

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XIX.—No. 52.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1899.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

God's Mother.—II.

EVIDENTLY all the speaking was left to Gabriel; and, in one sense, we wish this explanation had to be written by him, instead of by us; for the subject is rather scabrous, and we are only impelled to deal with it by a sense of duty. It is a fact that the Catholic Church, and to some extent the High Church, place the most elaborate treatises on the Mother of God, and the Immaculate Conception of Jesus Christ, into the hands of young people—girls as well as lads; and if the poison is disseminated it is necessary to furnish the antidote; nor can it be helped if the antidote is obnoxious as well as the poison, although it must be so in a minor degree, and that only temporarily, since its action and object are remedial.

According to Romish and Ritualistic writers, Mary had to be brought into a proper state of docility and receptivity. "Mary," said the late Dr. Pusey, "was not yet the Mother of God, for the Holy Ghost vouchsafed to await her consent ere working within her chaste womb the Incarnation of the Word." The Month of Mary, a common Catholic work, is still more explicit:

"On the assent of the Virgin to the proposition made to her hung the destinies of the human race. How the angels of God must have paused in breathless expectation of her answer! And when they heard issue from her mouth the words: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done unto me according to thy word'; how the vaults of heaven resounded with the glorious anthem of 'Glory to God on high, and peace to men of good will,' which, on the night of Christ's nativity, re-echoed from the earth! What would have been our condition if Mary had not yielded this ready compliance with God's will? We know every reason to conclude, that man would not have been redeemed. God could, of course, have employed other means; but there is nothing to make us believe that he would have done so. On the contrary, all that we know of the ordinary course of his providence tends to warrant the contrary inference."

Catholic writers have gone to the length of saying that Mary's assent to this mysterious proceeding was necessary, not only because her free-will had to be enlisted, but also because the faithful in after ages might see, as St. Ligouri puts it, that "every grace given to man in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ is conveyed to him by the hands of Mary." Father Saurez expressly declared it to be the general sentiment of the Church that "the intercession of the Mother of God is not only useful, but even necessary to salvation." St. Peter Damain asserted the same thing. "Our salvation," he wrote, "depends on the will of this blessed Virgin." So that it is she, rather than the Pope or St. Peter, who holds the keys of heaven and hell.

Now, suppose that Mary had refused her assent: how awful would have been the fate of the whole human race! None of us would have seen salvation. We should all have gone to hell. And it was a very ticklish situation. So much depended on so little. We assume that the "innermost retreat" of her dwelling was not the kitchen, but her bedroom. She had retired for the night, and was perhaps in an advanced state of *deshabille*—nearly ready to pose for the "altogether." At such a moment, Gabriel's sudden appearance "in human shape" must have been alarming; for it can hardly be supposed that the young lady was accustomed to such visitors. How natural it would have been if she had cried "Mother!" "Joseph!" and alarmed the whole household. In that case, Gabriel would have vanished as he came—probably through the keyhole: the blessed Trinity would

have flown after him; the Incarnation of the Word would have been postponed indefinitely; and thousands of years might have elapsed ere the attempt was renewed. Dear, good Mary! How fortunate that she was quick of intuition and prompt in compliance!

Gabriel departed, and Mary and the Trinity were left alone. What followed is best left to imagination. But the theologians will talk, even when decency suggests silence, and we are bound to follow them, although we shall do so with the greatest circumspection.

Let us first hear the famous Bonaventure; who, by the way, belied his name on this occasion:—

"Although the Person of the Son alone was made man, yet the whole Blessed Trinity took part in His Incarnation, the Father and the Holy Ghost co-operating with the Son in this august mystery. Here, then, be specially attentive, and try to embrace all that passes, as if present at the sacred scene. O what scope may not be afforded for your meditation in that lowly dwelling, where such Personages are assembled, and such unutterable Mysteries accomplished. For though the Holy Trinity be undoubtedly always everywhere present, yet, in this place, on this occasion, you must conceive It present in a more especial way, by reason of the unspeakable work then and there effected."

According to Luke, or the writer of the third Gospel, who ever he was, Mary was "overshadowed" by the Holy Ghost. Now, this is an extraordinary expression. It reminds us of the Greek stories of Leda, or of Correggio's great picture of Jupiter and Io, which produced such an effect upon the mind of the Rev. James Cranbrook, of Edinburgh, one of the pioneers of Rationalism in Scotland. Catholic writers have produced hundreds of pages of indecent speculation on this subject. Some have held that the Holy Ghost took three drops of Mary's heart's blood to make the body of Jesus. At least one divine held that she conceived through the ear. But we cannot, at this time of day, and in a journal like this, penetrate further into this controversy. The holy men who took part in it had no shame or reticence. "They search into the mysteries of generation so profoundly and exactly, and examine them in such a gross and naked manner," said Dr. Fleetwood, Bishop of Ely, more than two hundred years ago, "that even the chastest and most delicate translation of their Latin into English would not fail to wound, or, at least, to disorder, our imagination."

Instead of following these beastly divines into the dirty kennels and pigstyes of their heated imaginations, let us take a specimen of the rapturous, allusive style in which modern Catholics are fond of indulging. The following is extracted from a Month of Mary, written by two French priests, translated into English by a lady, and published with the sanction of Cardinal Wiseman:—

"The Holy Spirit overshadowed her, and formed of the most pure blood of Mary, in her chaste womb, the body of the Man-God. Who can tell all the graces with which the Lord favored her in that blessed moment?..... St. Luke, who only relates what he learnt, either directly or indirectly, from the Blessed Virgin, says not one word of this ineffable mystery, upon which Mary kept a profound silence. She, without doubt, could not have examined it, for such an operation was beyond all words and all conception. It appears, at least, that she could not speak of the ecstasy into which she was rapt in that happy and supreme moment, nor of the heavenly delight which then overwhelmed her soul."

This is very suggestive writing, calculated to raise a flutter in the bosoms of young females, for whom it seems to be specially designed. In the next sentence the authors—whose book, we repeat, is translated by a

lady—tell us of the pious silence maintained by Mary when she had “recovered from her rapture”—which is sailing close to the wind of sensuality.

Well, the child thus mysteriously begotten was God Almighty himself. It seems a shocking blasphemy to say so, but it is the teaching of Christianity, and whoever ventures to disbelieve it is destined to everlasting punishment. “She nourishes God at her breast,” says Bishop Ullathorne in reference to Mary’s suckling her offspring; and it must be equally true that she washed God and changed his napkins, although it sounds a great deal less poetical.

We are informed that the primal curse upon Eve, and through her upon all her daughters, was revoked in the case of Mary, who brought forth her Son (with a capital S) without pain or sorrow. The reason of this was that she escaped the universal taint of original sin. It was discovered by her fanatical devotees, although it was not known to the writers of the New Testament, that Mary also was born in peculiar circumstances. Her father and mother, Joachim and Anne, received her as a kind of gift from heaven. They had no children, and had given up all hope of any, when an angel promised them a daughter, as a son had been promised to Abraham and Sarah. This was in their old age, and their having a child at that time was at least wonderful, if not miraculous. Some writers, indeed, have asserted that Joachim was physically incapable of becoming a father; others that Anne labored under a preternatural impotency. Mary was begotten, however, without “the poison of concupiscence.” Spinellus, the Jesuit, says that her parents were simply “inebriated with spiritual love,” and were “by a special privilege of God” preserved from all carnal pleasure. But this idea was scouted by St. Bernard, who urged that it might as well be said that Mary, like Jesus, was conceived by the Holy Ghost. What the “Immaculists” were trying to do was to get Mary into the world without original sin, which, as the Council of Trent declares, is “transfused by propagation.” But, after all, they could not deny the propagation; they were unable to get rid of Joachim as they had got rid of Joseph; and they were at last obliged to go another way to work. They started an idea which, in the course of several centuries, permeated the whole Catholic Church, and was finally elevated into the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. This dogma was proclaimed by the Pope at St. Peter’s on December 8, 1854, to a vast audience of thirty thousand persons, brought together from all parts of Christendom. Amidst breathless silence, and with his face bathed in tears, whether natural or artificial, the Pope solemnly declared as follows:—

“It is a dogma of faith that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin.”

This was a very clever way out of the difficulty. The knot had no longer to be untied with fumbling fingers, soiled with dabbling in sinister impurities; it was cut once for all with the clean, bright sword of a miracle. All the questionable old speculations about the connubial experiences of Joachim and Anne could be cast aside, or left in the background, as out of harmony with the purer and severer taste of a higher civilisation. Moreover, an end was put to the embarrassing questions of sceptics with regard to the natural side of this theory of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. First, the Christians had a miraculous God’s Mother; next, they had a miraculous God’s Grandmother. But why stop there? Logic demanded a further retrogression. If the world rested on the back of an elephant, and the elephant rested on the back of a tortoise, what did the tortoise rest on? And if Jesus was conceived miraculously, and Mary was conceived miraculously, they were still linked on to the chain of original sin unless Anne was also conceived miraculously. Nay, the mother of Anne would have to be conceived in the same way, and Anne’s grandmother, and Anne’s great-grandmother, and so on up to Mother Eve. But this was more than improbable—it was absolutely impossible. For in the line of Christ’s descent there were four ladies of easy virtue—namely, Tamar, who played the harlot by the roadside, and had a child by her father-in-law; Rahab, the brothel-keeper

of Jericho, to whom the Jewish spies resorted by instinct or inspiration; Ruth, who had a curious night-adventure in a barn; and Bathsheba, who committed adultery with David while her husband was engaged in fighting the king’s battles. Four such ladies as these were enough to destroy the value of any *immaculate* chain, whose strength must depend, of course, not upon its strongest, but upon its weakest links. This was obvious to the astute leaders of the Catholic Church, who therefore propounded a dogma which cut the whole business short at the birth of Mary, by making the miracle one that was wrought upon *her* and not upon her *mother*.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

Christian Controversy.

CONTROVERSY upon Christian topics, if properly conducted, is useful in stimulating thought, in exposing error, and in making truth clearer. In order to achieve such results, disputants should recognise the possibility of their being in error. No one man has the whole truth on his side. The assumption in a debate, by either party, that it is infallible robs controversy of its real value. The pertinency of these remarks has recently been illustrated in a conflict of opinion in Aberdeen.

The facts of the case are these: Last November I made arrangements to deliver a lecture in Aberdeen upon Colonel Ingersoll, and, after the subject had been selected, it was discovered that the local Unitarian minister, the Rev. Alexander Webster, had published a pamphlet entitled *Ingersoll Impugned*. I was asked to notice this production in my lecture, which I readily consented to do. On reading the pamphlet, however, I found that it contained so much debatable matter upon the questions of Agnosticism, Theism, Man, and the Universe, that to reply in my lecture to all that was said upon these points would have prevented me from carrying out the object I had in view—namely, to correct the misrepresentations which had been made in many places in reference to Colonel Ingersoll as a Free-thought exponent. I therefore confined myself to what the rev. gentleman had written in depreciation of the Colonel as a writer and Secular propagandist. Mr. Webster was present at my lecture, and at its close he simply asked a few questions, and announced that he would reply to me in his church on the following Sunday evening. He did so, and he has since published his rejoinder in pamphlet form. It is a curious combination of misrepresentations and evasions, and an exhibition of religious excitement. He appears to have been impressed with the notion that his Unitarian view of religion was the only logical one, and that those who differed from him were foes of the human race. Some idea of the nature of his “Reply” may be formed from reading the following letter which I sent the rev. gentleman:—

24 Carminia Road,
Balham, London, S.W.
Dec. 7, 1899.

To the Rev. A. Webster.

