL REPORT, 1898-9.

The National Secular Society's Executive presents this Annual Report to the Conference with cheerfulness, though without exultation. The past year has not been crowded with heroic incidents, but the work has been carried on with steady energy, and in some ways with distinct success.

Since the last Conference two of the Society's vice-presidents have been removed by death. Mr. Edward Truelove was in his ninetieth year, and belonged to a former generation. He was a brave, unselfish man, who had fought in the front of the battle for liberty of publication, and was honored by all who knew him. Professor Büchner, the German scientist, was a man of world-wide fame as a champion of Darwinism and an opponent of Superstition. Hot controversies have raged around his great book on *Force and Matter*. He also had suffered from persecution, but his later years were passed amidst general esteem, for the intelligent world had assimilated a good deal of his once abhorrent teaching.

It is well to state, in this connection, that our Society shared in the effort that was made to provide a little comfort for Mr. Edward Truelove's declining days. The sum of £5 was voted towards the Fund that was raised for the purpose, and all will agree that the money was well expended.

Death very nearly succeeded in removing another of your vice-presidents, Mr. Charles Watts, who was prostrated by a terrible attack of influenza during his visit to America. Happily he escaped with his life, but it will be some time before he is able to resume his work upon our platform. Delegates and members will all be very glad to see him in their midst to-day, and will join the Executive in wishing him a speedy restoration to health and many subsequent years of happiness and usefulness.

As the present Conference meets at Birmingham, attention should be drawn to the trials of the Branch in this city—trials that have been encountered with the greatest energy and courage. Owing no doubt to the very large Sunday meetings held by the Branch, and the general success attending its propaganda, orthodox bigotry was excited against it, and under cover of ridiculous charges, of which no substantiation was attempted, the Branch was deprived of the use of the Bristol-street Board school for a period of twelve months. That was the nominal sentence passed by the School Board, but doubtless it was intended to operate as a life penalty. Fortunately the Branch was able to hire the Circus for a protest meeting, which was addressed by your President; and at that great meeting a resolution condemning the action of the School Board was carried unanimously, except for one solitary dissident, who was unable to find a seconder to his amendment. Since then the Branch, after much vain seeking, has

found another meeting-place, which has frequently been crowded by enthusiastic audiences.

Much orthodox denunciation was aroused by the title of an address by a local lecturer—"Did God Make Man, or Did Man Make God?" It was described as blasphemous and insulting, and the placard announcing it as a desecration of the outer wall of the Board school where it was displayed. These angry bigots did not know that just the same title had been used by Dr. J. P. D. John, President of De Pauw University, on the other side of the Atlantic, in replying to Colonel Ingersoll's lecture to the members and friends of the Church Militant at Chicago in April, 1896. Dr. John's placard was crowded with representative Christians, not one of whom seems to have been offended by his title, which only became offensive when it was employed by a Freethinker. So much for one of the most contemptible features of the late agitation against the Secularists in Birmingham.

Another attack upon Secularism was made at Liverpool on the occasion of your President's last visit to that city. The police intimidated the proprietor of the Alexandra Hall. They threatened him with the loss of his license if he allowed the lectures to be delivered with a charge for admission. However, the Branch kept possession for the day, and went through with its program; although it was afterwards obliged to conform to the new conditions imposed by the proprietor at the instigation of the police. It is a pity that the guardians of the peace in such a city as Liverpool, so famous for drunkenness, prostitution, and other social evils, have time on their hands for the persecution of respectable citizens.

At West Ham a fierce battle has been fought around the *Freethinker*. The bigots began in a small way, as they did at Birmingham, by letters in the local press, demanding the exclusion of the *Freethinker* from the Free Library. Then the matter was taken up on the Town Council by a well-known Christian fanatic. Finally, the Council was approached by a deputation from all the Churches in West Ham; Catholics, Churchmen, and Dissenters finding it once an object on which they agreed. When the vote was taken after the speeches by members of this deputation, it was found that the majority of the Council was in favor of Freethought journals lying upon the reading-room tables like other organs of opinion. A proposal was then made and accepted that the borough should be polled upon the question. This afforded the opportunity of appealing to the ratepayers. Accordingly a great meeting was held in the Stratford Town Hall, at which the editor of the *Freethinker* was received with enthusiasm, and a resolution in favor of fair-play was carried by an overwhelming majority. But the idea of the poll being dropped, as possibly illegal and certainly expensive, and the matter arising again in the Town Council, it was decided that the *Freethinker* should be kept in the Free Library, but placed behind a screen, and only given out to persons who applied for it in writing. This unfortunate and absurd anti-climax was due to the desertion of their principles by some of the Labor members, including Mr. Will Thomas, who aspires to represent the division in the next parliament. Thanks are deserved, however, by the majority of the Labor members who stood firm, and declined to be led into an act of injustice.

