

THE
Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

Dangers of Prophecy.

THE author of a signed article, in a recent number of a well-known weekly newspaper, confessed that he had never read a single line of the writings of Auguste Comte. This journalist was expressing himself pretty freely on social and speculative questions, and evidently thought what he was saying was of considerable importance. In reality it was nothing of the kind. He was merely stating his personal fancies and feelings in the fluent style which he had acquired by long practice. And this application of the literary method to problems of philosophy is extremely common in the journalism of all "civilised" countries. Because a man is able to write fairly forcible English, and has read enough of Carlyle, Ruskin, and perhaps Mill, to give him a tolerable acquaintance with the catchwords of schools and controversies, he is turned on by his editor, or even by himself, to deliver his raw, uninformed judgments upon almost every subject that takes its momentary turn in the public interest. A few of his readers may know more than he does on the matter, but they only smile in private at his airy ignorance and presumption. The great majority of his readers know nothing, or very little; and as long as he affects to know, and wears an air of easy infallibility to the very end, they regard him as a distinguished oracle, and quote his views until they forget them, which generally happens in twenty-four hours. Thus it is that ordinary journalism, while pretending to be a great popular educator, is really a breeder, or at least a nurse, of superficiality and stupidity. It debases and besots the public mind. And the scribes suffer as well as their readers; they lose whatever sense of intellectual responsibility they may have started with; they come to think that anything will do, that a journalist's mind may safely be as empty as a drum and as shallow as a saucer, and that writing is always good enough if it pleases the lazy subscriber. How otherwise could it be possible for a journalist, like the one we have in our mind, to confess without the slightest shame, but rather as a matter for satisfaction, that he had never read a line of the greatest French thinker of the nineteenth century? Comte was certainly this, and perhaps more; for, taking him all round, it is doubtful if the whole world, in the present century, is able to show his superior. He was undoubtedly a man of rare genius; moreover, he was and is what Fuseli said of Blake—"Damned good to steal from." Mill, Buckle, and other honorable men, have stolen from Comte, but many less honorable writers have stolen from him; passing off the sterling gold of his thought as the product of their own intellectual mines. Even those who do not assign Comte one of the very highest positions in modern philosophy must admit that he has been a great feeder and nourisher of a number of other minds of much power and distinction. And if ever the Religion of Humanity gets established, as Paine suggested and Shelley hoped—and we are ready to back it at long odds against any other religion that has turned up in these latter days—the name of Comte will be held in the loftiest reverence as that of its philosophical founder, even if its practical developments should be far different from all his foreshadowings. Mill never had the courage to face the world on a definite basis of pure Naturalism, and Spencer has half-ruined his philosophical character by his rigmarole about the Unknown—as though it were anything but a solemn term for the sum-total of our ignorance. It

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was reserved for Comte, and that *before* them, to write these pregnant and decisive words:—

"Everywhere the relative definitively takes the place of the absolute, and altruism tends to bear down egoism, whilst a systematic method takes the place of a spontaneous evolution. In a word, Humanity definitively substitutes herself for God, without ever forgetting his provisional services."

Note the colossal patronage in those last words. Comte looks down upon the poor old Deity with a certain compassion, in view of the continued attacks of militant Atheism. He will take the ancient and battered Deus—not as a personage, but as a conception—under his kind shelter, and give him a friendly nod now and then for "auld lang syne." Christians will probably call it disgusting impudence on Comte's part, but, at any rate, it shows how irrevocably he had left all Theology behind him.

The passage just quoted from Comte occurs at the end of his *Catechism of Positivism*, admirably translated into English by the late Dr. Richard Congreve. This book is a noble one, although it scarcely justifies its title, for it is not really a Catechism, notwithstanding that two persons speak throughout it as teacher and pupil. But it is a wonderful exposition of Comte's philosophy. He has managed to put all his leading ideas into a very limited space, and even to present them in a most intelligible manner to the reader who has had some sort of scientific, historic, and ethical preparation. And the book is a noble one, not only intellectually, but also morally. The loftiest tone is maintained from the opening to the close. After reading its three hundred pages, which we have done more than once, for it is as full of matter as an egg is full of meat, we close it with a feeling that the writer, in spite of what appears to some of us as intellectual egotism, and to others as a deficiency in the sense of humor, was endowed with a personal character that matched his splendid intelligence.

Nothing could be finer than Comte's reflections on history and the general progress of the human spirit, both in this little work and in his great and elaborate *Positive Polity*. He reads the past with the critical and discriminating eye of a master. In this particular respect we know of no English writer who approaches him. But when he peers into the future he shows the vanity of prophesying. Certain great sweeps of tendency may be discerned by much smaller men than Comte, but when the greatest tries to go beyond that he is baffled by the vastness of nature, the finiteness of the mind of man, and the oppressive relativity of human knowledge. Shakespeare, who saw most things, seems to have seen *this*; for, in the famous and magnificent passage of one of his Sonnets, he speaks of

The prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.

Dreaming, mark; not proclaiming, not even speculating, but indulging in fancy, with *some* direction from experience.

Comte took an optimistic view, for instance, of the decline of the military spirit. He wrote his *Catechism* in 1852, before the Crimean war, and towards the close of the long peace which followed the downfall of Napoleon. He spoke confidently, therefore, of "the permanence of general peace, for the future perfectly secure." Even the Crimean war, which broke out not long afterwards, was treated by him as merely a regrettable episode. In the Preface of his *Appeal to Conservatives*, written in 1855, he still spoke of "the irrevocable

establishment of peace in the West," which he apparently thought secure under the dictatorship of Napoleon III. This great philosopher, trained in science, and learned in political and social history, had not the least idea that the West was entering a new military period, in which the Conscription would be almost universally adopted, and in which would occur some of the most desperate and bloody fighting in human records. He was quite unable to guess that France would march against Austria, ostensibly on behalf of Italy; that Prussia would also array herself against Austria, only a few years later; and that within another few years a terrible war would break out between France and United Germany. All this happened in Europe, and a similar contradiction to Comte's forecast was supplied by other parts of the world. There was even the tremendous struggle between North and South in America, which had been peopled by emigrants from Europe; there was another war between Russia and Turkey; and, finally, there was the quite recent conflict between America and Spain. We need not dwell on the British fighting expeditions in various parts of the globe, or on the Kilkenny-cat performances of the South American Republics. It is sufficient to point out that Comte was woefully mistaken in his outlook. And now, at the close of the nineteenth century—or, as some say, the opening of the twentieth—Europe is groaning under military burdens, millions of soldiers are armed and trained for scientific slaughter, racial animosities are fearfully acute, and the political state of Europe is fraught with the direst peril, not only to peace, but even to civilisation.