DEAR SIR,—I have carefully read your second pamphlet and regret to find that it is the usual specimen of writings penned under the influence of religious excitement. You complain that I did not fully reply to your printed lecture on Colonel Ingersoll during my recent visit to Aberdeen. But I stated at the commencement of my address that it was not my intention to do so, inasmuch as I agreed with portions of your lecture, and with other portions I had no concern. My object was to show that you had unfairly depreciated the Colonel as a writer, and also as an exponent of Free-thought. I sought to refute your allegations that “he had no scientific knowledge”; that from him “you never get a solid statement”; that he never “defines religion”; that his style of advocacy was “shallow” and “gassy”; and that what he did “he did narrowly, ignorantly, blindly.” I also endeavored to show that you were wrong in condemning him for regarding theology as a part of religion, and that you were in error in asserting that “Agnosticism is as much an impertinence as dogmatism.”

Now I look in vain through your pamphlet to discover any answers to these objections which I clearly urged. In fact, in reference to most of them you are absolutely silent. Instead of noticing what I said upon these points you

manifest a peevish temper, use most disrespectful epithets as regards myself, and fill a large portion of your pamphlet with matter which has no bearing upon what I said. The cause of all this your readers can judge for themselves. As a Secularist, I impute no motives, and shall not attempt to "bear false witness against my neighbor." If your religion fail to exercise a similar influence upon you, so much the worse for your religion.

I cannot accept your invitation to write a sixteen-page pamphlet to be bound up with your two lectures and your "final reply," as I object (to use your own words) "to have my name used as a catch-power for any cause which has not my approval." But as you "venture to think" that your first pamphlet would have furnished me "with stiff work for an hour at least," I will deal with what you (herein state in the columns of the *Freethinker*, and you shall receive copies of the papers containing my comments. Such comments you are at liberty to publish.

You seek to disprove statements which were not made by me, and are thereby likely to induce your readers to form erroneous conclusions as to my position. For instance, you devote four pages to giving extracts from Max Müller's *Science of Religion* with a view of refuting what I never said. The fact is, that in my lecture I did not even mention Müller's name. But when the lecture was over you asked for my authority for the statement that the original etymological meaning of the word "religion" was secular, not theological. I gave you two authorities—David Urquhart and Max Müller. The former writer, whom you do not notice, says in his *Familiar Words*: "Religion coming to us from the Romans, we must seek first its Latin sense. It is derived from the verb 'to bind'—the binding of man by his faith to the performance of those duties that in modern English language are political. To the Roman, religion presented not worship, not faith—it signified the binding of man to do justice by, and to, the State as a member of the community." Max Müller writes: "There are some late writers who use *religio* in the sense of faith.....but in classical Latin *religio* never has that meaning.....We can clearly see that what the Romans expressed by *religio* was chiefly the moral or practical, not the speculative or philosophical, side of religion" (*Natural Religion*, p. 39). Further, Müller speaks of "Atheistic religions," and refers to the religion of Buddha, which, he says, "was from the beginning purely Atheistic" (*Science of Religion*, p. 52). Now in your pamphlet you entirely ignore Urquhart, and give Müller's words upon historical religion—a subject upon which I did not touch. I referred only to the original etymological meaning of the word. You committed the error of confounding the etymology of the word "religion" with its historical development—two very different questions. And then you accuse me of "unveracity of statement," and with being ignorant of Müller's works. Surely, to again employ your own phraseology, I am not the only one who requires "better manners, if not morality."

You then indulge in language which is, to say the least, very offensive. To use such terms as "mendacity," "culpable ignorance," "wanton audacity," etc., reminds me of the story of the counsel who, having no case, abused the opposing advocate. It is as bad as Archbishop Magee, who is said to have denounced your Unitarian idea of religion in language more emphatic than polite. He described it as "embracing the most daring impieties that ever disgraced the name of Christianity." "If," said he, "Unitarianism be well founded, Christianity must be an imposition." You say my "mendacity should not have passed without protest." Then, sir, why did you allow it to do so? You were present, and had every opportunity to offer opposition; but you contented yourself with merely asking a few questions, reserving your protest until I had left Aberdeen. This might have appeared to you discreet, but it was scarcely valiant.

On page four of your second pamphlet you entirely misrepresent the facts in reference to your use of the term "negative scepticism." You say: "If Mr. Watts had read properly, he would have found that the reference was to the Scepticism of Ingersoll." I should have found nothing of the kind, for the name of Colonel Ingersoll is not even mentioned in your pamphlet until after your reference to "negative scepticism." Moreover, you avow that you had been dealing with both Dogmatism and Scepticism "in general terms." It is in the next paragraph that you say: "Coming to Scepticism, as manifested in Ingersoll," etc.

As you so emphatically express your disapproval of Secularism and Agnosticism, I hereby invite you to either two or four nights' public debate in Aberdeen upon the following propositions: (1) That Christian Theism is more reasonable than Agnosticism. You to affirm, and I to take the negative. (2) That Secularism is superior to Christianity, either for this or any other life. I will affirm, and you take the negative. The discussion to take place in February next, or at any other time suitable to both parties. You are at liberty to publish this letter.—Yours sincerely,

CHARLES WATTS.

It is curious that Mr. Webster, in his pamphlet, is exceedingly reticent about his own definition of religion. Let him state plainly what he regards the word to mean,

and then probably we shall find that the great body of professed Christians would differ from him. When certain Freethinkers use the term religion, as representing their views, they do so in the sense in which it was employed by Thomas Paine—namely, "to do good." With them it has no relation to the alleged supernatural. This was Colonel Ingersoll's idea of religion, and he so expressed himself several times in his writings.

Mr. Webster says that the Colonel "failed as a constructor"; that he was "a superficial man"; that "his efforts in the way of Biblical criticism were curiously crude"; and that his words "lacked solidity." The rev. gentleman adds: I do not know any piece of work of his which is really solid, radical, thoroughly rational, and fit to last as a solution of any problem of human thought." Probably, when he says he "does not know," Mr. Webster is correct. But surely his lack of knowledge should not be made the cause of erroneous charges being urged against the Colonel. I know Ingersoll's writings, and am prepared to prove that he has given to the world materials sufficiently "solid and constructive" to enable man to live a wise, prudent, useful, and noble life; that he had a philosophical grasp of the varied subjects with which he dealt; and, finally, that his criticisms of the Bible were so solid that no Christian has yet been able to controvert them. It is very unfortunate that Christian exponents will persist in misrepresenting their opponents with an effrontery which is frequently inspired through lack of information.

So much for the rev. gentleman's criticism of Colonel Ingersoll's style of advocacy. In my article next week I will deal with the so-called "philosophical" criticisms of the pamphlet which is said to have furnished me "with stiff work for an hour."

CHARLES WATTS.

Phthisis in Olympus.

INTERESTING as the vast collection of humanity's poor deities are when gathered into a Pantheon of thought, they yield a much deeper interest when they are arranged in chronological order. There has been change, progressive modification, in the idea of god and goddess, and one knows not at times whether it is to be called evolution or devolution. One scientific term, at least, happily fits the process, and that is, "attenuation." It is as though some consumptive disease had penetrated the ethereal regions. Deity was at first a solid and substantial embodiment in stone or wood. Then came the larger-sized human deities of early "civilisation." Even that "too solid flesh" has melted. Gradually material solidity came to be regarded as heretical; and then it was the turn of human passions to drop out of the picture—lust, and hunger, and jealousy, and even, in these latter days, the sacred passion of vindictiveness. And it is whispered in the Churches that the attenuation is still proceeding. It is becoming a mere poetical license to attribute love and hate, mind and conscious will, or any other personal feature, to the evanescent god. He is fast relapsing into the nebula of cosmic force from which he was originally evolved. God is dying of consumption.

That is one of the reflections which force themselves on us when we survey the procession through the ages of the idea of divinity. It may seem a particularly irreverent way of putting the phenomenon; but, after all, even the theologian has to express himself in metaphors borrowed from human characteristics. The misfortune of the theologian of each special race is that his historical outlook is too narrow and too short. He confines his attention to a particular phase of religious development, and thus misses the more interesting impressions which we get who survey the whole stream of anthropoid and anthropological speculation on this subject. To the Christian the fetishes of uncivilised races and the members of the Olympian family never were gods; the revelation of deity came in with Abraham, and has been practically confined to a select branch of the human race. We know differently now. There is no sudden appearance of "light" in a particular corner of Asia at a particular date in history. The gods of the early Hebrews were the gods of the Assyrians and the Phœnicians, and the god of the later

Hebrews and of the Christians is a natural speculative development out of them. Thus are we forced to survey as a continuous and unbroken stream the entire speculation of humanity on divinity. We cannot, therefore, escape from the fact that there has been a gradual attenuation or wasting away of the Olympian family, and that it is now proceeding so rapidly that the men of the near future will have little more than the shades or *manes* of past gods to expend their irrepressible reverence upon. It is a sad prospect for those who imagine there is some undying instinct in the human system which causes it to yearn for a deity.

There is a convenient theory in ecclesiastical circles that the revelation of God to man was progressive, or that it gradually unfolded itself from the crude image of pre-historic days to the more elaborate idea of modern Christianity in thoughtful harmony with man's mental progress. Like most of the theories that do not profess to rest on positive evidence, this one is difficult to refute; it has the correlative disadvantage of being more than difficult to establish. The impression of the impartial thinker is that the changes in the idea of God are more likely to be connected with the changes in the convolutions of the human brain. The brain with shallow furrows in its grey bed reflects little; it may be safely burdened with *any* image of divinity, provided it is not *too* superhuman. But with time and exertion the human brain has deepened its convolutions, increased the area and the subtlety of its thinking stratum, become more reflective and critical. God has had to change in proportion. God has been likened at times to the spectre of the Brocken—the great enlarged shadow of a man on the mountain top projected on to the clouds—the shadow must change as the unconscious projector changes. And so, when early humanity found itself in possession of a legend of divinity which, partly by sheer force of hereditary fear or reverence, and partly through the influence of a sacerdotal caste, it did not wish to lose, it had to modify the picture with every increase in its own moral fibre and mental discernment. The "progressive-revelation" theory is a more or less happy afterthought.

The ultimate term of this consumptive process is not difficult to foresee; it is Pantheism, which will some day be called frankly Atheism. Already the process has gone so far as to render ritual and sacerdotal religion indefensible. Even a few centuries ago priest-hoods subsisted mainly on the theory that the deity possessed the very human passions of hatred, jealousy, and vengeance. A more refined generation rejected the theory, and closed Tartarus for ever. Then the priest-hoods had to lay emphasis on the love, the all-pervading consciousness, the more sublimated features of the still anthropomorphic god. But the mind of the race is rapidly refining, and there is a growing repugnance to admit any element of personality in the deity. Even divines, like Jowett, are found (in their posthumous pronouncements) to have given up the idea of personality. There is a very strong tendency in that direction amongst thoughtful Theists. It is the completion of the discovery that God was only an enlarged shadow of man, and it means death to ritual religion. There is no meaning in the worship of an impersonal force. The Christian who joins in the worship of a deity that he does not credit with conscious interest in the proceeding is more foolish than the Central African with his wooden god.