One result of the West Ham agitation is the establishment of a Branch of our Society there, which is carrying on vigorous and successful open-air propaganda on Sunday evenings. A new Branch has also been formed at Battersea, chiefly through the labors of Messrs. Heaford and Edwards, and open-air lectures are likewise carried on in that populous district.

During the summer a number of Freethought Demonstrations were organised by your President in London, with the assistance of your secretary, Miss Vance, and the help of Messrs. Watts, Cohen, Moss, Heaford, and Snell as speakers. Mr. Wilson kindly provided a brake and a pair of horses on each occasion. Huge crowds were addressed in Victoria Park, Regent's Park, Finsbury Park, Hyde Park, and Clerkenwell and Peckham Rye. This effort was so successful that the Executive will repeat it during the approaching summer on its own responsibility.

A pleasant feature of the Executive's work was a Children's Excursion; a large number of young folk spending a happy day in the country, with enough of their elders to walk off their little highnesses.

Much good work has been done by some of the Branches, notably at Glasgow, Motherwell, Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham. Wherever the Branches put their energy into the cause they make progress, even in spite of the most serious difficulties. Unfortunately there are not enough special lecturers at present to fill all the platforms that should be maintained in the provinces. Mr. Cohen has been particularly active in the North, and has reaped a golden opinions. Mr. Percy Ward has also lectured in several places with "great acceptance," as they say in religious circles. Some towns have also been visited lately by Joseph McCabe, who has come out from the protection of the Catholic Church to fight under the banner of Freethought.

The question of lecturers is of course dependent on the question of finance. This is a subject that will be dealt with presently. Meanwhile the Branches should be urged to

utilise the services of lecturers who happen to be in their district. It is a pity that a propagandist who has left home for the lecture field should be unoccupied for a single evening.

The necessity should also be urged upon the Branches of making the two annual collections which are stipulated in the Society's constitution—one for the Benevolent Fund, and one for the General Fund. Were this done with regularity, it would considerably improve the Society's financial condition. The Manchester Branch, which is a pattern for others in this respect, takes advantage of the President's visit, or that of some other well-known lecturer, and its collections generally realise about £3 each. Similar collections by twenty other Branches would have saved us from the deficit which figures in this year's balance-sheet.

Before attacking the general financial question, however, there are two matters calling for attention. The first is that of the Free Press Defence Committee, which was formed to resist the attack upon free publication involved in the prosecution of a sociological work by Dr. Havelock Ellis. The principle at stake was one that this Society was bound to support. The Executive subscribed to the Defence Fund, and the President was a very active member of the Committee. Service was also rendered by Messrs. Watts and Heaford at the public meetings in London. Unfortunately, the defence collapsed through the final weakness of Mr. George Bedborough, who quailed at the thought of imprisonment as the day of his trial approached, and made a disgraceful arrangement with the prosecution. His plea of guilty saved him from all danger, but the cause of free publication was betrayed, and the Committee were left helpless in face of a compromise which rendered all their efforts abortive.

The second matter is that of the Moral Instruction League, to which our Society was affiliated. During the past year the Executive has been estranged by the policy of that League. It is conducted too much in the interest of the Ethical Societies. It is also committed to a position which does not command the sympathy of the majority of Secularists. By pronouncing in favor of the retention of the Bible as a book to be used by Board School teachers for moral instruction, it has doubtless conciliated some supporters, but it has alienated many others whose adherence might have been more valuable. The Bible was placed in the schools for religious reasons, it is kept there for religious reasons, and as long as it is kept there the religionists are perfectly satisfied that it will serve their turn in the education of the nation's children. The Bible, indeed, is a book of religion, and its retention in the public schools is opposed to the principle of secular education.

The Executive now wishes to draw serious attention to the question of finance. The deficit in the balance-sheet shows that the Society must increase its income or reduce its expenditure. It ought not to be difficult to do the former. Certainly the latter should be a secondary alternative. It has already been pointed out that there would have been no deficit if the Branches throughout the country had made their annual collections for the central fund. But as the Executive has no means of enforcing this clause of the Society's constitution, it becomes necessary to look in other directions.