Comte was mistaken on another important point. It was his opinion that countries should be small, partly to prevent territorial ambition, but more to actualise the spirit of patriotism, which operated between the family and humanity. "A population of one to three millions," he said, "at the average rate of two hundred and fifty per square mile, is really the extent suited to States enjoying true freedom. For we can only so designate States, all the parts of which coalesce without any violence, from the instinctive sense of a practical community of interest." This idea is, of course, worthy of serious consideration; but Comte was not satisfied with propounding it, or even with urging it; he proceeded, after the manner of all prophets, to make his opinion the basis of a prediction. "Before the end of the nineteenth century," he said, "the French Republic will of its own free will be divided into seventeen independent republics, each comprising five of the existing departments." He looked forward to the early rupture of the "artificial bonds" that hold together England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. This decomposition of the great States would proceed so rapidly that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Portugal and Ireland—if even *they* remained entire—would be "the largest republics of the West." Europe would be divided into "sixty independent republics," having nothing in common but their spiritual organisation. A beginning of this process was perceived by Comte in "the gradual break-up of the colonial system since the independence of America."

Such was Comte's political prophecy, and, instead of being fulfilled, it has been entirely falsified. The colonial system has not broken up; it has wonderfully expanded—principally, of course, in the case of Great Britain, but secondarily in the case of France and Germany. Indeed, the talk is now all Empire; yet we have reached the chronological limit of Comte's forecast. Nor have the great European states shown the slightest tendency to "decompose"; on the contrary, they have grown larger. Even the Russian colossus bestrides a wider territory. France has lost two provinces, but that was in war, and she yearns for their recovery. Germany is no longer a loose collection of separate states, but a well-compacted empire, and all Germans have one common fatherland. In every instance Comte is proved to have been wrong by the unanswerable logic of events. And what is the moral of his blunder? It is threefold. In the first place, as George Eliot said, prophecy is the most gratuitous form of error; in the second place, if we must prophesy, we should be careful to do so on a surer basis than that of our wishes and preferences; and in the third place, the odds are heavy against the most well-informed and

sagacious prophet being right in his predictions. It is hardly given to the wisest of us to know what will happen in the middle of next week; still less in the middle of the next (the twentieth) century. This should make all of us, and especially the social and political reconstructionists, a little more diffident and modest, and a little less cocksure and peremptory. "We know what we are; we know not what we may be"—as Ophelia says. But this is no reason for indolence or despair. It is rather a reason for accepting the philosophy of the concluding words of Voltaire's greatest romance; one of the wisest of utterances in one of the wittiest of books. *Il faut cultiver notre jardin*. The phrase is not really translatable; roughly it means "Let us do our work." After all, we can only *serve* the future through the present; and he is the wisest and best man, and the greatest benefactor of his species, who embraces what truth is available and does what good is possible *to-day*, in the reasonable belief that he has not injured, if he has not assisted, the welfare of *to-morrow*.

G. W. FOOTE.

Secularism and War.

(Concluded from page 83.)

In my article in these columns last week I showed, from the official statement of the National Secular Society, that its members advocated the settlement of national disputes, wherever possible, by arbitration rather than by war. I also pointed out that, while professed Christians have favored the warlike spirit, Secularists preferred to appeal to reason as a remedy for international misunderstandings. I now propose to offer some further considerations in favor of peace rather than of war, for the important reason that the advantages of science, education, and the general harmony of society can only successfully thrive under the influence of peace and justice. As Dr. Dick, in his *Philosophy of Religion*, remarks: "Under the term war is included everything that is base and execrable in moral conduct, and subversive of the principle of benevolence; everything that is destructive of human enjoyment, that rouses the passions into diabolical fury, and adds to the sum of human wretchedness; everything that is oppressive, cruel, and unjust, and everything that is dreadful and appalling to mankind" (p. 267). Now, peace is productive of conditions the very opposite of those just indicated. Her mission is to aid human progress and to consolidate the more refined feelings of our nature. The province of peace is to augment good feelings, to elevate the moral sense, to add to national grandeur, and to increase the true supremacy of empires. For this reason Secularists should regard the establishment and perpetuation of peace as an important factor in the success of a nation.

It is an unfortunate fact that, in the presence of the war-fever which is now raging throughout the civilised world, we cannot honestly congratulate ourselves either upon the results of the progress of civilisation, the fruits of the spread of knowledge, or the beneficial effects of the preaching of two thousand years of the Gospel of Christ. Force and brutality are not confined to reputed savage nations, for these evils have long been, and still are, in active operation among people who call themselves Christians. "Blessed are the peacemakers," said Jesus, and ever since the time when those words were supposed to have been uttered his professed followers have practically preferred to avoid peace and to resort to the curse of warring with each other. The very nations bowing to the same God, worshipping the same Christ, and adopting the same religion, exhaust their resources in slaughtering one another. What a sad influence of Christianity! Fifty years ago some of us hoped that as education increased among the masses, and as the industrial arts were developed beyond all previous dimensions, there would naturally arise a disinclination upon the part of the people to engage in warlike enterprises. But, alas, however justifiable such a hope might then have appeared, we have, within the time named, not only had numerous little wars, but the world has been devastated

by such gigantic conflicts as those which occurred between England and Russia, between France and Germany, and the civil war between the Northern and Southern States of America. And to-day the leading countries of Europe are armed to the teeth, and are still further augmenting their armies and navies. This is not only an anomaly in nations where the boast of love of peace is continually being made, but it furnishes materials for serious reflections upon the part of all sane people. The motto throughout Christendom just now appears to be precisely the same as that which obtained among the ancient Greeks—namely, "Keep the sharpest sword, or live on good terms with those who do."

This is the state of society which obtains in the very stronghold of Christianity, which, in theory at least, enjoins "Peace and goodwill to all men." A greater sham was never perpetrated than such orthodox preaching. It is obvious that the terms "peace" and "goodwill" need revision, for peace is only practised by men who have already goodwill for others. The abhorrence of war is not produced by religious faith, but rather by fostering the loftiest aspirations of human nature. If a God exist who governs and regulates the destiny of man, war should be unknown. By repeating this fact, and by pressing it home to the minds of professing Christians, we may not perhaps be instrumental in converting them from their warlike passions, but it may possibly bring the tinge of shame to their cheeks when the hypocrisy of their love of peace is laid bare. The Freethought movement has been the means of taming, to a large extent, the savage treatment of Christians towards heretics, and it is to be hoped that through the same agency the terrible evils of war will be considerably reduced, if not altogether destroyed. At least, to achieve this desirable result is one of the principal aims of Secularists, who, in spite of all drawbacks, do not despair that the time will come when their mission of peace will be crowned with success. This consummation, so devoutly wished, may not be realised during the lives of many who are now engaged in Freethought work; but that reflection does not damp the ardour or destroy the hopes of the present workers who are endeavoring to substitute peace for war in the settlement of national disputes. Great reforms are not of sudden birth, nor are they consolidated in one generation. Freethinkers, therefore, toil on, hoping and believing that in performing what they deem their duty they are hastening on the period when a better, nobler, and more humane condition of society will replace the one in which we are now living.