And from impersonal Theism to Pantheism the descent (or ascent) is rapid. The most interesting feature is that it amounts practically to a return of Theistic speculation to its starting-point. God began as an impersonal force, and his consumptive process is rapidly reducing him to the same condition. You may call him the Unknowable, or the Absolute, or the First Cause, or the Stream-of-tendency, or by any of the numerous names modern speculation has given him, but he has become as nebulous and unsubstantial as the vague force that struck awe into the heart of our pre-historic parent. The next step will be the discovery (which most of us made long ago) that there is really no sound reason for conceiving of any force distinct from the universe. Metaphysical subtleties about the relative and absolute, or about phenomena and noumenon, may retard that discovery, but it is even now admitted on many sides. The last stage is Pantheism; the First

Cause, the Infinite and Eternal Energy, etc., is substantially one with the world. And when the perverse and ridiculous desire to cling to some relic or shell of the old belief has died away, and social tyranny has ceased to dictate our opinions or our utterances, it will be seen that Pantheism is identical with plain, unconventional Atheism.

J. McCABE.

Atheism and Conduct.

WILL the disappearance of religious beliefs be accompanied by a corresponding decline of moral obligations? This question is continually cropping up in theologic or anti-theologic warfare, and its settlement one way or the other would largely determine upon which side the majority of people should take their stand. For the interest of the mass of the people in religion is, after all, practical, not theoretical. They value the presence of religion for what they believe it confers, just as they regret its decay because of what they believe it takes away. To a certain section of the religious world the fact that individuals do not, on giving up their religion, surrender all self-respect and decency is not always a pleasant sight, and their explanation of an awkward fact is, that the goodness of individual Atheists is entirely due to the circumstance that they have been brought up in a religious environment, and have been unable to free themselves from its influence.

Dealing with this aspect of the matter about a year ago, I pointed out that, carried to its logical conclusion, the argument nullified itself. If we are to attribute whatever goodness Atheists display to their Christian surroundings, the argument must be equally strong concerning the early Christians and their pagan surroundings, and one might push the case still further back until we ended in altogether denying the possibility of progress.

It is true, undoubtedly, that, for whatever is in us of good, some credit is due to our ancestry and education; but this is equally true of what is evil, and one might as reasonably say that if an Atheist does evil it is because of the influence of his Christian environment, as attribute his goodness exclusively to the same source.

Turning over again the pages of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen's interesting book, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (a book which, ten years ago, gave me much more satisfaction than it does now), I came across a presentment of an opinion concerning the effects of a widespread acceptance of Atheism on morals that is well deserving of a little close attention. Although he does not accept the belief in God, Sir James Stephen is of opinion that, inasmuch as it has hitherto been used as a buttress for our conception of duty, its disappearance may be followed by very unpleasant results. He says: "Though the sense of duty, which is justified by this form of religion, has become instinctive with many of those who feel it, I think that, if the belief should ever fail, the sense of duty which grows out of it would die by degrees. I do not believe that any instinct will long retain its hold upon the conduct of a rational and enterprising man when he has discovered that it is a mere instinct, which he need not yield to unless he chooses. . . . We cannot judge of the effects of Atheism from the conduct of persons who have been educated as believers in God, and in the midst of a nation which believes in God. If we should ever see a generation of men—especially a generation of Englishmen—to whom the word 'God' has no meaning at all, we should get a light upon the subject that might be lurid enough."

The concluding sentence reads curiously. Why the fear that the sense of duty should decline with the decay of religious beliefs should have special application to a generation of Englishmen, it is difficult to see. Perhaps Sir James Stephen thought the sense of duty less keen with Englishmen than with others.

The first reply, however, to the latter portion of this quotation is that the writer pictures society as governed by a single idea, and its convictions as determined by a single belief; whereas there are a multitude of beliefs, social, religious, political, domestic, etc., which all unite in determining conduct; and these, again, are largely determined by forces which never rise into consciousness at all. At most, the belief in a God is only

one of the beliefs that help to sway mankind and determine human conduct, even though it may be a most important one to the majority of people. But whether it is important because of its necessary connection with the higher aspects of life, or because mistaken education, primitive racial ignorance, and priestly pretensions have given this belief a fictitious importance, is the very point in dispute, and cannot be decided by the mere fact that a number of people are convinced of the truth of the former view. But, at any rate, it is plain that human actions in the past and in the present are no more determined *solely* by the belief in God than by any other single belief; and, therefore, admitting that the belief in God has helped to fashion and sustain the sense of duty—a position that may, in my opinion, be safely challenged—it is clearly unphilosophical to quite ignore all the other social factors that have contributed to this result, and make it exclusively dependent upon the belief in God.

Coming from a clergyman, one can understand this being done. He is in business, and it is part of his professional duties to advertise the value of his wares. Coming from a man who was, I believe, an Agnostic, the statement is curious. One would think that a very slight study of life, in both its ordinary and extraordinary phases, would show what little influence the belief in God has. I do not mean that there are not grave social injustices perpetrated because of the belief in God, or that this belief is not used as the avowed reason for a good many different actions. What I mean is that, if we penetrate to the *real* causes of conduct, the belief in God plays but a small part among them. The clergy say they preach for God's sake, and, without intending any sneer, I ask whether a settled income, definite career in life, and social position are or are not considerations that play some part in their choice of a profession? In the present war the Boers are said to be animated by their fervent belief in God. But suppose they did not believe in God, does anyone doubt that they would have fought quite as bravely, or would have failed to find some other phrase, "Love of Home," "Patriotism," etc., by which to describe or color their conduct? As a matter of fact, the expressed reasons for action are seldom the real, and are never the whole, causes of conduct; these lie much deeper, and can only be indicated after a careful examination. This is as true of religious shibboleths as it is of others. Men express themselves in the religious formulas that happen to prevail, just as they use in their speech the language of their country, without that form of expression being the determining factor of their feelings or actions.

Moreover, such a way of stating the case is far from impartial. It completely ignores the Atheistic view of the matter. It is the very essence of the Atheistic position that, while the social instincts may and do express themselves under a religious form, and are modified or colored by it to a certain extent, they are completely independent of it. For example, "Thou shalt not commit murder" has more often than not been propounded in such a manner as to make it appear that its value was entirely dependent upon the belief in deity. Yet I imagine that it requires but little wisdom to see that the reason for the precept does not lie in the "Thus saith the Lord" which has usually accompanied it, but in the exigencies of social life, which render a curbing of man's passions an indispensable condition of collective existence. In coming to this conclusion, the Atheist may be right, or he may be wrong; but simply to say that the decay of Theism will involve deterioration in morals is only to state the subject of the dispute over again.

Sir James, although an Agnostic, says with the Theist that men have always been in the habit of associating their moral feelings with the belief in God, and, therefore, a severance of the association may bring moral disaster. The Atheist readily grants the first portion of the statement as being true concerning a large number of people, but strongly questions the accuracy of the concluding portion, except so far as it concerns an individual here and there. As a historical fact, moral rules have generally been associated with religion; but to the Atheist the association is casual, not causal. In the past the conception of the State has been just as closely bound up with religious sanctions. That connection has been destroyed, and yet the conception of

the reciprocal duties of State and individual is clearer and stronger to-day than at any other period of Christian history. In the same manner, the Atheist believes that, as the true grounds of conduct, of duty, lie altogether outside of the sphere of religion, the separation of ethics and religion would no more involve a deterioration of conduct than a political revolution would destroy society, or the disestablishment of the English Church land us in chaos.

The objection that no "instinct will long retain its hold upon the conduct of a rational and enterprising man when he has discovered that it is a mere instinct which he need not yield to unless he chooses," although apparently an objection of greater weight, is not so in reality. No Atheist expects that moral instincts will support themselves, like Mohammed's coffin, between heaven and earth without clinging to the one or resting on the other. In claiming that all morality has a natural or human basis, the Atheist claims that the conditions that have created and sustained moral obligations in the past will continue to sustain them in the future. It is true that the duty of attending to one's domestic, social, and national obligations will no longer be accompanied with a "Thus saith the Lord"; but as domestic, and social, and national obligations will still continue to exist, the Atheist submits that, as it is the existence of these relationships that gives moral rules their value, their perpetuation is a sufficient guarantee of the preservation of the "moral instincts" themselves.

An examination of the nature and meaning of morality, the placing of it upon a purely human basis, cannot, therefore, reduce it to "a mere instinct," the gratification or repression of which is of no more concern than whether one shall smoke a cigar or leave it unsmoked. Such an examination can only show that moral instincts, instead of being dependent upon a belief that is at best of a fluctuating strength, rising and falling with each generation, are intimately and indissolubly connected with the deepest requirements of human nature, and, much as their form may alter with time and place, are in their essentials as indestructible as the humanity from which they spring, and whose needs they subserve.

C. COHEN.

A Roman Catholic View of Colonel Ingersoll.

De mortuis, etc. It might be well for the Christian moralist now and again to turn back to the page of pagan ethics, lest he give scandal to the New Dispensation. The blessedness of an assured hope is a glorious privilege, but the dignity of human nature is also worth regarding. We are, first of all, men, and then Christians, pagans, Agnostics, what you will, according to the light of our souls. Of our common humanity we are at least certain, hence we should begin with those duties which are lowest in the scale, those sentiments which may establish our title to be men before we can hope or, indeed, strive to be saints.

It must be allowed that the death of Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll has elicited a vast deal of ministerial comment which does not make for edification. I have been glad to note that in this matter the advantage of tolerance is clearly on the side of the Catholic clergy. The sum of their judgment seemed to be that, if the famous Agnostic held his heretical views strictly on conscience, it may be better with him now than so many of us are prone to think. Here is a notable abatement of the *rancune ecclésiastique*, and if the Colonel were not beyond the clamor of earthly voices, it is safe to say that he would be considerably astonished by this indulgence of priestly charity.

That Colonel Ingersoll was a commanding force in his peculiar domain of thought will be conceded on all hands. That his gifts of eloquence, wit, pathos, and virile, if not markedly subtle, argumentation were great is undeniable. It is certain that he was enormously popular on the lecture platform; indeed, his profits in this wise constitute a special count against him in the ministerial indictment. Whether the elements of professional jealousy enter here would be invidious to decide. Besides, I prefer to keep before my mind, as the worthier spectacle, the tolerance and charity exhibited by the clergy of the Catholic faith.

With Colonel Ingersoll's fine abilities went, it cannot be questioned, some solid, and even splendid, virtues. He was a man of stainless honor and perfect probity, most truly *integer vire*, a great leader in the profession which he illustrated with his talents. Moreover, he embodied and realised a high conception of American citizenship, and some of the best utterances are dedicated to the sentiment of American patriotism. Add to all this that in his domestic

relations he was singularly lovable, so that his death has left a void which saddens all feeling hearts, and it will be seen that we have here a character so broad in its outlines, and, in view of its special circumstances, so imperative in its demand for strict justice in the appraising, that we may well hesitate about the form into which we shall cast our final judgment.

In the chorus of lay criticism touching Colonel Ingersoll there are one or two common notes. It seems to be agreed by the editors generally that he made few proselytes to the cause of Infidelity. The grounds for this assumption are not apparent. In our day men preserve a reticence with regard to their religious convictions which would have enchanted old Isaac d'Israeli, who used to insist that no sensible man ever tells his religion. As already pointed out, Colonel Ingersoll's popularity in the Lyceum was unbounded; we should have to go to the camp-meetings of the most strenuous revivalist for an equal showing of appreciation and enthusiasm. And, be it remembered, people paid full price to hear the Colonel, while they gave nothing (unless the spirit moved them) at the camp-meeting. Now, it is a popular axiom that "a free show catches the crowd," whatever its demerits; but, again, to employ the vernacular, people must know "what's what" before they will pay their good money.