Two years ago, at the Leicester Conference, our Treasurer, Mr. S. Hartmann, proposed a financial scheme, towards which he himself promised (and paid) a donation of £50 for the first year. That scheme was bold and statesmanlike, but was apparently designed on too large a scale for the existing conditions of our movement. Not through any fault of Mr. Hartmann's, or of any other officer or member of the Executive, that scheme has proved a failure. It was thought that if the President kept more in the background, and the Society's affairs were placed upon a more democratic basis, grumbling and detraction would cease, and all who had expressed discontent would rally to the Society's support under the new régime. That expectation, however, has not been realised. The discontent was purely critical, and had no positive value. The Executive is therefore of opinion that it will be best to revert to the older policy. It has been proved that the President's initiative is still indispensable. He and his immediate platform colleagues are in touch with the whole party, in a way which is impossible to members who are confined to London. On the other hand, the Executive sitting in London, and meeting the President in business conference at least every month, is a guarantee that the Society's business will not be carried on in disregard of the representative principle, or of the general ideas and sentiments of the party. At any rate, it has been demonstrated that the affairs of a Society so scattered, and with such precarious resources, cannot be conducted successfully without a large element of personality. Other principles of government must wait until the Society is much larger, much better knit, and much more certain of an adequate income.

With regard to the immediate future, it is possible that something may accrue from Motion xv. on the Conference Agenda. Moreover, in the course of time benefit will arise from the new Secular Incorporation, which is yet in its infancy.

The Executive does not wish to convey the idea that the financial condition of the Society is alarming. Deficits have occurred before, and have been cleared off—as this one will be if members do their duty in the ensuing year.

This report must not close without a reference to the probable visit to England of Mr. Joseph Symes, one of the Society's vice-presidents who has been gallantly upholding the Freethought flag at Melbourne for the last sixteen years. No doubt, the motion on the Agenda with reference to Mr. Symes's intended visit will be carried with acclamation. The date of Colonel Ingersoll's visit to England is still unfixed. Mr. Watts obtained a renewal of his promise to come over this year. We cannot, and would not, dictate to him; but we venture to express a hope—which will be conveyed to him from this Conference—that he will not be compelled to disappoint our expectations. Myriads of Freethinkers wish to see and hear him, and his visit will be a red-letter episode in the history of English Freethought.

The Report was unanimously adopted, upon the motion of Mr. W. H. SNEY (Huddersfield), seconded by Mr. T. THURLOW (East London).

The Financial Report was then read, and some discussion ensued upon the deficit. Mr. CHARLES WATTS desired to hear from the delegates present some suggestion of practical work which would enable the Executive to wipe out the present deficit. It was most unfortunate that Mr. Hartmann's Scheme had failed, and, at the suggestion of Mr. W. Heaford, he desired to place a resolution before the meeting: "That the Treasurer's Scheme be dropped, and that the President be asked to resume his old Lecture Scheme and work it on his own responsibility."

Mr. G. HOON (Chatham) thought the Society had no right to depend upon schemes. If members' subscriptions were not large enough to support the Society, they should be increased. Branches should be at once asked to adopt such methods as lie in their power to raise funds.

The PRESIDENT said the Society had never depended upon Branches for the main portion of its income. Branches have usually enough to do to pay their own way locally. The principal financial resources were drawn from Secularists in all parts of the country, who seldom or ever were members of Branches or attended Conferences.

Mr. THURLOW agreed that the chief support was derived from those who did not attend lectures, and was willing to move Mr. Heaford's resolution. He desired to see the Society revert to the President's Lecture Scheme. Mr. Foote's election year by year proved he had the entire confidence of the party, and it was desirable that all appeals for funds should emanate from him.

Mr. FOOTE said he did not feel inclined at this stage to resume the responsibility of the previous Lecture Scheme. It involved much responsibility, odium, and slander which he had not found agreeable. If re-elected, he might be willing to resume the presidential initiative he had exercised prior to Mr. Hartmann's Scheme, to which he had rendered the most loyal support. He had not interfered in any way with the Committee, and only attended its meetings when requested to do so. What had happened? Nothing, except the proof that it was difficult to raise money unless definitely asked for by some person well known in the party. Appeals in the *Freethinker* had been fruitful, and he was willing to pledge himself to endeavor to obtain funds from one end of the country to the other.