There is one fact that it would be well for us all to remember. It is this: As a rule, war does not settle the questions involved in the dispute which caused the conflict. After thousands of lives have been sacrificed, and perhaps millions of pounds spent, the very points of difference which occasioned war have to be again discussed and decided in the manner which should have been adopted previously to the outbreak of hostilities. Further, it does not follow that the fighting secures the triumph of justice. It is *might*, not *right*, that wins as the result of an appeal to arms. Besides, the men who make the quarrels are *not* the men who fight. Husbands, fathers, and sons, who have had nothing to do in causing the wars, are the victims who brave the dangers of the battlefield. If fighting there must be, I would have kings, kaisers, czars, and would-be statesmen, who generally are the originators of the quarrels, be the foremost actors in the wars. There is so much religious cant mixed up with modern warfare that one is led to deplore that the heroism of the soldier should be allied with the hypocrisy of the priest. Many of the ancient nations did not, before engaging in war, profess to regret having to slaughter their fellow men, neither did they, as a rule, appeal to priests and their gods to help them in their work of desolation. But the pharisaical church-goers of to-day assume feelings of horror at the contemplation of war, and when it is commenced they join in priestly supplication to their God for his co-operation in making them victorious on the battlefield. Yet these Pharisees do nothing to prevent war, or to calm the warlike passions of the nation. The news of the killing of thousands of their brothers in Christ calls forth their praises to God; while the same tidings bring grief and desolation to homes which are wrecked,

and to wives and mothers who are left to the tender mercies of charity for their means of subsistence.

To me, war in most cases appears to be so terrible in itself and so disastrous in its consequences that to be compelled to engage in it ought to be regarded as the greatest possible misfortune of life. It entails upon the masses such personal woes and heavy pecuniary burdens that it is surprising so many of them should applaud it as they do. I quite agree with the Republican poet:—

War is a game that, were subjects wise,
Kings would not play at.

CHARLES WATTS.

Christianity's Reserves.

IN the history of every religion there is a period when, although it may make the angels weep, it can only make mortals laugh. Profound conviction, disinterested devotion to a set of ideas, will always command our admiration, even while a stern sense of social duty compels us to attack those beliefs with all the energy we have, and with all the weapons of reason, ridicule, and satire at our disposal. We respect the man even while we attack his most cherished convictions. We believe the latter to be untruthful and injurious, but we can at least respect the intellectual sincerity of the man with whom we are fighting.

We look back upon the uncompromising bigotry of earlier generations, and instinctively recoil from the torture of heretics, the gloom, the intolerance, and the sacrifice of all that was brightest in life. But when we look round at the shilly-shallying, weak-kneed clergy of our own day, temporising, apologising, "holding the candle to the Devil" inside and outside the Churches; when we see their professed liberalism and surreptitious intolerance, their pretended acceptance of the results of recent Biblical criticism, and their frantic endeavors to keep in the schools the very teaching they repudiate in apologetic writings; when we note the hundred and one different ways in which the clergy try to run with the hare and keep in with the hounds, then we say, "Give us rather the intolerant but intellectually honest bigots of the seventeenth century in preference to the cowardly incompetents of our own day."

In sober truth, intellectual strength and honesty are no longer compatible with a profession of Christianity. Two or three hundred years ago a man could enter the Church without either conscious dissimulation or the sacrifice of his self-respect. The world was so much smaller and simpler, science was only commencing its triumphant career, and Christianity was such a large and such an important fact in life, that there was little or no sense of self-stultification in taking up its advocacy as a life's career. Now all has changed. The cosmical basis of Christianity has been destroyed by a series of workers commencing with Copernicus and culminating with Kepler. Evolution has destroyed whatever fancied support it gained from biology. Anthropology has shown us the origin of all religious ideas, and a study of primitive sociology has made clear the conditions of their development. Christianity, religion in general, is left without any foundation save a number of artificial supports of doubtful quality and impermanent value.

Christianity no longer appeals to conviction; its chief appeals are to the narrow interests of the individual. To one class it appeals as a means of conserving threatened vested interests; to another as a means of relieving miseries which it has been no small means of perpetuating; and to yet another as a profession in life, holding out to incompetency and chicanery the promise of a profitable career. Consider the support given to Christianity by the mere fact that it exists and enjoys a recognised social position. A London merchant explained to John Russell Lowell, who had been wondering at his attending church while holding rather heretical views, that he went because it was the established thing to do; and, added this accommodating gentleman, "If you get your opinions established I'll attend that as well." Hazlitt said that, if you asked the average middle-class Englishman why he went to church, he would tell you in strict confidence it was because his wife took him. And if the ordinary Englishman were perfectly candid, he might give a number of

reasons for his support not quite so creditable even as this one.

How many parents are there who look upon a profession of religious beliefs as the best means of securing good matrimonial alliances for their daughters, and advancement for their sons? How many men in business regard religious belief as an indispensable condition of building up a good connection, or an easy method of gaining pardon for any business misdemeanors of which they may be guilty. The early Christians may have believed in Jesus because of the prophets that went before him; the modern one certainly believes in Jesus because of the *profits* that come after him. It may be a matter of dispute whether we run our business on Christian lines, or our Christianity on business lines; it is certain, however, that with a large number Christianity is accepted as a fair commercial transaction, and that, as Ruskin said, "If engineers would build a tunnel to hell, Christians would invest their money in it, and stop building churches for fear of lowering the dividends." Take away from Christianity all that it gains from social establishment, let it depend for support solely upon straightforward conviction, and how long would it endure? Only so long as the sheer inertia of the people enabled it to persist. As it is, people take Christianity because they find it ready to hand, because they find it profitable, and because they are not sufficiently in love with truth to face social discomfort and annoyance to obtain it.

We are accustomed to soothe our minds with a number of fine-sounding maxims concerning the power and majesty of truth and the weakness of error. They sound nicely, and may serve a useful part in spurring people to renewed endeavors after a higher life. But if we look soberly and seriously at life, what we find is that truth is often crushed in its encounter with error, and that the weakest passion with the majority of people is the sincere desire for truth. Instead of love of truth being the passion to which men and women will sacrifice most, it is usually that to which they will sacrifice least. Truth may be essential to all men and women, but bitter experience tells us that in most cases they will rub along with a wonderfully small amount, and will sooner economise in this direction than in any other.

Nor is it correct that if we only let truth and error grapple truth is bound to come out uppermost. Milton's saying, "Let truth and error grapple, for truth was never yet worsted in fair and open encounter," may be true enough, but only in the sense that most laws of physics are true—in *vacuo*. For truth never does meet error in a fair and open encounter; it is always heavily handicapped. Truth enters the arena lacking the authority of fashion, of custom, of power. Error is there with all the weight of tradition behind it, with all the wealth of threatened vested interests to purchase support, with all the *prestige* of social position to silence dissent. The opposing forces are never equal, and never can be equal. Under normal circumstances it is the new-born truth fighting a two-thousand-year-old lie; poverty fighting wealth; the timid present fighting the truculent past.