Also, it must be conceded that Colonel Ingersoll's published writings had a vast vogue, and the most careless observer will have noticed that his death has increased the popular demand for his works. If the sort of evidence that is furnished by the bookstalls may be relied upon, it cannot surely be contended, however devoutly it were to be wished, that the great Agnostic cast his "seed of perdition" upon barren ground.

Again, it is claimed by the sort of criticism which I am noting that Colonel Ingersoll, being defective in scientific equipment as well as in exact scholarship, was impotent to produce such effects by his teaching as might otherwise have been apprehended by the orthodox. It seems to me that the contention is quite unsupported by logic or fact. True, Colonel Ingersoll was neither a Darwin nor a Huxley, neither a Tyndall nor a Spencer. He lacked the special training and scientific grasp of all of these, as well as the searching erudition and ripened philosophic spirit of Ernest Renan, in our time the chief protagonist in the domain of Liberal thought. But had Colonel Ingersoll been other than he was, it is doubtful if he would have achieved so distinct an effect. In mere scholarship he was at least equal, if not superior, to Thomas Paine, and he was no more unscientific than Voltaire. As a propagandist of Liberal opinions, and as a living force, he was far greater than the former by virtue of the free play accorded to his vigorous and persuasive eloquence. That his influence in no way approaches that of Voltaire is not a fact which demands explanation. A stream cannot rise higher than its source. The whole Liberal movement may almost be said to have proceeded from the great Frenchman, whose portentous eminence remains secure to him alone.

But if Ingersoll was neither scientific in a profound sense, nor cultured in a Liberal one, he was not the less manifestly cut out for his work. He gave his audiences just what they expected to get, and were glad to pay for—oratory—which it serves no purpose now to disparage, and which, in spite of all disparagement, often rose to a noble height and strain; wit that played like lambent lightning about the old structures of belief, showing many an obscure niche and cranny that, mayhap, had escaped the torches of earlier investigators; pathos that proved the poet in the orator, and only needed a metrical expression—nay, sometimes unconsciously attained it; humor that evinced this man's sympathetic touch with his fellow men, and which not seldom won their regard when all the protean resources of his eloquence had failed to persuade; lastly, a gracious and noble presence,

Where every god did seem to set his seal
To give the world assurance of a man;

and a voice whose thrilling organ melody it will long be the solace of many thousands to have heard.

How much of the Colonel will live as a permanent influence is a graver question than that of his influence upon his contemporaries. *Litera scripta manet*, and the Ingersollian word is essentially the spoken word. Most of his writings are cast in the form of speeches; were obviously written to be delivered as such. John Morley notes this as a sensible depreciation of a great part of Macaulay's brilliant composition. The finer note addressed to the mental ear is more palpably lacking in the American. One sees this at once by turning from Colonel Ingersoll's speeches to the papers of his controversy with Gladstone. It is indubitable that, of these letters, Colonel Ingersoll displays a closeness of reasoning, a dialectic fence, an analytic subtlety which are quite foreign to his ordinary processes. The fact is that Colonel Ingersoll, being a born pleader, and skilled, moreover, in a long course of forensic training, adopted too much in his speeches the lawyer's plan of making the most of the adversary's weak points. Hence the too often gross unfairness of his philippics against the Christian religion, and hence, also, the unlikelihood of their being permanently embodied in the canon of liberal faith.

The keenness of the critical spirit was in Colonel Ingersoll; in his charity he was totally wanting.

Yet we may well believe that many a noble sentence, winged with the utmost felicity of speech, many a fine sentiment, the fruit of his kindlier thought, many a tender word spoken to alleviate the sorrow of death, will long remain. Even the literary critics, who make so small ado of the Colonel's merits, may well envy him the noble essay on Shakespeare, or the solemn and fitting tribute to Walt Whitman. And it may be that, "so long as love kisses the lips of death," so long will men and women, in the nighted hour of grief and loss, bless the name of him who touched the great heart of humanity in that high and unmatched deliverance at his brother's grave.

From a sunken Syrian tomb, long antedating the Christian era, Ernest Renan brushed away the dust and found inscribed thereon the single word, "Courage!"

—Michael Monahan, in the "Kansas City Mirror."

The Devil that God Made; or, The Origin of Christmas.

THIS is the Devil that God made.

This is the garden that sheltered the Devil that God made.

This is the apple that grew in the garden that sheltered the Devil that God made.

This is the couple that swallowed the apple that grew in the garden that sheltered the Devil that God made.

This is the burden we bear on our back,
As heirs of the couple that swallowed the apple that grew
in the garden that sheltered the Devil that God made.

This is the scheme of Jehovah the quack
To banish the burden we bear on our back,
As heirs of the couple that swallowed the apple that grew
in the garden that sheltered the Devil that God made.

This is the Baby of Bethlehem, born
To work out the scheme of Jehovah the quack
To banish the burden we bear on our back,
As heirs of the couple that swallowed the apple that grew
in the garden that sheltered the Devil that God made.

This is the maiden all forlorn,
The Mother of Baby of Bethlehem, born
To work out the scheme of Jehovah the quack,
To banish the burden we bear on our back,
As heirs of the couple that swallowed the apple that grew
in the garden that sheltered the Devil that God made.

This is the mustn't-be-scoffed-at Ghost
That courted the maiden all forlorn,
The Mother of Baby of Bethlehem, born
To work out the scheme of Jehovah the quack,
To banish the burden we bear on our back,
As heirs of the couple that swallowed the apple that grew
in the garden that sheltered the Devil that God made.

This is the fire in which we shall roast,
If we scoff at the mustn't-be-scoffed-at Ghost
That courted the maiden all forlorn,
The Mother of Baby of Bethlehem, born
To work out the scheme of Jehovah the quack,
To banish the burden we bear on our back,
As heirs of the couple that swallowed the apple that grew
in the garden that sheltered the Devil that God made.

ESS JAY BEE.

A Season-able D. (D.) Bait.

A DEBATE will be held in Pudding-lane on *Chesus*-day next, the Arch-bishop of Cant(erbury) in the chair. Subject: *Current Christianity: Is it a Raisin-able Faith? Candidly considered, does it ap-peal to the heart? Will it profit mankind to pur(sue it), or is it but a compound of sun-dry fruits of other climes and times, wrought into a flowery "Mass" under the au-spices of theological "chefs" skilled in the manipulation of the ingredients, especially the all-important "sugar"; well-"bile"-d, and occasionally garnished with sprigs of 'olly—the whole unknad-ed and indigestible?* As this is a religious debate, there will be a deal of heat in it; and as, doubtless, persons who are not coal'd will be cold, all such are earnestly invited to attend, sit round the debate, and warm themselves. Coal'd or not coal'd, come, and welcome. *Holly-lujah!*

H. NEWBERRY.

The dear old *Daily News* recently had a leading article on "Omar," and tried very hard to explain that the popularity of the poem did not mean that Freethought was spreading. If the proprietor of that paper really believes this, he might do worse than give some thousands of copies of the book as Sunday-school prizes. It should prove a welcome change after *Queechy* or *The Wide, Wide World*.

DECEMBER 24, 1899.

Acid Drops.

DR. PARKER wants to see the war in South Africa ended, and has offered his recipe for ending it. He appeals to the Queen as the first lady in the world, and asks her to speak the necessary word. But he does not suggest what this necessary word is to be, or to whom the Queen is to say it. It hardly seems of much use for her to speak to President Steyn or President Kruger; and, as a constitutional sovereign, who reigns but does not govern, she can only act with the advice of her Ministers; in other words, she merely endorses the decisions of the Government. Dr. Parker will have to try again. And next time he may hit upon something more manly than throwing the burden upon the shoulders of an aged woman. But what can you expect from men of God when they meddle with foreign matters? Really, they should stick to sermons and Sunday-schools.

The business of Dr. Parker, if he wants to see this war ended, is to try to do it by prayer. We have soldiers to fight, and statesmen to diplomatisise, and clericals to pray. These clericals, sky-pilots, men of God—call them what you will—are supposed to have great influence with the Almighty. Let them exercise it, then; let them beseech the Lord to put an end to the slaughter in South Africa. How he is to do it must be left to himself. But there is one way that may be suggested. He might miraculously prevent every bullet from finding a mark, and every shell from hitting anything but the ground, and turn the point of every bayonet in a charge. Nobody would be able to hurt anybody, the war would end in a general burst of laughter, and Britishers and Boers would be able to sit down and eat Christmas pudding together.

Praying doesn't do much good, but it is a better business than fighting. Tommy Atkins risks wounds, disease, and death for a shilling a day and his grub; while the parsons and ministers take large salaries to live comfortably and die on feather beds. Seeking the enemy is dangerous; seeking Jesus is pleasant pastime.

A Boer prisoner taken at Magersfontein states that a lyddite shell, fired by the Britishers on the previous Sunday, fell plump in the middle of a large open-air prayer-meeting which was being held to offer up supplications for the success of the Boer arms. There is no information as to what followed, but it is tolerably certain that that prayer-meeting was pretty quickly dispersed. Lyddite can be relied upon for putting the Doxology on proceedings in which it happens to be dropped.

From a letter in the *Christian Budget*, we learn that it is not at all unlikely that the Lord is assisting the Boers. The writer says: "The world may call it cant, but those who know that God honors the faith of those who put their trust in Him will understand. The people of the Transvaal and Free State, and a great portion of Cape Colony, are on their knees now, and we do not know what God may do. So far, there is no knowing what God may do. So far, it seems as if he had been occupied, as usual, in doing nothing. Still, he may be moved to assist the Boers. He is as much their God as ours, and they are a great deal more devout than we can pretend to be."

Sabbatarianism has scored once more. The London School Board have rescinded the resolution, passed a short time ago, permitting the Board Schools to be used for public meetings on Sundays. The Sabbatarian members are entitled to all the credit attaching to the victory. It is true they gained it only by the narrow majority of one—the voting being twenty-five to twenty-four. The result, however, is just the same. At two meetings of the Board the subject was discussed, and the old bogey of Sabbath desecration duly trotted out. To read some of the speeches, one would think the world had gone back at least a hundred years.

Some objection was made to the Sunday use of the schools on the ground of seven days' labor for the caretakers. When that was disposed of, the real motive of the opposition came out in all its nakedness. It was said by Mr. Sharp, and echoed by other members, that the Sunday use would "interfere with the sanctity of the Lord's Day." In other words, it would interfere with the sanctity of the Lord himself Day, for it might well be supposed that the Lord himself would disown such a dull, dismal, and unprofitable day as his self-appointed ministers have made it. The "interference" most to be complained of is with the right of the ratepayers to the use of their own schools. But this, of course, was a trifling matter to the Sabbatarians, as also the fact that no one is obliged to hire the schools if he has religious scruples against doing so, or to attend any of the meetings arranged for by other folks, who find Sunday the most convenient day for their purpose.