Mr. C. PEGG thought Mr. Heaford's suggestion was somewhat sprung upon the Conference. During Mr. Bradlaugh's presidency special appeals had invariably been responded to—general appeals never. He supported Mr. Thurlow's suggestion, although it was not fair that Mr. Foote's reputation should suffer when he endeavored to obtain funds for the party. After discussion, the resolution suggested by Mr. Heaford was withdrawn, those present being content with Mr. Foote's general pledge.

Mr. WITNEY (Derby) suggested that one way to economise would be to close the office.

The PRESIDENT pointed out that that matter would be for the new Executive to consider; some local habitation was absolutely necessary.

Mr. PEGG suggested that future balance-sheets should be in the hands of the Branch secretaries at least two weeks prior to the Conference, and the Secretary was instructed to prepare the next balance-sheet in March.

The Financial Report was then adopted.

The next business being the election of President, Mr. Foote vacated the chair in favor of Mr. Watts, who called upon the Birmingham and Finsbury Branches to move the re-election of Mr. Foote.

Mr. RIDGWAY, in moving the resolution, said the great point about Mr. Foote was that he could not only bear prosecution, but could meet and fight persecution.

Mr. BATES (Finsbury Branch) seconded the motion.

Mr. C. PEGG gave the nomination his hearty approval, and declared that the Manchester Branch were amongst the steadiest supporters Mr. Foote had in the country.

Mr. HOON also supported the resolution, and was particularly glad to have heard Mr. Foote's explanation of his attitude re Mr. Hartmann's Scheme.

Mr. SUNDERLAND further supported the nomination, and humorously announced the important fact that "Yorkshire was satisfied" Mr. Foote was the only possible President.

On the motion being put to the meeting, it was carried unanimously and with applause, and Mr. Watts congratulated Mr. Foote upon his "good fortune."

Mr. FOOTE, upon resuming the chair, remarked that he was not sure it was correct to say it was "good fortune." He, however, sincerely appreciated the honor. The N.S.S. had little to give but its confidence and affection; all he asked was a little patience and consideration.

The following were then proposed and re-elected as Vice-Presidents, being nominated by the Executive: Dr. T. R. Allinson, George Anderson, E. Bater, Annie Brown, C. Cohen, W. W. Collins, J. F. Dewar, R. Forder, J. Grange, T. Gorniot, S. Hartmann, W. Heaford, A. B. Moss, S. M. Peacock, C. Pegg, W. Pratt, E. W. Quay, V. Roger, J. H. Ridgway, T. Robertson, F. Schaller, H. J. Stace, Joseph Symes, S. R. Thompson, J. Umpleby, E. M. Vance, G. J. Warren, Charles Watts, with the addition of Mr. James Neate (London).

Mr. CATTELL (Birmingham) then proposed Mr. James Partridge (Secretary Birmingham Branch), and testified to his twenty years of work for the movement.

Mr. R. FORDER also supported the motion, and Mr. FOOTE said he knew no worker for whom he had a greater respect than for Mr. Partridge, who was then elected unanimously.

Mr. H. BROWN (Finsbury) moved the suspension of the Standing Orders to permit the name of Mr. W. H. Spivey, of Huddersfield, to be added to the list.

This was supported by Messrs. FORDER and SUNDERLAND, and by Mr. FOOTE, who characterised Mr. Spivey as one of the grandest of Freethinkers.

After a unanimous election, the Standing Orders were again suspended to permit the name of Mr. T. Thurlow to be proposed by Mr. R. FORDER, which was seconded by Mr. J. W. GOTT (Stanningley), and carried.

Mr. R. FORDER was re-elected as Hon. Secretary, and Mr. Hartmann as Treasurer, and Messrs. W. B. Thompson and H. Brown as Auditors.

On behalf of the Executive the PRESIDENT then moved the two following resolutions: "That this Conference expresses its high admiration for the character of the late Mr. Edward Truelove, and for his services to the cause of free discussion and publication." "That this meeting expresses its sense of the great loss that the intellectual world has sustained in the death of Professor Büchner, one of the foremost champions of science against superstition."

These were carried unanimously.