But prominent among the artificial supports of Christianity stands the existence of a large army of professional advocates who exist for the sole purpose of enforcing its claims on the people. Theoretically the clergy exist for the benefit of religious beliefs; practically religious beliefs exist for the benefit of the clergy. This is inevitable when the advocacy of any particular view becomes a recognised profession, and withal a lucrative one, not so much from a sincere conviction of its truthfulness or general utility as from the simple reason that it is a profession. I do not mean that there are not many among the clergy who may honestly believe their religion to be both truthful and useful, only that when you have religion existing in the shape of wealthy organised corporations it is taken up with, in the majority of cases, as a lawyer or a doctor takes up his profession—because it is a recognised method of getting a living.

Nor have I any objection to the clergy getting a living from their preaching, provided it is obtained by legitimate methods, which at present is not the case. If the people want clergymen to preach to them on a

subject upon which neither of them knows anything, they are morally bound to maintain him. Charles II. has not been credited with a superabundance of wisdom, but one reputed saying of his is worth noting. He explained a popular preacher's success with his congregation by saying that "his nonsense suited their nonsense," which was a remark of wider application than the mutton-eating king dreamed of. If people require a parson to talk nonsense to them, let them pay him by all means. It is a poor game, but this is their concern, not mine.

But the clergy are not content to urge their claims in a legitimate manner. Instead of trusting to conviction, they call in the assistance of the State on every possible occasion. They bribe the poor by charities, which are only advertisements for their particular "doxy"; they enlist the help of the interested classes by promising to keep the "people" in order; they deliberately *breed* customers by forcing their creeds upon the unresisting mind of childhood, and safeguard themselves by withholding knowledge from the people whenever it is possible to do so.

Let those who talk so glibly about the value of religion, its indestructibility, and the craving of human nature for it—let them remove from religion all these artificial social supports, these reserves that are always brought up to compel obedience when it cannot demand conviction; let it appeal to an educated human reason as religion, and in a few generations it would be looked upon by educated men and women in the same spirit as they now look upon the dead gods of the uncivilised past.

C. COHEN.

Who Would be a God?

REALLY, in these latter days, it is no light and easy thing to be a god. He has so much to attend to. The calls upon his time are so incessant that his work may be said to never cease. Yahveh wanted a rest after six days' work. The modern god, however, has to keep pegging away day and night throughout the blessed year. No wonder the present-day Jove sometimes nods. And then, of course, follows a lot of inward grumbling on the part of his devotees, but thinly concealed by the pious formula, "Thy will be done." Everybody wants everything at once, and wants absolutely irreconcilable, not to say impossible, things too. What is one man's meat is another man's poison. There never was a god in existence that could grant all the contrary requests that are made.

Certainly the Deity might have ordered things differently at the beginning. But possibly even a god cannot be expected to think of everything when he has such a mighty big job on hand. The schemes of gods, as well as those of men and mice, may gang a-gley. Poor God has to put up with the general arrangements as he has made them. Any alteration now might upset the whole machine, any drastic changes might queer the whole deal. The only resort is to imbue the minds of his worshippers with the belief that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, this is the best of all possible worlds. That takes some doing. It is not so easy to persuade a man that evil is good; that pain and misery and famine and strife are all for his benefit; that droughts, inundations, pestilence, and earthquakes are exhibitions of an almighty and benevolent power. Still, it has to be done. It is doubtful if even God himself could do it without the assistance of his high priests. They are equal to any amount of humbug. They consider that they are appointed—we know they are paid—to bluff and bewilder common mortals. They raise imposing conventicles; call themselves "Reverends," "Right Reverends," "Venerables," and goodness knows what; array themselves in all kinds of queer garments and fine linen; adopt all sorts of high-sounding, mystifying terminology to conceal the utter nonsense they desire to convey. They enlist the support of the State; they lay their hands on the nation's money, and they capture the children almost before they can lisp. There is nothing they can't do, or won't do, to make evil appear good; wrong look as if it were right; folly as if it were supreme wisdom; falsehood as if it were unassailable truth. They succeed to an extent. If they refrain

from privately exchanging smiles, we may be sure that their patron-god indulges in many a hearty laugh at them all. He leaves them to this work, and, so far, rests serene in a consciousness of the relative success of their endeavors.

But there are certain things that he must do himself—more than enough to occupy him all his time. As for the tax on his patience, that is beyond all adequate estimate. Yahveh used to have some terrible fits of passion at times. In one of these he drowned the world. The up-to-date deity is not given to these unseemly ebullitions. In these days even his worshippers would deem them bad form. Still, he can't help feeling annoyed at the waywardness of these creatures of his hands. Possibly he often curses himself for being such a fool as to start on the job at all. He was far happier resting by himself in the solitude of infinity. Like the distracted or hen-pecked husband, he must look back with envy on the happiness of earlier days, when he was free from an irksome tie.

He might, of course, put an end to it all by simply sweeping all creation out of existence. Why doesn't he? Pride, infinite pride, is the explanation. He can't bring himself to confess that his work is all a failure. Yahveh, in a moment of self-complacency, pronounced his own work good. But he lived to correct that notion. He got rid of his early illusion, and proceeded to swill things away. Even he must needs leave some flotsam and jetsam on the face of the waters, sufficient to give him later on so much pain and trouble that he had to sacrifice his own son to appease his own indignation.

The up-to-date god, who is so much the maker of all things that he must have made Yahveh or our notions of him, is not quite the deity to throw up the sponge, however distressing the results of his work may be. Seemingly, he prefers to make the best of a bad job. And thus he excites our sincerest commiseration. Who would be in his place? Uneasy lies the head that rules creation. Just think of all the conflicting interests he has to attend to, and either satisfy or disappoint. He has made certain promises in regard to prayers—or, if he hasn't, his priests have made them for him. In honor, he feels bound to fulfil them. But it can't be done.

Take, for instance, affairs at the present time. Here are the British praying to him like steam for the success of their arms in South Africa. From the Queen and Archbishop of Canterbury downwards, they are praying that the Boers may be speedily whipped. On the other hand, the Boers—who by their piety have greater claims upon him than any we can advance—are praying that they may smite and smash the British into smithereens. What is he to do? Isn't it distracting enough to drive any god mad? And at his time of life too. He seems—at any rate, up to quite recently—to have been giving the Boers a lift. Sooner or later, he will have to do something for the other side—perhaps has done before this appears. But in the end there is sure to be a deuce of a lot of dissatisfaction on one side or the other. And how is he to answer all the individual appeals—the piteous supplications of fathers, mothers, wives, sisters, brothers, sweethearts, children who have dear ones at the front? If there is a war, somebody must be killed. You ask, Why didn't he prevent the war? I reply, Ask me another. I don't know; his priests don't know; nobody knows. It is a mystery too deep to be fathomed. True; you can't see very far down into a muddy puddle.

FRANCIS NEALE.