One clerical member—the Rev. A. Jephson, vicar of St. John's, Walworth—spoke out with great common sense and

boldness. He said that, as a clergyman of the Church of England, it had been his persistent endeavor to lift up his voice against all sorts of mechanical religion, such as meant consecrating twenty-four hours out of the week to what they called keeping the Sabbath. It was like people who considered it was necessary to say prayers very early in the morning on an empty stomach. He had watched crowds of people pouring out of omnibuses on a Sunday outside St. Paul's Cathedral, and also outside Spurgeon's Tabernacle, but none of those persons was ever heard to lift up his voice against the Sunday labor of omnibus drivers. Why had they never protested against these men working so hard on the Lord's Day? It was because it would interfere with their own convenience.

Mr. John Lobb, proprietor of the *Christian Age*, thought that these were strange arguments for a clergyman of the Church of England to use. Some of the other Nonconformists thought so too, which shows that in this matter Dissenters are quite as bigoted as the bulk of the clergy.

The gem of the debate, however, was contributed by Canon Allen Edwards, who insisted that the Fourth Commandment was as binding now as ever it was, both in the spirit and in the letter. He rebuked Mr. Jephson for stating that we had left Judaism behind us long ago, and reminded the Board that the Ten Commandments formed the basis of the law of this country.

It is useless to argue with clerics of the Allen Edwards stamp. They are quite beyond redemption. The debate and its result have, however, a special significance for Freethinkers when taken, too, in connection with other Sabbatarian victories of recent times. Is it not obvious that an immense amount of work remains to be done in the direction of sweeping away theological obstruction? Is it not idle to suppose that the ground is anything like cleared?

Dr. Edghill, the retiring Chaplain-General of the Army, has recently been interviewed. Of course, he has a glowing account to give of the results achieved by the commissioned chaplains—Anglican, Roman, and Presbyterian. And especially, of course, by the Anglican. He says: "There are about 214,000 men in the whole army, and of these 140,603 belong to the Church of England, 14,986 are Presbyterians, 10,842 Wesleyans, 1,889 other Protestants, 36,178 Roman Catholics. This gives 688 out of every 1,000 to the Church of England, 73 to Presbyterians, 53 to Wesleyans, 9 to other Protestants, 177 to the Roman Catholics. The percentage of the Church of England has increased every year steadily since 1885."

If the other statements of this retiring chaplain-general are as reliable as his estimate of the number of "Church of England" soldiers, we may know how much confidence can be reposed in his assurances. He knows very well, as everyone knows, that recruits are asked on enlistment what religion they belong to, that many of the new "Tommies" are staggered by the question, never having previously given the matter a thought; that to help them out of the difficulty "Church of England" is suggested; and "Church of England" is at once accepted as being about as good as anything else. That, and that alone, accounts for the Church of England preponderance.

The interviewing of nonentities who want to advertise themselves is becoming a little too common to be endured with patience by readers who perceive the motive. Now, who, for instance, is Mr. Frank T. Bullen? The *Christian Budget* says he is the author of "The Cruise of the Cachalot." Well, he may be; but why should he be interviewed, and the public inflicted with such statements as these: "The source of my style is the Bible.....I have read the Bible through from cover to cover twenty-five times.....Nothing has taken hold of my heart and soul like the Bible.....The Bible and John Bunyan have really formed my style." What is Mr. Bullen's style? Who knows or cares?

There is something, it is true, about the feat of reading the Bible through twenty-five times. Once is more than enough for a great many people. To keep on wading through it all from cover to cover—genealogies and all—seems to display more of a mechanical mind bent on making "records" rather than of a due and discriminating appreciation of what is read.

The Rev. James Cooper, D.D., regards the invention of the motor car as one of the signs of the Second Coming. We have heard of the possibility of Christ descending in a chariot of fire, but what have the motor cars on earth to do with the expected event? Will they be used to take the saints up to heaven?

Here is a nice reflection by one church-goer on a number of his fellow-worshippers. The incumbent of a Bath church intimated from the pulpit that he had received a parcel of prayer-books and hymn-books for distribution amongst the "most dishonest frequenters of the church." The anonymous donor hoped that when the books were distributed the

stealing of his own from his pew would cease. The donor would have done better to have consoled himself with some such reflection as: "He who steals my hymn-book steals trash," &c.

The fire at Messrs. Isbister's publishing establishment, near Covent Garden, destroyed the January issue of *Good Words* and the *Sunday Magazine*. This was very unkind of Providence, considering all that those two pious magazines have done to set forth his claims and justify his ways to men. If the fire had been at the *Freethinker* office, there would have been, we can be sure, paragraphs in *Good Words* and the *Sunday Magazine* duly pointing the moral and adorning the tale.

Even up to the present day the children at Bethlehem are told by their mothers that on Christmas Eve a choir of angels always sing above the place where Christ was supposed to have been born, though how that locality has been discovered passes all rational understanding. However, travellers say that on Christmas Eve scores, and sometimes hundreds, of children may be seen in the open air, looking up into the sky, waiting to hear the angels sing!

Another "seasonable" superstition prevails in Calabria, South Italy, where it is believed that vipers will not bite on Christmas Day, or that, if they do, their bite is harmless, the poison being neutralised by the sanctity of the day.

Mozoomdar, the successor of Keshab Chunder Sen, contributes an article to the *Christian Life*, in which he comments on the methods of Christian missionaries in India. According to him, "they seem to think that the more violent they are in dealing with the faith of the Pagan, the more violent they are in exposing its weakness and superstitions, the more they consign their fathers and grandfathers (*i.e.*, the Pagans) into the unquenchable fire, the sooner they will be converted; and the result is, the more violent they are the greater the reaction, until it becomes a question whether the Christian Mission should be continued or not."

Wm. Reece, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, has discovered an effective method of bringing sinners to their knees. He entered a social gathering with a loaded revolver in each hand, and commanded all present to drop on their knees and pray their loudest. To encourage them to further efforts he quoted the passage of Scripture describing the scene between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. One man did not pray sufficiently loudly to please Reece, who shot at him and wounded him in the head. The man kept the rest of the terror-stricken people praying at the utmost power of their lungs for half-an-hour. At last the police were notified and removed Reece.

The Rev. Alfred Warr, of Rosneath, has been taken severely to task for not only proclaiming himself a moderate drinker, but maintaining, "as a Christian minister, that intoxicating drink, under certain conditions, is a beverage and a blessing to humanity." Whatever his co-religionists may think, the Rev. Warr has scriptural authority for his statement. The whole subject is dealt with in Mr. Foote's *Bible and Beer*.

For bearing false witness against his neighbor, the Rev. W. K. Chafy-Chafy, D.D., rector of Rous Lench, near Evesham, has been mulcted at the Birmingham Assizes in the sum of £100. He had made a baseless charge against a land-agent of having misconducted himself with the daughter of one of the rector's tenants, and he published libellous letters by reading them to a party of parishioners in the vestry after Sunday service. The rev. gentleman now probably wishes he hadn't. Some excuse may be found for him in the fact that the long-established licence of the pulpit is calculated to create in the clerical mind a false notion of irresponsibility.

According to the New York correspondent of the *Christian World*, we are in a "transition period" in regard to ideas of the Bible and its inspiration, and American Sunday-school teachers will not recognise the fact. A complaint on this score being made to the editor of a Sunday-school lesson series, he wrote in reply: "While you and some others may regard the story of the Hebrews in the fiery furnace as a myth, the almost unanimous majority look upon it as a veritable fact—a miracle. It is either that or an absolute fabrication, and I do not believe that it is a falsehood." The *Christian World* correspondent regards this sort of argument as "revealing the sad incompetency to which the preparation of the lesson studies is for the most part committed."

All the same, that editor was right in saying that the "fiery furnace" incident was either a miracle, or the account of it a fabrication. There is not much doubt which is the case. Still, we can understand the pastor of an orthodox church in Chicago writing that his "heart bleeds" for children who are taught these stories as facts. "I sincerely believe," he adds, "that all the heretics, unbelievers,

Freethinkers, and infidels combined, with all their works, are not so responsible as these teachers for the loss of faith."

"A Clergyman" is contributing to the *Church Gazette* a series of articles on "The Higher Criticism: What may we Teach?" He says it is a question pressing more and more upon the consciences of many of the clergy in the present day. "How far may we, or ought we, from the pulpit to communicate the results of the critical labors which, in late years, have been spent upon the Old Testament." Well, if the clergy have any "consciencences" at all, it is their duty to communicate all they know, whatever the consequences may be. This question of "What may we teach?" sounds hardly honest.

Ingersoll ran no journal, he formed no society, attached himself to none. As a result, he went through life with extremely little of the worry that fell to Mr. Bradlaugh's lot, that falls still to the lot of some others. I never envied Ingersoll (nor any other man), but he must have escaped some of the worst evils of life. Still, the journalistic and other work has to be done, and done by patient and indomitable men, no matter what it may cost them. Those who reap the benefit and enjoy the pleasure should remember that, especially as Freethought journalism must, after all, do the bulk of the work of destroying superstition. Our journals are strictly boycotted by all the pious, by all the slaves of the pious, by Mrs. Grundy, of course! and by all the timid tradesmen, who would fear ruin should they advertise in an honest journal. Were this not so, our journals would flourish commercially—an impossibility, until society undergoes a moral revolution and learns to prefer honesty to sneaking hypocrisy. Many wealthy and well-to-do Freethinkers never give these things a thought. The result is that those who work the best for their cause are compelled to suffer the most.—*Joseph Symes, in the "Liberator" (Melbourne)*.

Rev. Mark Guy Pearse, of the West London Mission—Mr. Price Hughes's co-worker—has been preaching lately at Buxton, and in the course of his sermon he rejoiced that "the Secularist movement as represented by Mr. Bradlaugh and others was practically dead." In proof of this he mentioned the fact that the West London Mission carried on part of its work in Cleveland Hall, which was "originally built by the Secularists." But this is not true. The Hall was built by a private individual, and was used by the Secularists for some time; but Mr. Bradlaugh never lectured there, we believe, after the Hall of Science was erected in Old-street. Many years elapsed between the leaving of Cleveland Hall by the Secularists and its being rented by the Wesleyans; nearly twenty years, we should think; and it is monstrous to talk as though the place had been captured. Down at Manchester the Secular Hall used to be a place of Christian worship; but the Secularists there are not so idiotic as to boast that they have captured a chapel. The worshippers went elsewhere, and the London Secularists went elsewhere; and, as the Americans say, that's all there is in it.

After all this ridiculous boasting, Mr. Pearse had to make the ignominious confession that the Christian work around Cleveland Hall had been "practically a failure." Money has been poured out like water, but the people will not snap at the Wesleyan Methodist bait. Some of them will take anything there is to be given away, but that is as far as they show any disposition to go. They are like the Chinaman—"No monnee, no converttee."

The Dead Sea is reported to be drying up. It used to be fed by the river Jordan, the waters of which are now largely diverted for purposes of irrigation; and it is said to have come to look more like a salt mine than a lake. No doubt, in the course of time, we shall have a society started in England to dig under the lake's bed for the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lots of money will be collected from old women of both sexes, a few laborers will be set digging, and a number of pious officials will earn good salaries by writing and signing imaginary reports. Perhaps they will find Lot's wife.

Herbert Swift, aged twenty-three, committed suicide at the Leeds Infirmary by jumping out of a window fifty feet from the ground. Mrs. Swift testified at the inquest that her husband had been suffering from religious mania. He had been "studying the Bible all the week."