The next item was a "statement *re* the Secular Society, Limited," by Mr. G. W. FOOTE. At the last Conference he stated that he had no doubt the Memorandum and Articles of Association would be passed at Somerset House. A few days after that Conference he obtained the Certificate of Incorporation. The Secular party had now a legal instrument which gave security to its funds and a guarantee to donors and testators that their gifts and legacies would be devoted to their intended objects. The number of members enrolled already was approaching two hundred, and no doubt this number would be considerably increased during the next twelve months. Already, too, various persons had put the Society in their wills for various legacies, amounting in the aggregate to several thousands of pounds (applause). No one, of course, wanted to hasten the death of any testator; but when death arrived, in the natural course of things, the Society would profit—that is to say, the Secular cause would profit; and in the course of time, by this means, it would become possible to fight more effectually that Christian superstition which subsisted so largely on dead men's money (applause).

Mr. PEGG (Manchester) inquired if a sum of money intended for a certain Branch could be left to the Secular Society, Limited, with that proviso?

The PRESIDENT replied in the affirmative. Subject to the objects being in agreement with those of the S.S. Limited, the donor would simply constitute the Board of Directors trustees to see the particular purpose carried out.

The morning sitting then adjourned for lunch.

#### AFTERNOON SITTING.

Upon reassembling, Mr. TITHERINGTON moved on behalf of the Blackburn Branch: "That the Conference strongly impress upon the Branches the importance of establishing Sunday-schools wherever possible." He thought the question did not receive the attention it demanded from the Secular party. It was, he contended, possible for Secular Sunday-schools to be successfully conducted, and referred to Chatham and Failsworth.

Miss GOYNE (Birmingham Branch) seconded. Children who learned at orthodox Sunday-schools had to unlearn in after years, with a large amount of pain. If rational enjoyment were given to the younger children, and popular science lectures to the elder scholars, all would grow up Secularists, and thus avoid the painful ordeal many of those present had gone through.

Mr. WATTS expressed himself as being entirely opposed to Sunday-schools. Children should be allowed to go free on Sundays, and enjoy the pure air. Secular Sunday-schools were merely an imitation of religious principles. He had opposed Sunday-schools for forty years.

Mr. PEGG (Manchester) supported the resolution, and

suggested a recreative Sunday class—history, music, and dancing might be taught. He hoped to see the resolution carried, and advised parents to keep their children clear of the taint.

Mr. BATER supported the resolution.

Mr. HOOD also supported the resolution, and instanced Chatham, where the children brought their companions, and parents became interested; no Branch was complete without its Sunday-school.

Mrs. PEGG (Manchester) was in favor of the motion, and suggested a class for mothers.

Miss VANCE expressed her willingness to devote her Sundays to this object. It was the duty of Secularists to withdraw their children from religious instruction, and their negligence in this matter was, in her judgment, most reprehensible. If Mr. Watts had held for forty years the view just enunciated, she personally regretted to find his mind so stagnant.

Mrs. WATTS thought it a matter for the parents; it was their duty to see that dogma was not forced upon an infant brain.

Mr. THURLOW thought it desirable that children should understand a religion which cost the nation so much. Secularism would not be advanced by Sunday-schools.

Messrs. RIDGWAY and TITHERINGTON having been heard, the PRESIDENT thought the matter had been sufficiently discussed. He would take no part in this discussion beyond remarking that his first official connection with the Society was as a teacher in the Secular Sunday-school, and he still looked back upon it as one of his most agreeable experiences.

The resolution was then put and carried.

Mr. FOOTE moved on behalf of the Executive: "That this Conference, being much pleased to hear that Mr. Joseph Symes hopes to visit England shortly, after so many years' absence at the Antipodes, hereby cordially invites him to come as soon as possible, and promises him that everything shall be done on the part of the British Secularists to make his visit pleasant and successful." This was seconded by Mr. Pegg, and carried unanimously.

Mr. FOOTE then moved: "That the Executive be instructed to take steps for the raising of a Twentieth Century Fund in connection with the Secular Movement in this country, in order that Freethought may be the better enabled to counteract the special efforts that are being made by the various Christian Churches; and that the Executive be further instructed to draft and publish a scheme of such a Fund with the least possible delay, so that the money may be collected during the present year." Mr. Foote said there was no harm in imitating the Churches in matters of business. The Churches had been trading for a great many centuries; they were well organised, and they understood how to raise money. In this respect the Secular party might well follow their example. Funds were absolutely indispensable. Oriental religions might be founded in the open air, but in a Western climate, and in a Western state of society, the work had to be carried on in appropriate buildings. Rent had to be paid, so had printers, bill-posters, advertising, lecturers, and travelling expenses. The Secular party was bound to make a great effort to counteract the special enterprise of the Churches, and this Twentieth Century Fund ought to realise a considerable sum of money, which should give a great impetus to Freethought propaganda.