During the Christmas tree exercises at the Pinhook Methodist Church at Shelbyville, Ind., Mrs. William Harrell was called to the tree to receive a present, which proved to be a pair of colored doll babies. She accepted the babies, and, as she returned to her seat, threw them in the face of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Wick Harrell, who, she had reason to believe, had placed them on the tree. She then caught Mrs. Harrell by the hair, and dragged her from her seat. The assailed woman was being stamped almost to death when her husband came to her rescue, knocking her assailant down. This brought William Harrell to the scene, and he and his brother engaged in a rough-and-tumble fight, while women and children hastened from the building. The Rev. John Westhaver attempted to separate the struggling men, and when the battle ceased he was a sorrowful-looking sight, his face being severely pounded. The exercises were declared off. The families are prominent.—*Chicago Tribune.*

Boycotting the Christians' Murder Match; Or, The Old Trinity's Neutrality.

THE Trinity sat in their Heavenly chair,
The Father, the Son, and the Dove,
In the beautiful City so bright and fair,
So full of joy and love,
In the Heavenly regions—God knows where—
Some millions of miles up there.

Some verbal petitions arrived that day
From the mundane sphere below;
They'd been on the journey, I'm bound to say,
A couple of months or so,
For petitions that travel the Milky Way
Have got a long way to go.

Said Jah, "Do you hear that peculiar sound,
Like the buzzing of billions of bees?
All the parsons are praying, I'll bet you a pound,
They are 'flopping' again on their knees;
Let me hear what they're saying, these worms of the
ground—
Fetch an ear-trumpet, Christ, if you please."

Christ went for the trumpet and brought it to Jah,
Who applied it to one of His ears;
He listened awhile, then He muttered, "Pooh! Bah!"
And His face was contorted with sneers,
For the "jabber" that struck the tympanum of "Pa"
Was as next hereinafter appears.

British:—

"O Lord, back the troops of the British Em-pire,
Be our shield 'gainst the enemy's sword."

Boers:—

"Turn aside all their shots; but, O Lord, when we fire,
May their bodies with bullets be bored."

British:—

"To hell with old Kruger; O grant our desire;
We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord."

Said Jehovah the Father to Christ and the Bird,
"There's a murder-match on down below
'Twi'x the British and Boers, and from what I have
heard

They are both of them friends of our Co.,
And they both want our help."—Said the Son, "That's
absurd";

And the Holy Ghost muttered, "What ho!"

Said the Father, "A plague on each son of a gun;
If I help them at all, may I roast!
Let things take their course."—"So say I," said the
Son;

"Hear, hear! that's the talk," said the Ghost.
So the slaughter continues: the fight will be won
By the ones that can slaughter the most!

ESS JAY BEE.

Acid Drops.

"THE Bishops," the *Daily News* says, "seem to have bungled badly in the matter of the Day of Intercession." Well, what of that? Does any man in his senses really believe that intercessions in England will have any influence on the course of the war in South Africa? We don't credit even the Archbishop of Canterbury with such stupidity. It is true that he preached on Sunday afternoon at Lambeth Parish Church, and that the names of fifty men, formerly connected with the parish and now at the front, were read out before the Lord, with a view to his looking after their "safety." But that little incident was only part of the day's business. "Cantaur" has to do this sort of thing, foolish as it is; but he is handsomely paid for it, and there is much consolation in a big salary, which even alleviates the pangs of self-contempt.

A sergeant, who is also a Salvationist, and who was engaged in the battle of Magersfontein, writes home that he was led to read the Ninety-first Psalm before the battle, and, although shells and bullets rained around him, sweeping down his comrades to the right and left of him, not one touched him. This letter, we are told, "thrilled the home of his spiritual birth." Well, it is interesting as showing an easy method of evading the deadly missiles of the Boers. Let every British soldier read the Ninety-first Psalm before an engagement, and then we shall be shocked by no further lists of terrible casualties.

That embodiment of prelatical politeness and liberality of sentiment, the Bishop of Coventry, who recently compared Birmingham Secularists to burglars, has been speaking of

the war at Leeds. Of course, he talked nonsense. He seems to have a sufficient glimmering of intelligence to perceive the anomaly that "we were standing before the heathen, preaching to them the Gospel of Peace at a time when Christian was fighting against Christian." War, however, he said, was a visitation of God and a blessing in disguise. Why, then, is his Church praying for its early cessation? If it is such a blessing, let the Lord give us as much of it as he pleases. The war, says this prelate, has knit together the bonds of empire and the brotherhood of our whole race. Yes, and it has also knit us in a deadly conflict.

The clerico-military party in France is steadily pursuing its design of fomenting a quarrel with England; partly because England is Protestant, partly because it is the chief home of free institutions, and partly because it is too dangerous to pick a quarrel with Germany. Something must be done to make a row with a view to overthrowing the Republic, and politicians move, like nature, along the line of least resistance, or what they take to be such. And it really seems quite possible that these reckless intriguers may succeed. They have to deal with a credulous and inflammable public, and they stick at nothing that tends to make them hate the English ogre. The most extensively circulated paper in France is *Le Petit Journal*, and its influence was used against justice for Dreyfus. Now it is being used just as unscrupulously against England. A recent editorial in the *Journal* denounced "British ferocity," and declared it to be responsible for the revolt of "every Afrikander in Cape Colony and Natal"! According to this organ of inaccurate news and inventive calumny, the British had proclaimed that they would make a general massacre of the African rebels, and repeat at Pretoria the horrors of Omdurman—killing the men, violating the women, and cutting the throats of the children. No wonder the French are learning to hate us if this is the sort of stuff they read in their daily newspapers.

Mr. Dillon, in the House of Commons, was not above appealing to mere race hatred in his speech on the Address. He spoke of English soldiers as "fighting from behind the Irish" in South Africa, and said that the Irish soldiers had lost 200 per cent. more heavily than the English. Even if this were true, it would probably prove to be no more than the chances of war; for some engagements are bloodier than others, and the regiments that happen to be in the most dangerous place will naturally be the greatest sufferers. But it is *not* true. A careful table of statistics has been made out by a correspondent of the *Westminster Gazette*, from which it appears that, up to January 10, the English (British) battalions had lost 447 killed, and the Irish battalions 146. According to the number of battalions engaged, the Irish killed in action are just $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. in excess of the English. Immediately afterwards, however, at Spion Kop the English lost 180 killed and the Irish only three. But this again only proves that the English soldiers happened to be just where the work was deadliest. Englishmen don't doubt the valor of Irish soldiers, and Mr. Dillon was playing to a very wretched Irish gallery in affecting to doubt the courage of their English comrades. He must be a great fool if he fancies it brings Home Rule any nearer. The present writer helped to organise the great London reception of Mr. T. D. Sullivan on his release from an Irish gaol, and stood by his side on the platform in Hyde Park. Englishmen didn't get *behind* Irishmen then, and it will be rather difficult for some of them to get *beside* Mr. Dillon if he ever wants their assistance.