The *Daily Chronicle* has turned over a new leaf in more ways than one. Mr. Henry Harland is put on to review the first two volumes of the new edition of Mark Twain, and he calls the great American humorist vulgar and irreverent. Mark does not fall upon his knees in Palestine, he laughs at some of the old saints, and pokes fun at the swarms of nails that are supposed to have been taken out of a few holes in the cross of Christ. All this, of course, is very shocking. But we fear that Mark Twain is too old to learn better, or to take lessons in sweet reasonableness—with a dash of cant—from the new young lions of the *Daily Chronicle*.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, December 31, Athenæum Hall, London, W.
January 7, Athenæum Hall; 21, Liverpool; 28, Glasgow.
February 4, Manchester.

To Correspondents.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—January 14, Leicester. February 4, Sheffield; 25, Glasgow.—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.

J. C. EDGLEY.—You may think better of it before the finish.

M. E. PEGG.—See paragraph.

H. PERCY WARD.—Mr. Ridgway is a fine old veteran. We have the highest respect for him. Put us down for 10s., which shall be forwarded after Christmas.

R. P. EDWARDS.—Thanks for your good wishes. Other contents of your letter noted. You do not at all "trouble" us by writing; quite the contrary.

R. CHAPMAN.—Our best regards to the South Shields friends. We hope they will have a good time on January 12.

W. P. BALL.—Thanks for your welcome batches of cuttings.

SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED.—Miss Vance, secretary, acknowledges receipt of donation promised by Mr. J. T. Embleton at the General Meeting.

W. LANGWORTHY.—The little work you refer to was written by George Grote, the historian, from materials supplied by Jeremy Bentham. Both these great men were Atheists. James Mill was undoubtedly an Atheist too.

PESSIMIST.—While the war lasts all "movements" will necessarily suffer. People read the newspapers, morning, noon, and night; and other matters are neglected. The same thing was seen in America during the war with Spain. By-and-bye, however, the reaction will come, and with it another period of progress.

EDINBURGH AND NEWCASTLE.—Your Lecture Notices arrive on Wednesday, just as we are going to press. Too late. It is a pity that secretaries do not post such notices so that they reach us by the first post on Tuesday.

INGERSOLLIAN.—Yes, the superior edition of the *Mistakes of Moses* will be worthy of a place on the drawing-room table. Freethinkers may order it with perfect confidence in that respect. It will make a handsome gift-book too.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Leeds Daily News—The High Peak News—Brann's Iconoclast—Blue Grass Blade—People's Newspaper—Der Vrije Gedachte—The Daily Chronicle—Sydney Bulletin—Liberator—Ethical World—Der Arme Teufel—People (New York)—Free Society—Two Worlds—Torch of Reason—Secular Thought—Progressive Thinker—Isle of Man Times—Echo—Truthseeker (New York)—Boston Investigator—Freidenker—Freethought Magazine—Open Court—Public Opinion—Yorkshire Evening Post—New York Herald.

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

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 due.

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

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

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

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

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

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 or 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.

Sugar Plums.

THE Athenæum Hall will be closed this evening (Dec. 24), which is Christmas Eve, but will be re-opened on the following Sunday, when the platform will be occupied by Mr. Foote, whose subject will be duly announced in our next issue.

The London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner takes place at the Holborn Restaurant on Monday evening, January 8. The tickets are 4s. each, and can be obtained from Miss Vance, 377 Strand, W.C., from R. Forder, 28 Stonecutter-street, E.C., or from any London Branch secretary. Mr. Foote will preside, and will be supported by most of his principal colleagues. A full program will be published in our next number. Meanwhile we may observe that the new year opens more auspiciously than ever for the Secular movement, and that a large gathering is expected to celebrate the improved aspect of affairs.

The Statutory Meeting of the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited—which has to be held within four months of registration—has been fixed for Wednesday evening, January 10, at 8 o'clock. This announcement is made in order that Shareholders may take note of the date. Formal notices, with proxy forms, will be posted to them in due course.

All who intend to take Shares in this Company should do so at once. Now is the Application time, now is the day of Allotment. Prompt action will entitle the new-comers to attend the Statutory Meeting and to vote upon the Agenda. Directly that Meeting is over the Company will begin business in dead earnest, and of course the extent of its operations will depend upon its resources. We should like to hear that five hundred Shares have been applied for between now and the end of December.

The new edition of Ingersoll's *Mistakes of Moses*, which is being put through the press by the Freethought Publishing Company, is well forward, and will be on sale early in the New Year. It will be well printed on good paper, and published at the old price of one shilling. A special *edition de luxe* is being prepared for purchasers who care to have this brilliant book on their shelves or table in a handsome form. This edition is to be printed on superfine paper, and bound attractively in cloth. The price is to be half-a-crown. Copies can be secured by forwarding that amount in advance to the Company's Secretary (Miss Vance) at 377 Strand, London, W.C. When ready the book will be sent post free to subscribers.

Mr. Cohen's article on "Converting the Jews" is reproduced in a "condensed" form in the New York *Public Opinion* from our columns. The same article is reprinted in full in the Melbourne *Liberator*.

Mr. Joseph McCabe delivered three lectures for the Liverpool Branch on Sunday. The local "saints" were highly delighted with him, and hope to hear him again shortly.

The last number of Mr. Symes's *Liberator* to hand from Melbourne, dated November 11, reproduces a number of paragraphs from the *Freethinker*, together with Mr. Foote's article on "Converting France." In an editorial note our old and esteemed colleague says he is still a Republican, but the people are not yet fit for Republicanism. "I tried it," he says, "on a small scale in the Australasian Secular Association, and carried it out to perfection. The results were disastrous, merely because the people were incapable of appreciating it. They needed stiff and absolute rule, which my principles and disposition forbade. They formed cliques and produced anarchy."

Mr. G. L. Mackenzie may like to know that his verses, entitled *A Feat of Hands*, were reproduced in *Secular Thought* (Toronto) for December 2.

The South Shields Branch holds its Annual Social Party at the Baring-street Board school on Monday, January 12. Tea will be on the tables at 5, and songs and dancing will begin at 7. Tickets—1s. 6d., 1s., and 9d.—can be obtained from Mr. R. Chapman, secretary, 30 Madras-street, Simon-side.

The Manchester Secular Hall closes this evening (Christmas Eve). The Annual Soirée for members and friends will be held on January 1. The program is—Tea at 5.30, Entertainment at 6.30, and Dancing at 7.30. The tickets are one shilling each.

Mr. J. H. Ridgway, president of the Birmingham Branch, celebrates his Golden Wedding on January 29, and his colleagues mean to take the opportunity to present him with

a memento of their affection and esteem. Mr. Ridgway has worked hard for the cause for about eighteen years, and has always been well to the front in times of difficulty and danger. Freethought has no more loyal and devoted servant anywhere. We hope the present will be worthy of the man and the occasion. Subscriptions can be sent to Mr. W. T. Pitt, Kenyon-street, or to Mr. H. Percy Ward, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath.

Christianity and the World.

Does the world need Christianity? is the subject of a recent discourse by the Rev. Dr. Amory H. Bradford, who is a traveller as well as a preacher of some distinction.* The *Christian Age* thinks so highly of this sermon that it reproduces it in its pages—perhaps as a contrast to the vapid pulpit rhetoric to which it usually treats its readers. After a careful perusal of all that the preacher has to say in answer to the question he raises, one is still left waiting for the proof that Christianity is needed by the world, and that the world will not be happy until it gets it. The utmost that can be said of all the facts which Dr. Bradford marshals in imposing array is, that the world is in need of *some* gospel of reformation, some agency of salvation. No one ever doubted that; the evidences are too numerous and too obvious. But when we come to the question, Is Christianity the remedy for the evils that exist, the means whereby mankind is to be raised to the higher plane? the discourse supplies nothing but bare assertions, and in that respect is weakest where, most of all, it should exhibit strength.

The text from which Dr. Bradford preaches is the very significant declaration of Paul to the Corinthians: "The world by wisdom knew not God." There, I suppose, Freethinkers are quite in agreement with the Apostle and this latter-day preacher. The text might be placed as a motto on the title-page of an Atheistic or Agnostic work. Wisdom does not lead to a knowledge of God; it does not even afford satisfactory evidence of his existence. On the other hand, ignorance and superstition, which imply the want of wisdom, have provided the world with an endless number of gods, including the Christian Deity, who, after all, is only one amongst many. Upon this scriptural passage Dr. Bradford bases an exhortation in favor of foreign missions, Christianity having, apparently, in his view, revealed the only true god in the whole of the world's pantheon. He sorrowfully recognises that "there is much scepticism in the air as to the value of Christian work in non-Christian lands." Undoubtedly a great deal of such scepticism exists, and is likely to increase. People are beginning to perceive that the main object of foreign missions is merely to dispel native theological delusions, in order to substitute other chimeras which are equally delusive and unworthy of belief.

The native priests and medicine-men, with the gods whom they serve, may appear exceedingly absurd to the Christian missionary; but, on the other hand, it is very likely that the latter, with his Christian God, or three gods in one, may excite in the native mind an equal sense of the ludicrous. The absurdity is not all on one side. "For anyone who weighs the matter well," says Matthew Arnold, "the missionary in clerical coat and gaiters whom one sees in wood-cuts preaching to a group of picturesque Orientals is, from the inadequacy of his criticism both of his hearers' religion and of his own, and his signal misunderstanding of the very volume he holds in his hand, a hardly less grotesque object in his intellectual equipment for his task than in his outward attire." Then there is always the very serious question to be considered, Why should the Gospel be offered to the heathen with the possibility that they may incur posthumous penalties by obduracy in rejecting it? Very often the attitude of missionaries in regard to the ancient faiths they endeavor to supplant is such that one can hardly wonder that the new faith they introduce is received with coldness and dislike.

If we had as our only guide the glowing, and often

not very candid, accounts which missionaries themselves send home to their societies and supporters, we might remain very much in the dark as to what is really being done. But, fortunately, we have the testimony of lay residents and travellers, who, though themselves for the most part Christians, are impelled to protest against the behavior and performances of these uninvited zealots in foreign lands. A recently-published work by C. N. J. Du Plessis, of Johannesburg, gives a very striking description of the arrogance of agents of the London Missionary Society in South Africa—their bigoted denunciation of all views but their own, their affectation of airs of sanctity and superiority, their quarrels with the colonists, and their constant talk of the "high and holy calling" to which they have devoted their energies, apparently as a special favor to God. We know from many other sources how little is really accomplished in the way of native conversion, not only in South Africa, but in India, China, and Japan. The world outside Christendom evinces no great longing for the Christian faith. It does not feel the need of it; in fact, exhibits every indication that it would prefer to be without it.

Many missionaries will find something of a rebuke in Dr. Bradford's declaration, that "faith in the superiority of Christianity does not imply belief that other religions are not good as far as they go, or that they may not have served a beneficent end." But Christianity, it seems, is vastly superior, and displays its superiority in its teachings about God. Many religions, we are told, have practically no doctrine of God. "They speak about gods, and the people may have some general ideas on the subject; but in all countries where Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism prevail, while there is speculation about the Deity or Deities, there is no clear evidence of belief in a personal God." Accepting this statement for the moment, does it really disclose any very terrible state of affairs? Does it not rather point to the fact that the Eastern philosophy has long anticipated the present trend of Western thought, which, admittedly, is so largely in the direction of modifying and toning down the crude old notions of a personal God—such, for instance, as we have presented in the Jewish Scriptures.