This was seconded by Mr. SUNDERLAND, and carried unanimously.

Mr. PEGG inquired if Branches would be expected to collect and send to headquarters, or if they might retain their own collections?

The PRESIDENT replied that Branches were always free to make their own rules.

Mr. COHEN rose to move: "That this Conference earnestly hopes that Secularists throughout the country will do their utmost to run and support 'Secular Education' candidates at School Board elections; feeling that this, and this alone, is the most practical way of breaking down the usurped position of Christianity in the educational system of this nation. He felt that the carrying out of this resolution depended upon the success of that previously moved. The Act of 1870, whilst good in many directions, was unfortunately marred by putting into the schools books which never should have been there. The N.S.S. was the only body during the last twenty-nine years which had stood forward for the principle of Secular Education.

Mr. CATTELL supported. Had there been one "Secular Educationist" upon the Birmingham School Board, the Branch would have at least secured justice.

Mr. J. GREEVZ FISHER (Leeds) proposed an amendment that the words "this and this alone" be amended to "is an important one." Mr. Fisher's arguments were ruled by the Chairman as having no bearing upon the point, and the amendment was lost.

Miss GOYNE proposed as an amendment, "That we support Secular candidates who stand for the minimum of religious teaching," and thought it better than supporting purely Secular candidates, when such support would allow the more bigoted section to join the majority, and consequently increase the maximum of religious teaching in schools.

This amendment was also lost.

Mr. FOOTE, upon rising to put the question, said: For

years the Secular Party has been sold on the question of Secular education. What had they gained by supporting "Liberal" or "Progressive" candidates in opposition to Church and Catholic candidates? They had simply helped one set of Christians against another set. Meanwhile the Bible was firmly established in the Board schools, and that was really the be-all and end-all of Christian superstition. It was high time that Secularists combined to fight their own battle. They should run and support "Secular education" candidates whenever possible. In many cases they would succeed; in others they would at least prove that they had to be reckoned with; and in any case they would spread abroad a knowledge of the only just principle of State education.

The business on the Agenda being completed, Mr. PEGG proposed a vote of thanks to the Birmingham Branch, seconded by Mr. KOHN (West London).

Mr. RIDGWAY thanked the delegates in a neat little speech, and the PRESIDENT closed the Conference.

#### THE EVENING MEETING.

A largely-attended public meeting was held in the Town Hall in the evening. It was a pleasure to behold so many people listening to the music and the speeches with the deepest attention, and evidently enjoying themselves from beginning to end. It was a still greater pleasure to note the very considerable proportion of ladies. The proceedings began at a quarter to six. Selections were given by the City Organist, and some capital songs by Mr. J. Matthews, who was much applauded. Mr. A. Scrimshire, a well-known local Shakespearean reader, rendered the speeches of Brutus and Mark Antony from *Julius Caesar*, and retired from the platform amidst loud plaudits. Mr. Foote had a splendid reception on rising, being greeted with round on round of cheers, and his speech was freely punctuated with laughter and applause. Mr. Watts, who had been announced to speak, felt unable to face the exertion; a fact which elicited many marks of sympathy. Mr. Cohen made an excellent speech, full of good matter, and diversified with telling points, which were heartily appreciated. He also was much applauded on resuming his seat. Mr. Forder spoke briefly and with some difficulty, but what he did say was well received. Mr. Percy Ward, who is rapidly improving as a platform speaker, was in good voice, and quite earned the cheers which followed his peroration. Mr. Foote, as chairman, closed the meeting with his benediction. During the evening a good collection was taken up, the nett proceeds of which will go to the Freethinkers' Benevolent Fund.