Mr. Tim Healy, the darling of the Irish priests, played the same sort of tune as Mr. Dillon. He talked insufferable nonsense, only meant to be irritating, about the shameful cowardice of the English in leaving General Symons to die. He might as well have talked of the shameful cowardice of all those hundreds of Irish soldiers who surrendered to the Boers on that hill outside Ladysmith, and are now prisoners at Pretoria. The truth is, there was no cowardice in the matter. Sir George White had to fall back on Ladysmith because his positions were untenable. General Symons was left in the English hospital because he could not be removed, and he did not fall into the hands of savages. There was no cowardice in either case, and Mr. Tim Healy knows it. But as he chooses to talk in this way, we may remind him that a good many English supporters of Home Rule have their own opinion of how he left Parnell, how he snapped at the hand that had made him, and how he went over bag and baggage to the triumphant priests. The less Mr. Tim Healy talks about leaving a wounded General to die the better for his own reputation.

"You are as God made you. We suspect you." So said Mr. Healy to the British members of the House of Commons. Whereupon the *Daily News* prints the following epigram:—

'Tis very true what Tim avers,
And handsome of him really—
If God, then, made the Britishers,
Pray, who made Mr. Healy?

Mr. Tim Healy's bitter tongue was effective enough at one

point of his speech. "While one great Protestant nation," he said, "was slaughtering another Protestant nation, missionaries were being sent out to convert the heathen, who might well exclaim, 'How these Christians love one another.'" A hit, a palpable hit! But the Catholics are no better than the Protestants in this respect.

Mr. J. E. Redmond has issued a manifesto in the name of the United Nationalist Party. We have no concern with it in these columns as far as it is political. But there is one passage of it which refers to the question of a Catholic University in Ireland. "Those of our Catholic youth," we read, "who might naturally be expected to become the leaders of public opinion are still condemned by the spirit of an old-world bigotry to deprive themselves of the advantages of the higher training of the intellect unless they resort to institutions founded and carried on on principles at variance with their religious convictions." This sentence is not a masterpiece of composition, nor will it stand examination from other points of view. It is really the Catholic who is guilty of "old-world bigotry," since he objects to studying secular subjects in association with his fellow citizens of a different faith. This cry for a Catholic University in Ireland is raised by the priests, who want a State-supported institution in which they can see that Catholic theology is mixed up with all studies; in short, they want a University directly under their own thumbs; and this is their little game in every part of Christendom where they have the slightest chance of success.

Priests and parsons have preached a lot about the fear of death, and how solemn it makes us to feel that we shall soon be standing in the presence of God. Well, we commend the following story to their best attention. Lieutenant Adie, of the Queenslanders, was thrice wounded in the fight at Sunny-side. One bullet had struck him in the stomach, and his wounds were thought to be mortal. One of his comrades went to cheer him up, and found him lying in the ambulance, singing with much liveliness the comic song, "Oh, why did I leave my little back room in Bloomsbury?"

There was once a Shelley Society, consisting of a certain number of the poet's admirers who met periodically to talk about him. Mr. Bernard Shaw was a member of it—in his callow days; and he used to say that, although Shelley was a Vegetarian, a Republican, and an Atheist, he nearly burst the Society up by confessing that he also was a Vegetarian, a Republican, and an Atheist. Eventually the Shelley Society died a natural death—of inanition.

There was a Browning Society, too. It was started in his lifetime, and we believe he used to laugh at it. The members tried to untwist his sometimes knotted grammar, and bathed their souls in the mysteries of *Sordello*. But the Browning Society has long been defunct.

Bradlaugh—perhaps because he was not a poet—fared still worse. Some of his admirers, after his death, started a Club and took his name in vain by tacking it on to their enterprise. Lecturing went on for a while on Sunday evenings, but it soon dropped, and the place sank into the usual type of London Club, where the Objects are full of principle and the mouths are full of beer.

Poor Bradlaugh! The Shelley Society is dead, the Browning Society is dead, and the Bradlaugh Club still lives.

Now we are to have a Ruskin Society. A number of enthusiastic, if ill-advised, gentlemen, and probably several ladies, met the other day at St. Martin's Town Hall to form one. Mr. Frederic Harrison, who ought to know better, condescended to take the chair, and introduced the orator of the occasion—the Rev. J. B. Booth, of St. James's Church, Piccadilly, who dragged God Almighty into his exordium. After the usual votes of thanks, for nothing in particular, it was resolved that a Ruskin Union (not a workhouse) should be formed, to promote the study of Ruskin's writings, to hold meetings for reading and discussion, to publish a Journal of Proceedings, and to collect half-a-guinea a year from all persons willing to become members. By way of climax, the Rev. J. B. Booth was appointed honorary secretary.

We don't suppose we shall hear much of the Ruskin Union. Most people see through that sort of thing nowadays, and have a shrewd suspicion that a collection of nobodies can hardly throw lustre on the reputation of a man of genius. All that anybody can do for Ruskin is to make it easy for people to read him. But that is a matter for the publishers, for the question of accessibility is finally a question of price.

The only Society we can understand, bearing a great man's name, is a Burns Society. There are many of them. Each one has a member called John Barleycorn. Once a year they all drink extra deep to the Immortal Memory; and when

they walk, skip, or reel home in the "wee hours ayont the twel'" their wives overlook it for the sake of poetry and patriotism.

"One Law for the Rich" is the heading of an article by Mr. Andrew Lang in the *Westminster Gazette*. Mr. Lang deals with the present fashionable practice of palmistry, compared with which he says that "thimble-rigging is an exact science and an honorable profession." Still, it flourishes, and the police wink at it. "But the point is," Mr. Lang says, "that a poor man or woman who teaches or professes this ridiculous art at a charge of a couple of shillings is fined or imprisoned. Meanwhile, anybody who charges a guinea is, as a rule, perfectly safe. This," he adds, "is a disgrace to society; either the idiotic art is harmless or it is harmful; the amount of the fee makes no moral, and, I would humbly suggest, ought to make no legal, difference." Precisely so—on abstract grounds; but, if you proceed in this way practically, what havoc you will play with society. When hobbledoys play at pitch-and-toss, or small bookmakers take betting commissions at street-corners, we all know it is a crime, and we rejoice to see them punished. But when the gambling and betting involves the loss and gain of hundreds and thousands of pounds, we have a natural respect for the size of the offence. It would be absurd, not to say wicked, to run in a lord as well as a loafer, or a great offender as well as a little one. Similarly in the matter of palmistry. Guinea practitioners are respectable; it is the sixpenny criminals who are arrested and locked up. To a very large extent, of course, palmistry is fortune-telling. Mr. Lang argues that the guinea and the sixpenny fortune-teller should be treated alike. Yes, but what about the Catholic priest? Not only does he pretend to know a good deal about the fate of the dead, but he actually pretends to be able to influence it, and he takes money for masses to hasten poor souls out of purgatory. Is not this a great deal worse than ordinary fortune-telling? And ought not Mr. Lang to include all these clerical impostors in his indictment?