The *gravamen* of the charge brought by this preacher against Buddhism is that "the god of the Buddhists is the insensate stream of causation, which flows on without beginning, without end, without intelligence, and without feeling." Is this such a very outrageous belief that we must send armies of missionaries at immense cost to disabuse the native mind? Is it not, in fact, an infinitely wiser and more philosophical view of the facts of existence than the Christian belief in a personal God and a special Providence? Taking Dr. Bradford's own interpretation of the main feature of Buddhism, which he says he derived at first hand from the lips of eminent Buddhist priests in their own temples, one would think that Buddhists might very well be left alone; or, at any rate, that they would not be benefited by taking upon themselves the incubus of Christian dogmas and creeds.

Really wonderful are the results of pious imagination when once it is set to work. No flight seems too wild, too extravagant, or too fanciful. Dr. Bradford assures us that—

"If there were no other reason for missionary efforts, I should feel that they are more than justified by the fact that Christianity alone, in terms of fatherhood, reveals the personal Spirit, in whose hands are all men, all nations, the world, and all the galaxies of worlds; who cares for the poor, the weak, the outcast; before whom all lives are precious, and who rules the universe as a father rules his household—not by force, nor by authority, but by love."

What nonsense! How can anyone by searching find out such a God? The world by wisdom knows no such Deity. The conditions of life, the realities of existence, are dead against the supposition that any such being exists. He "cares for the poor, the weak, the outcast." Does he, indeed! Then he has a very curious way of showing his care. No one would have thought it, unless he had been told so from his birth upwards. A man's unassisted observation and reason would never have brought him to that conclusion. Half Dr. Bradford's discourse goes distinctly to prove that this God

* Dr. Amory Bradford, by the way, is the author of a recently-published work on *The Art of Living Alone*, in which he speaks of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam as "one of the most doleful, dismal, and, in a certain sense, immoral productions of human genius."

does not care for the "poor, the weak, and the outcast." He says himself that in India we find to-day universal poverty, the plague, ignorance, indolence, and vice amongst 300,000,000 of people who remain in the condition of their great-great-grandfathers. What has this loving, personal, interposing Father been doing through past centuries for these children for whom he is said to have so much affection and care? Does not the alleged urgent need of foreign missions go to prove, according to Christians themselves, that this care has not been extended, and is not now extended? If all the world received the Gospel to-morrow, how many myriads will have died without hearing of it, or participating in its vaunted blessings? And "all lives are precious" to this imagined Deity. Well, there are a few being sacrificed just now in South Africa; but, in spite of all prayers, he manifests no disposition to interfere.

By the side of this purely imaginative Theistic belief—which no sort of sophistry can successfully bolster up—the Buddhist doctrine of the "insensate stream of causation which flows on without beginning, without end, without intelligence, and *without feeling*," is eminently philosophical. At any rate, it much better fits the facts. As to the minor teachings of Christianity, where is the use of conveying them to the natives of heathen lands when we do not think it worth while to practise them ourselves? The non-resistance of evil, the taking no thought for to-morrow, the laying not up of treasures on earth, the loving not the world or the things of the world—all these teachings, which constitute distinctive features of Christianity, are a dead letter with us, simply because they are impracticable. Rational ethics and civilising influences must ever be an incalculable boon to the benighted heathen; but these are not the special and exclusive property of Christianity.

FRANCIS NEALE.

The Religious Novel.

A FEW weeks ago there appeared an article in the *Daily Chronicle*, by Mr. W. J. Dawson (not, I believe, an irreligious critic), with the above title, which is rather interesting in a couple of ways. Mr. Dawson took as his text a recent novel by Mr. Silas K. Hocking, and on it he ventilated his opinions on this sort of work rather freely. To the reader of the religious novel, Mr. Dawson confesses, literary art is thrown away. Of course, we all knew that, but Mr. Dawson puts it pretty plainly:—

"The religious novel proper is supposed to identify itself directly, not only with Evangelical sentiments, but with the positive inculcation of Evangelical truths. What the reader requires of it is a picture of things he knows or regards as probable, and the echo of sentiments with which he is familiar. Upon such readers both art and style are thrown away. That austere reticence of touch which leaves a situation to speak for itself, that nice perversity of phrase which plays brilliant fantasies upon the keys of language, that swift brevity and condensation of thought which we appreciate in the great masters—these are not needed; they are, indeed, in the nature of stumbling-blocks and hindrances."

Not merely, however, is style thrown away on the reader of religious stories; sense and reality are alike superfluous. Says the critic:—

"If it were merely a question of style that is involved, there would be, after all, little ground for complaint. Plain English, as long as it is grammatical, is not to be despised, and plain people of no literary culture naturally prefer a plain style. But the supporter of the religious novel has some more exigent tastes which distinctly put fetters upon the art of the novelist. The sort of story he wants must not only be easy and fluent, but it must skilfully avoid the chasms of human tragedy. He does not object to death-bed scenes—there are more than a dozen, I believe, in a recent very popular volume of short stories; but he objects to the least lifting of the veil which covers the more disagreeable secrets of life. He likes denunciations of impossibly bad rich people, as long as they are not Church members; but he cheerfully admits impossibly poor people as normal and natural. He demands a happy ending to every story, however it may outrage probability, and he has a child-like faith in the long arm of coincidence."

After all this, it is not surprising, though it is a little

quaint, to find Mr. Dawson observing that "it naturally follows that the great blot upon the religious novel is its air of unreality."

The question, however, arises for the outside critic, whether that unreality is not a necessary concomitant of the unreality of religion itself. Can there be in any true sense of the word a "religious" novel? Can there be really "religious" art? One need not be led off the track by the facile shuffle about 'all great art being really religious, in that it raises us above our surroundings and takes us out of ourselves. We mean by "religious" art that connected with the propagation of the various dogmatisms which pass current as religion at the present day. Can there, then, be any work which is at the same time a true picture of life and a vehicle for the inculcation of effete and absurd dogmas which are utterly divorced from life?

But a few months ago the booksellers of the kingdom were displaying acres of printed matter by a Mr. Sheldon, whose productions rank, it is to be presumed, as the most successful religious "novels" of the year. Indeed, Mr. Dawson says, and probably truly, that six months ago a *plebiscite* vote would have placed the author of *In His Steps* far above the author of *The Newcomes*. But we have yet to hear of anyone with the least pretensions to critical ability who had anything to offer in extenuation of that appalling torrent of mediocrity.

There is, in fact, no such thing as religious *art* in any proper sense of the term; there is religion, and there is art; but either is injured when they come in contact. There are, for instance, religious stories in which life is distorted and cramped to make it fit the religious necessities. The goody-goody young man, who never does any thinking lest his brain would give way under the exertion, after various adventures of a not too exciting character, marries the goody-goody young lady, to whom serious thought is, of course, an indiscretion, and whose life is a round of commonplace; doubtless the pair are well matched. Then, occasionally, there is the dreadful "infidel," who, needless to say, is a person of disreputable character; he, it may be, is rescued by a tract from the goody-goody young lady, or perhaps converted from his wicked ways by a fever or a railway accident. These things are generally most effective (in fiction) for bringing the wayward into the fold. But, assuredly, nobody of sense will call this sort of stuff, even in its more ambitious flights, "art." It is untrue to life; its characters, as Mr. Dawson says, become "mere marionettes tied to the string of a creed." And the marionettes only interest the grown-up babies who would not comprehend the picture of natural men and women. "The religious novelist," says the *Chronicle* writer, "is only popular as long as he works within the limits of Sunday-school conceptions of life; the moment he handles life with a broader comprehension, and deviates into truth, his vogue is imperilled; and, if he persist in his recalcitrancy, his career is closed."

So much for the religious novel. But one may ask, in truth, whether much the same strictures do not apply to almost all "religious" literature. How much of real interest or of truth is there in the mighty tomes which fill the shelves devoted to theology in our libraries? Dry-as-dust lives of saints, musty exhortations, disquisitions on themes grown threadbare from age, mediæval speculations, half unintelligible to this generation, which has outgrown the frame of mind that indulged them. Here and there we may come across a pregnant idea, catch a glimpse of a saner view struggling for expression; now and again we may admire the wonderful word-play about nothing at all; but the bulk is waste. And there is something pathetic, too, in the spectacle; he would be a poor lover of his kind who could survey it quite unmoved. These fearful discussions—say, whether Jesus was God or man, or half God and half man, whether Mary really remained a virgin or not, whether Jesus was actually turned into bread and wine or only symbolically present in these things—such discussions did once mean desperately serious issues, on which, at times, brave men staked their lives. We can only look back at it all with amazement and with pity—a pity that is not, surely, out of place when we consider that so much energy and so much thought should have been thus wasted, when human life might have

been made so much happier and brighter had that energy and thought been more sanely applied.

To return, however, to the religious novel: there are only a couple more words to be said. Mr. Dawson, after remarking in his article that the writer who "handles life with a broader comprehension and deviates into truth" finds his occupation gone as a religious novelist, yet concludes, not very consistently, by arguing that what is wanted "in the religious story is a more masculine vitality and a more sincere and thorough grasp of the principles of the novelist's art." And he goes on to observe:—

"Among English people—at least, among those who read—no subject is of such abiding interest as religion. The greater novelists appear to be either ignorant of this element in the national life or incapable of dealing with it, although they see, as in the case of Mr. Sheldon, one of the poorest of books from the standpoint of art attaining an enormous popularity, simply because it appeals to the religious sentiment."

It is to be feared that Mr. Dawson is asking for an impossibility, as he has himself half confessed. You cannot have Art and Sheldonism together. If the "greater novelists" became Sheldons, why—they would cease to be great novelists. How in the world can an "enormous popularity" be achieved amongst people who want Sunday-school conceptions of life, by a writer who does not give them Sunday-school conceptions? Mr. Dawson says that "the conventicle still awaits its Stevenson, its Kipling"; we fear it will await them. The conventicle does not breed Stevensons; and though it provides the raw material for them to work on, we doubt if it even breeds Kiplings. Enormous popularity does not, as a rule, go with artistic sincerity. And the religious novel will remain the religious novel—until the conventicle outgrows the conventicle.

FREDERICK RYAN.

Early English Freethought.

BY THE LATE J. M. WHEELER.

THE insular position which our country enjoys, and the mixed races of which our people are composed, have doubtless contributed to form that spirit of independence in which English Freethought has found its basis, and which, through the long course of its history, has given it a stamp whereby one can recognise our Freethought no less than our philosophy and our literature to be the genuine outcome of English character, and to evince the native qualities of the English mind. None the less, the development of Freethought in this country, as well as on the continent, owes something to contact with the Jews, and still more with the Mohammedans. Under William the Conqueror the Jews took up important positions in England. Although, as Mr. Freeman observes, it may be doubted whether his son William Rufus was in any strict sense an intellectual sceptic, his conduct was well calculated to promote scepticism. He bade the Jewish rabbis and the bishops of England to dispute before him on the tenets of their several creeds, vowing by St. Luke's face that he would embrace the side which had the better of the argument. Of course, each party claimed the victory. The incident is as significant of the rise of a spirit of Freethought as the fact of St. Anselm writing a treatise to prove the existence of God. But whatever doubts might assail the solitary thinker, the Church was too strong to make it safe to publicly express them. We read that in 1160, when St. Thomas Becket was Lord High Chancellor, a party of thirty heretics, who came over from Germany to propagate their opinions, were branded in the forehead, publicly whipped and left naked in the streets in mid-winter, when, none daring to relieve them, they died of cold and hunger. The monkish chronicler makes the following comment: "This pious severity not only purified the kingdom of the plague which had already crept into it, but, by striking terror into the heretics, guarded against any future irruption of the evil."