### Correspondence.

#### THE STORY OF A CONVERT.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I hope you will excuse my occupying your valuable time, but it may be interesting for you to know that two years ago, as I happened to be passing through the Newcastle Temperance Festival, I saw a crowd hooting a Freethought lecturer (Mr. C. Cohen), who was calmly persisting in speaking, in spite of all the annoyance the crowd was causing him. I was very religious at this time, and I heard certain statements made by Mr. Cohen that set me thinking. Although I thoroughly disagreed with nearly everything Mr. Cohen said, yet at the same time I couldn't help admiring his moral courage in calmly stating his convictions, knowing that they would be antagonistic to such a large majority of his hearers. I had up to this time been pretty nearly fed on religion. All the good that I had been taught had been so mixed up with religion that I had the impression that goodness without religion was an utter impossibility. After hearing Mr. Cohen I commenced to read and think, and, after one and a half year's rather hard study, I found that I had been living in a fool's paradise. It took a long time before I could see that religion, instead of making society better, made it worse. I am only a young man, twenty years, but am trying as far as lies in my power to help the work of Freethought. Scepticism is more prevalent inside the Christian Church than you might think. In three months ago, that out of the twenty members fourteen believed in Evolution, four doubted the Divinity of Christ, two doubted the existence of God, and NONE believed in the liberal inspiration of the Bible. They dare not openly express their convictions, and most go simply because the leaving of the Sunday-school would distress their parents and make things unpleasant generally. I have not had the pleasure of hearing you lecture yet, but I hope that I shall be able to see you at Tyneside soon. I have walked from Newcastle to Stanley to hear Mr. Cohen, and have always been pleased with the lectures. I enjoy my *Freethinker* very much, and do all I possibly can to increase its circulation. I am sorry to hear such a lot of awful lies going about Freethought lecturers. A story goes about that while you were lecturing at Liverpool a pitman local preacher opposed you, and his arguments were so unanswerable that in the midst of his

speech you arose, and had to call upon your supporters to sing "Britons Never Shall be Slaves" to drown his voice. What nonsense!

A member of the Newcastle Y.M.C.A. said, confidentially, that he never enjoyed anyone's writings as much as those of Ingersoll's, but the man Ingersoll was shockingly immoral; in fact, he said that he had heard from good authority (whoever that was) that Ingersoll's left ear had a piece bitten out whilst in a house of ill-fame in New York, and, further, that a Freethought lecturer had admitted the truth of this on Newcastle Quay side. Mr. C. Cohen is said to have a particular liking for other men's wives, and so on, till the hearing of these stories sickens you. I heard Mr. Joseph McCabe at Gateshead last Sunday, and enjoyed his lectures immensely. I do hope that you will be able to come to Newcastle soon. A minister I know, that always has a lot to say against you, I hope to be able to persuade to come, and if he does no doubt he will offer a little opposition. I would very much like a debate to come off between yourself and some minister of note, as a debate gives the chance of lots of people having an excuse for attending a Freethought meeting. You might be surprised to hear that I know plenty of young fellows whose sympathy lies with the Freethought Party, and yet to be seen attending your lectures would probably cost some of them their employment—at all events, a large amount of annoyance; and a debate, when looked at from this standpoint, is very desirable. I am very sorry to say that I am afraid that to boldly announce myself a Freethinker at present would not be productive of much good. My parents are very religious, and I do not think that the time is yet ripe to tell them so. It is the knowledge of the sorrow it will cause them, and this alone, that prevents me. All other considerations I would not mind. Hoping that I have not occupied too much of your valuable time, and heartily appreciating your efforts on behalf of Freethought,

W. W.

#### REPLY TO MR. THURLOW.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—It seems to me there are some Secularists who would (*à la* Coulson Kernahan) have us all assemble somewhere, say Hampstead Heath, and henceforth and for ever renounce and discard all those words associated with religion, such as "soul," "faith," "worship," "holy," "righteousness," "sacred," "conscience," etc.—by one fell swoop have them expunged from all dictionaries and minds, similar to the disowning of the impostor J. C. at Rome, as recorded in *The Child of the Wise Man of Borneo*. I may be accused of going to extremes in my version of their position, but if we Secularists are not to clothe our ideas in whatever words seem to us expedient we ought to at least invent substitutes. Words fail in finding the equivalent expressed so brief and terse as when we say "The sun rises," so we continue to quote the inaccuracy. And if I said "My mother was a dear old soul," what else could I say better to express the same sentiment? With respect to Mr. Gould's funeral address—some would say sermon—certain words in which Mr. Thurlow dislikes, surely, read with the context, Mr. Thurlow, or even many Christians, cannot fail to understand the purport of Mr. Gould's remarks! How is it Secular lecturers will speak of the *Almighty* dollar, the *God* of respectability, the *Trinity* of £ s. d., the *Divine* Shakespeare, and so on? And even Mr. Cohen will sometimes plagiarize our common enemy in his descriptive articles—viz., "*Missionary Jottings*," "*Spreading the Gospel*"—all I can remember just at present. I am quite aware they are written facetiously, and have been pleased with those playful insinuations anent the Ethical party, making a point of getting my ethical acquaintances to read the same. But I would like to ask Mr. Thurlow one question. Would he presume to take to task Colonel Ingersoll as he has done Mr. Gould, as I hardly know which is the worse sinner for that special crime? I must conclude my remarks by expressing a hope that a profitable discussion may accrue. My standpoint is that new ideas must utilize the prevailing language, which, like everything else, evolves; for, as time proceeds apace, so words lose their old meanings, and fall into line with their new surroundings. I could not quarrel with a Secularist who might possibly wish to call Secularism a "religion," to accentuate, so to speak, the importance of such; and if he were misunderstood by his Christian friends I would not say it was his fault, but rather the poverty of their brains.