Theology is in a bad way at the University of Zurich. The theological faculty includes ten members—six ordinary professors, one professor extraordinary, and three tutors. During the last term they had only ten students at their lectures and classes, and this term they have only six students and two "hearers." At this rate the professors and tutors will soon have to lecture and teach each other, unless their faculty is abolished as a relic of superstition.

A peculiar controversy is now raging among the communicants of the Evangelical Zion Tabernacle, Chicago, over the action of the pastor, the Rev. Dr. Dowie, who, on a recent Sunday, instead of delivering a sermon from the pulpit, had a phonograph to act in his stead. The pastor was called out of town unexpectedly the last part of the week, and, being unable to find a substitute to act for him, delivered a discourse into a phonograph, and then sent the cylinder to the sexton of the church, who fitted it in another machine, and set it going on Sunday morning after the congregation had arrived. Many of the members were shocked at what they termed the unseemly levity, and a meeting of the church officers has been called to consider the matter.

We don't see where the levity comes in. Such an arrangement might be acceptable to flocks whose shepherds are not of such pleasing personal appearance that the sheep want to be eternally gazing upon them. And then it would be convenient to the shepherds who would like to remain a few Sundays from time to time at the seaside, or run up to London for a little jollification in mufti.

It has frequently been pointed out that the men who now take holy orders in the Church are, in the bulk, of a remarkably lower average of intellectual attainment than was formerly the case. According to the report made by Professor Ince, of Oxford, on the Preliminary Examination of Candidates for Holy Orders, many of the candidates displayed intellectual sloth. "Few had thought out the meaning of the words of Christ, or even taken an intelligent view of the circumstances under which the Gospels were composed." He also speaks of their gross ignorance of the Old Testament.

The world is moving. One of the special contributors to the *Christian World* writes as follows: "Within living memory there was a notion dominant about the Bible—that it was and how its statements should be regarded—which, amongst thinking men, has completely disappeared. Our fathers piled the Biblical materials into a fancy structure which has tumbled down. But the materials themselves are uninjured, waiting to be wrought into a more reliable building. The old mistakes will not be repeated in the new venture. The next builders will know the difference between history and legend, and will not put myths at the bottom to bear a weight which the granite of fact is alone equal to. The coming doctrine of the Bible must not be open to the

reproach levelled by Maurice at the theologians of his day, when he wondered 'that the faith of scientific men in the Bible has not wholly perished when they see how small ours is, and by what tricks we are sustaining it.'"

Yes, but when the legends and myths of the Bible are set aside as unauthoritative, how much of that blessed book will remain?

In an article on "Is Christianity Spreading?" in the *Sunday Chimes*, a writer gives the following estimate of the relative proportions of the population of the globe:—Christians, 460 millions; non-Christians, 968½ millions; that is, the non-Christians are 48½ millions more than double the Christians.

Now how on earth can Christianity be regarded as a heaven-sent Gospel when, after all these centuries, it has reached so few? Where was the use of Christ bringing a Gospel, and then departing without making better arrangements for its spread?

A monkey in the menagerie established by the Rev. J. W. Horsley in the churchyard of St. Peter's, Waltham, has sadly belied its antecedents. It used to be so amiable that it would shake hands, and even kiss a person. The other week it exhibited cannibalistic tastes, biting a little girl on the leg, for which lamentable defection the Rev. Horsley has had to pay 5s. by order of the Lambeth County-court judge.

The *Pull Mall Gazette*, commenting on the case, observes that "at one time old-fashioned piety might have been shocked by the exhibition of the origin of man so near a church." The *St. James's Gazette* thinks the idea of thus blending religious with civil instruction is an excellent one both for the parishioners and the menagerie, but if the monkey had been brought into the proximity of the church to read and learn, it seems to have ended up by marking and digesting.

We now know at what price some people value their immortal souls—at any rate, the value placed upon his soul by one person—a comedian described as an "Ethiopian sketchist." He sued another professional for the return of a diamond pin. The verdict being against him, he thus appealed to the Judge: "Oh let me have the pin. I would rather lose my soul than that pin." To which his Honor replied: "I have no desire to see you lose your soul, but I believe defendant when he says you made him a present of the pin." So that the Ethiopian sketchist remains in undisturbed possession of his soul, but minus his pin, and may display or conceal, as he pleases, his disgust at the arrangement.

Great astonishment was expressed by the coroner at a Canning Town inquest that a witness, a girl of thirteen, did not know what the Bible is. "You go to school," he says, "and don't know what the Bible is?" To which the witness replied, "No; what is it?" Shocking! Still, we might ask this coroner if he is quite sure that nine out of ten "grown-ups" know what the Bible is—that is, by actual study of its contents and claims. It doesn't look like it to see the hopelessly diverse views of those who do read the book, and the easy, happy ignorance of those who never think of glancing at its pages.

The Rev. W. Pope did not figure very well in the recent debate at the Metropolitan Asylums Board. A matron applied for leave to go as a nursing-sister to Capetown. The Hospital Committee thought she should stay at home and look after the sick poor under her charge. Thereupon the Rev. Pope said the Committee were prejudiced, and, upon Admiral Adeane dissenting, expressed his surprise that an English Admiral should approve the Committee's view. Then the Rev. Pope described a remark made by Mr. Crooks as most cowardly. Mr. Crooks, however, got his own back, for he asked the Rev. Pope why he didn't go and pray to the soldiers. The Rev. Pope made no reply, the fact being that, like a number of other bellicose clerics who, at an early stage, did their best to support warlike views, now that war is proceeding prefer to stay at home at ease.

Prosecution or persecution—call it which you will—tries all its victims, and overtries all but the very strongest. We are not surprised, therefore, to hear that the "Peculiar People," or at least a considerable number of them, are hedging. They do not like the prospect of being imprisoned by their professed fellow Christians for obeying Jesus Christ. Heaven is such a long way off, and the gaol is so near; God is so distant, and the policeman so handy. Accordingly one half of these "Peculiar People" are breaking away from the other half, and calling themselves "Liberty Men," by which fine title they only mean that they should be free to escape imprisonment by obeying the magistrates instead of the Lord Jesus. Mr. Hempstead is the leader of his section, and Mr. Heddle leads the old, original, uncorrupted body of true

believers. Philosophically, of course, we regard the orthodox section as mistaken enthusiasts; but we cannot help admiring their honesty and tenacity.

Mr. Hempstead, the leader of the so-called "Liberty Men," has explained to a *Morning Leader* interviewer that he and his followers have learnt from observation that "the Power above is not disposed to heal immediately in all cases." Of course not, but this has not escaped the notice of the orthodox party. The question arises: What should be done then? Trust to the will of the Lord, or run for a doctor? Surely the latter is *distrusting* the will of the Lord, and trying to take the matter out of his hands. Mr. Hempstead ought to see this. He ought also to see that his observation about the inaction of "the Power above" is simply carried a little farther by the Freethinker, who has found it to be constant instead of occasional.