Can we wonder that Æthelhard or Adelard of Bath, the first English Freethinker, was fain to put forth his views under the guise of being those of the Arabians. Adelard had travelled to Spain, Morocco, Greece, and

Asia Minor. He translated Euclid's *Elements* from the Arabic into Latin before any Greek copies were discovered. His philosophy was an attempt to reconcile Platonic idealism with Aristotelian empiricism, but he writes with the air of a man who has burst the swathing-bands of authority, speaking boldly of the privileges and utility of reason, and contemptuously of those who submit to slumber in a bestial credulity. Such at least, he says, are the opinions of the Arabians.

The universities of the Moors in Spain, and the works of such men as Avicenna, Almanzor, and Averroes, attracted the attention of those few whose native bent constrained them to the pursuit of knowledge. A Latin translation from Arabic of the book of Ptolemy on the Astrolabe was made at Oxford in 1185, and about 1190 Daniel Morley went to Spain and studied at Toledo. The first Latin translation of the Koran was made early in the thirteenth century by an Englishman, Robert Ketensis, who went to Spain for that purpose. While the Crusades exasperated Christendom against the infidels, and enhanced the hatred of heretics as also enemies of God deserving to be remorselessly slain wherever met, they nevertheless brought Christians into contact with a heathen civilisation, and their failure forced Christians to see that their divine religion did not always ensure secular superiority. As Voltaire wittily remarks of this period, "The king's fool was always a native; but his physician was either an Arabian or a Jew."

Roger Bacon, as is well known, was greatly indebted to the Arabians, both for his philosophy, well termed by Whewell the *Encyclopædia* and *Novum Organum* of the thirteenth century, and for those inventions which for so long gave him the renown of being a magician—"Old Hodge Bacon," as he was long known to British story—who acquired his skill by promising himself to the Devil, whether he died in the Church or out of it, and at last cheated Satan by dying in a hole in the church wall. Spectacles, gunpowder, and burning glasses, with the invention of which he has been credited, were known to the Arabians before his time. It was only the common people who suspected Bacon. Bonaventura, the general of the Franciscans, interdicted his lectures at Oxford, and commanded him to leave that city and place himself under the surveillance of the order at Paris. Here, for ten years, he remained under constant supervision, denied all opportunities of writing, and the most jealous care being taken that he had no communication with the secular world. But after he had regained his liberty through the intervention of Clement IV. he was again condemned by Jerome di Ascoli, general of the Franciscans. He was then thrown into prison, where he remained fourteen years. Such were the penalties of pursuing science and philosophy when Christianity was powerful. In no point does the service of "the wonderful doctor" to Freethought stand out more clearly than in his famous anticipation of the enumeration of *Idola* by his great namesake, Francis of Verulam. Roger Bacon distinguished four chief causes of error: dependence upon authority, yielding to custom, giving way to the opinions of the unskilled, and the pretence of knowledge by the ignorant.

His grand-nephew, John Baconthorpe, the diminutive "resolute doctor" who sought to reconcile Averroism with orthodoxy, is notable for his influence on Vanini, who claimed to be his pupil.

Bacon's friend and patron, Robert Grosteste, or Great-head, the vainly excommunicated Bishop of Lincoln, was the clerical representative of manly English thought, and in repelling the papal encroachments rendered a service to his countrymen, which long enshrined him in their hearts. From the day when coward John surrendered his crown to Pandolf, and agreed to pay a thousand marks as tribute to the Pope, all that was patriotic in England strove for release from a bondage which enthralled both mind and estate.

Draper, in the twenty-first chapter of his *Intellectual Development of Europe*, has depicted the degradation and misery of England caused by the drain of its money into Italy. Nor was this all. Foreign—mostly Italian—ecclesiastics were appointed to English livings, and privileges were claimed by the clericals that threatened to override all civil government. A priest might not be apprehended for murder. If a jury found a true bill

against a priest, he must not be brought before the secular courts, but handed over to his diocesan. All Church patronage must rest with the Church. It is true the State never surrendered all that was asked, but as C. H. Pearson, in his able *History of England during the Early and Middle Ages*, remarks:—

"Generally, it may be said that the Church always retrieved under a bad king, an Edward II. or Richard II., the ground which it lost under just and competent sovereigns. Thus, the worthless son of Edward I. repealed a great part of his father's salutary legislation, renounced the right of distraint upon old church lands, restrained the Judges from forcing clerks who had confessed a felony to abjure the realm, and forbade them to take the confessions of clerks, who were willing to turn king's evidence and renounce their benefit of clergy" (vol. ii., p. 489).

It is evident from the letter of the Emperor Frederick II. to Henry II. that that freethinking monarch desired an alliance with England against the usurpations of Rome. From the avidity with which the report had been spread that even coward John contemplated turning Mohamedan rather than submit to Rome, we may judge there were those who would have welcomed such an alliance. It was, however, rather political opposition, excited by papal aggression and clerical corruption, that manifested itself than any specific dissent from religious dogmas. When, early in the fourteenth century, charges of infidelity were sought against the Templars little was elicited to substantiate the charge.

In challenging the orthodox school of realism, represented in England by the followers of Duns Scotus and Anselm, William Occam, the invincible doctor, proved himself on the side of progress and free inquiry. Nominalism was in spirit inductive and critical, realism deductive and dogmatic. Occam allowed theology the dominion of faith just because it was seen to be irrational. He taught that knowledge had a double inadequacy arising from the needs of thinking and of expressing thought in language, and by denying that causes should be multiplied, and that universals existed out of the mind; and by opposing scholastic logomachy he was a progenitor of the philosophy which, under Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and Mill, has gone hand in hand with knowledge of things as they are, instead of as they may be supposed to be. Occam proved his title to invincibility by his resolution in opposing Pope Boniface VIII. and John XXII. "Defend me with your sword, and I will defend you with my pen," he wrote to Philip the Fair. He boldly contended against the supremacy of the Pope in temporal affairs, and attacked the lucre-loving propensities of the pretended followers of Jesus. To argue as he did on the principle that the Church and the Papacy were human was, in that age, temerity entitling him to the honor of excommunication. It indicated the whole gulf which separated the teachings of authority from those of reason and conscience. But in that age new ideas did not pass rapidly into the current of the nation's blood.

Had Wiclif, the details of whose career are too well known to need entering upon here, confined his teachings to Oxford, he would neither have gained the ears of the people nor have drawn down the wrath of Convocation. This he escaped for some time, for the indignation excited by the arrogant renewal in 1365 of the papal claim of feudatory tribute, and the great western schism of the papacy which arose in 1378, greatly facilitated the spread of his views, and Wiclif was unmolested until the Church was aided by prejudice arising from the abortive peasant rising under Wat Tyler. Wiclif's services as the morning star of the Reformation have been amply recognised, and by his appeals to the laity and his translation of the Bible for their use, a merit which he shares with John Purvey, he did much to direct the future course of the Reformation in England.

"Chaucer," says John Fox, the martyrologist, "was a right Wicklavian, or else there never was any." A recent German investigator, Mr. H. Simon, of Schmalkalden, whose essay is published by the Chaucer Society, has come to the same conclusion. He finds that there is good reason to believe that those portions of the *Canterbury Pilgrimage* which touch most closely on the points at issue between Wiclif and the Church of Rome have been grossly tampered with by clerical copyists.

The picture of the simple parson, he thinks, represents one of Wiclif's itinerant preachers, not a Catholic priest. It is known how sedulously it was reported that Chaucer, before his death, made his peace with the Church. A recantation, the spuriousness of which is universally admitted, was appended to his works, and remains itself a proof of our poet's heresy. That he largely sympathised with Wiclif is certain, and his contempt for the clergy and the corruptions of the Church continually appear in his delineation of such characters as those of the Pardoner and Sompnour, who

"would suffer for a quart of wine
A good fellow to have his concubine."

But Chaucer was no "Wiclifite."

Our morning star of song was our first great Humanist. In Italy he had heard, with Petrarch and Boccaccio, the first creakings of the ice of the Middle Ages which announced the coming spring of the Renaissance. His sympathies were too broad to be confined within the bounds of a sect.

In Langland's *Piers Plowman* we also find the hypocritical clergy scourged and a new prominence given to reason and conscience in the direction of the human mind.

(To be continued.)

The "Church Gazette" and Atheists.

"ALL's well that ends well." The *Church Gazette*, with the politeness and good humor which are distinguishing features of its contents, winds up the little controversy on "Atheist or Agnostic" as follows:—

"We are assured by the *Freethinker*, in reply to some remarks of ours in a late number, that the section of opinion which that journal represents prefer the designation of Atheist to that of Agnostic. At the same time, it fully explains that they by no means deny the existence of a Deity.

"This being so, we are fully satisfied, because the question becomes merely one of names; and, when both parties to a discussion really mean the same thing, to pursue it is pure logomachy."

There is nothing more to be said, except that the *Church Gazette* seems rather to make the *Freethinker* and its supporters responsible for the individual preference of a contributor.

FRANCIS NEALE.

Correspondence.

CHRISTIAN CRUELTY.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I have just read your remarks, in last week's issue of the *Freethinker*, on the recent case of cruelty to children at the hands of the Rev. S. J. S. Le Maistre, rector of Everingham. You are entirely too lenient in merely saying that this fellow had a narrow escape. Had he been tried by a jury of average Englishmen, instead of by a bench of magistrates who are hand in glove with the parsons, he would most certainly have got the punishment he so richly deserved. The case was fully reported in the *York Herald*, and the evidence of the boys themselves, backed up by that of the doctors who examined their scarred bodies, as well as of Mrs. Masson, the house-keeper, was quite sufficient to convict Le Maistre of the grossest cruelty. I have discussed the case among my friends here, working men of the better class, and they are unanimous in saying that this "consecrated" blackguard should have had at least two years' hard labor, with a few floggings thrown in, to teach him to behave himself. Theoretically, I am opposed to all such brutal methods of reforming criminals, but when I read how these helpless children had had their tender flesh "cobwebbed" (as one of the witnesses said) with scars from the catgut whip of this "Rev." ruffian, I fairly longed to be within arm's length of him, with that same whip grasped firmly in my hand. And yet, vicious, cruel, and bloodthirsty as he is, he is infinitely tender compared with the Infinite fiend he worships!

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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.

BRADLAUGH CLUB AND INSTITUTE (36 Newington Green-road, Ball's Pond): 8.30, Grand display of "Animated Photographs."

HYDE PARK: 11.30, Mr. Davies.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, W. H. Littleton, "A Peep into Ancient Britain." Illustrated by the oxy-hydrogen light.

WESTMINSTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Grosvenor Arms, Page-street): 7.30, E. Calvert, "George Stephenson: History of Railways and Steam Engines."

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): No lecture.

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): 12, Discussion Class—Impromptu Speeches; 6.30, A. G. Nostik.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, Vocal and Instrumental Music.

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): No lecture.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Pleasant Sunday evening—Vocal and Instrumental Music, etc. December 27, Annual Soirée and Ball. Tea at 5.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—December 31, Birmingham.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham.—January 14, Birmingham.

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