W. S. CLOGG.

#### Faith and Knowledge.

Faith and knowledge belong to two entirely distinct provinces, whose boundaries are constantly changing, and the change always takes place at the expense of the former and not of the latter. There are departments which but a hundred years or so ago were wholly under the sway of religious faith, and which at this day are occupied by science; and as time goes on this will continue to be the case to an ever-increasing extent.—*Ludwig Büchner*.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

[Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday, and be marked "Lecture Notice," if not sent on post-card.]

## LONDON.

THE ATHENÆUM HALL (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Robespierre and His Religion."  
BRADLAUGH CLUB AND INSTITUTE (36 Newington Green-road, Ball's Pond): 8.30, Bohemian Comedy Co. in "Uncle."  
EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (78 Libra-road, Old Ford, E.): 7, W. G. Howard, "The Evolution of Ethics."  
WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall): 11, Stanton Coit, "In His Steps."  
SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Surrey Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road, S.E.): 7, Stanton Coit, "In His Steps."

## OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, E. Pack.  
BROCKWELL PARK (near Herne-hill Gates): 3.15, F. A. Davies; 6.30, F. A. Davies.  
CAMBERWELL (Station-road): 11.30, F. A. Davies.  
EDMONTON (corner of Angel-road): 7, R. P. Edwards.  
HAMMERSMITH (The Grove): 7.15, W. Heaford.  
HAMPSTEAD HEATH (Jack Straw's Castle): 3.15, R. P. Edwards.  
HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): Lectures every week evening at 8. Sunday, at 11.30, W. Heaford.  
KILBURN (corner of Victoria-road): 7.15, W. Ramsey.  
KINGSLAND (Ridley-road): 11.30, C. Cohen.  
MILE END WASTE: 11.30, W. J. Ramsey; 7, S. Jones. May 31, at 8, C. Cohen.  
PECKHAM RYE: 3.15 and 6.15, C. Cohen.  
THE TRIANGLE (Salmon Lane, Limehouse): 11.30, S. Jones. May 30, at 8, W. J. Ramsey.  
S. L. E. S. (Peckham Rye): 11.15, Mr. Rider. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, Miss Zona Vallance.  
VICTORIA PARK (near the Fountain): 3.15, W. Heaford.  
WESTMINSTER (Grosvenor Embankment): 11.30, H. Hunter, "Who is a Christian?"

## COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): J. McCabe—3, "Modern Versions of Ancient Legends"; 7, "Life without God."  
CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school; 7.30, A lecture.  
GREAT YARMOUTH FREETHINKERS' ASSOCIATION (Freethinkers' Hall, bottom of Broad-row): 7, Violin Selections by Professors Elliot and Ray; 7.15, H. Dane.  
LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, Sydney A. Gimson.  
LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, M. L. Bergmann, B.Sc., "Organic Evolution."  
MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): Closed for Summer Season.  
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE (Mr. Foreman's, 1 Grainger-street): 3, Members' meeting.  
SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Willie Dyson, "Sunday Papers: Why Opposition?"  
SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7.30, Conference Delegates' Report.

## Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—May 28, m., Kingsland.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, London, S.E.—May 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.—June 25, Northampton.

R. P. EDWARDS, 52 Bramley-road, Notting-hill.—May 28, m., Clerkenwell; e., Edmonton.

E. PACK, 10 Henstridge-place, Ordnance-road, St. John's Wood.—May 28, m., Battersea Park; a., Regent's Park.

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