Another Temple of God has been destroyed by fire—this time the Church of St. Savior, Liverpool, built at a cost of £12,000. In a short time the building was in a complete blaze. It had been recently renovated and decorated. How the great "I am" must have smiled when that work of renovation was going on! Thus doth the Lord exhibit his watchful care for his own conventicles, and direct the efforts of his servants.

According to the *Publishers' Circular*, the latest trust is one to run "a corner" in Bibles. It is announced from New York that the publishers of the Bible are combining in order to raise the price from fifteen to twenty-five per cent. Rather unwise, from a religious point of view, to raise the price of the book when its interest and authority are so rapidly diminishing. How many millions of copies have to be given away at the present time? Surely there never was a book which owes so much of its circulation to gratuitous distribution.

A Scarborough cleric the other day made arrangements to meet a funeral at the cemetery. The mourners turned up at the appointed time, but nothing was seen of the clergyman. Half an hour or more was spent waiting in the bitter cold, and then a messenger was despatched to inquire for the defaulter, who was found enjoying his pipe before a good fire. He had quite forgotten his engagement. This was rather rough on the mourners. From another point of view, the "absent-minded cleric" was probably quite as well employed with his pipe as in reading mechanically that pious piece of mockery, the Church of England Burial Service.

Having apparently studied the probable tastes of the Deity, a peculiar sect in Holland decided to offer up to him a sacrifice. Something, of course, must be killed. So, while a service was proceeding, a peasant farmer murdered his wife, a female servant, and two girls, no one attempting to interfere with the fiendish work. This Dutch ecclesia must be a very comfortable sort of sect to belong to.

A member of the Worcester School Board recently had the audacity to give notice of motion to introduce into the curriculum of the Board schools the Apostles' Creed. That was a little too much even for a Board that pushes the Bible into the national institutions of which it has charge. The member judged it expedient to withdraw his proposition, on the ground that, as the Board would not be unanimous, he deemed it inadvisable to proceed with it. The Worcester ratepayer should know how to treat this gentleman should he offer himself at the next election.

Mr. H. G. Wells, the novelist, has written a letter of advice to shop assistants. He concludes his admonitions as follows: "Above all, let the assistant avoid dancing-classes, Sunday-schools, the society of condescending persons of a superior class, the banjo, fiction, and the feminine sex." The *Christian World* does not like the juxtaposition, and considers the slur on Sunday-schools as wholly undeserved.

The professors of the University of France are going to hold a four days' International Congress for the study of the history of the religions of the world in connection with the Paris Exhibition of this year. Four days for anything like a comprehensive study of such a subject looks like cramming a quart into a pint pot, but still something may be done. There are essential similarities in the history of all religions—the murder by believers of one another, and the dead set they conjointly make on all who have too much sense to accept their nostrums.

We may find some indication as to the kind of people who attend the worship of God, and their behavior whilst so engaged, from an indignant rebuke administered by the Hon. C. J. Littleton, rector of St. Mary's, Stafford, to certain members of his congregation. He has heard of "cases where persons have been not only treated with rudeness, but have actually been turned out of a seat in church by those who think they have a right to claim a pew for themselves." He is highly indignant with this "display of vulgarity, pride,

and selfishness in the House of God, where all should be equal."

Perhaps there is a great deal of snobbishness in the conduct of these people; but why do the churchwardens demand pew rents if folks have no right to that which they pay for? As to all being equal in the House of God any more than elsewhere, that is a little fiction that very few church-goers really believe in.

As a sample of the silly anecdotes to which religious journals treat their readers, take the following from the *Sunday Chimes*: "A certain divine, having preached a sermon on miracles, was asked by one of his congregation, walking homewards, to explain a little more lucidly what a miracle meant. 'Is it a miracle you want to understand?' said the clergyman. 'Walk on, then, before me; and I think I can explain it to you.' The man walked on; and the clergyman came after, and gave him a tremendous kick. 'Ugh!' roared the man; 'why did you do that?' 'Did you feel it?' 'I should think I did,' replied the man. 'Well, then, it would have been a miracle if you had not.'" Of course, the natural feeling produced by this story is a hope that the "tremendous kick" was immediately returned in the shape of a thorough good hiding for the parson.

This is very kind and gracious of the *Rock*: "Bishop Colenso was a heretic, and the Church of England may pray to be delivered from ever again seeing such a heretic in orders; but as a politician, shall we say a statesman, he deserved well of England."

The *Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung*, the chief organ of orthodox Lutheranism in Germany, writing on the war, says: "We believe that we may hope that a people so pious as the Boers cannot perish, and that God will fulfil his word in their case, 'Them that honor me, I will honor.'" Well, we will wait patiently to the end, and see how God really does fulfil his word.

The Bishop of Königsgärtz has published a Latin circular directed against the love of dancing shown at present by the clergy in his diocese. All priests who dance will be immediately suspended. But why? What about David, the man after God's own heart, who danced before the Lord and danced *naked*? Michal, Saul's daughter, saw him through a window, and reproached him. But David defended his dancing, and we read: "Therefore Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child unto the day of her death" (2 Samuel vi. 14-23).

American Christians gloated over the fact that Mrs. Ingersoll was prostrate with grief at the death of her husband. See (they said) the consolations of infidelity! Nothing (they added) but the gospel of Christianity gives us any support in the dark hour of bereavement. Well, the great evangelist Moody died the other day, and what do the American papers report of *his* wife? "Mrs. Moody," they say, "has carried herself during the sickness of her husband with the greatest bravery and patience, but when death came she was prostrated." Precisely like Mrs. Ingersoll.

Judge Scott, of Omaha (U.S.A.), in committing a man of God to gaol for contempt of court, remarked that ministers of religion "are half the time preaching nonsense, and the other half drawing their salaries." He seems to have studied them pretty thoroughly.

What is the matter with "Providence"? No less than 408 persons died of the plague at Bombay in one day (Feb. 6). The highest previous record was 392.

Mr. M. Myers Shoemaker, the American author of *Quaint Corners of Ancient Empires*, speaks of the frightful corruption, inhumanity, and debauchery of the monks, friars, and priests in the Philippines. The mercenary spirit of these fat parasites was carried so far that they actually dug up dead bodies for non-payment of grave-rent by the survivors.

When the famous Dr. Whewell and others were discussing "the plurality of worlds," meaning inhabited planets, the witty Charles Austin said: "This is an ideal subject for a theological dispute, inasmuch as there is not a particle of evidence either on the one side or on the other."

The inhabitants of the Madagascars Islands are extremely polite. When they are angry they don't say "Go to blazes" or "Go to the Devil." They say "Go to St. Peter." This is the gentle saint who holds the keys of heaven, and, according to Byron, knocks you down with them if you displease him. "Go to St. Peter" might thus easily mean "Go and get your skull cracked."

"Jesus, Oxford," is not a telegraphic address. It is the name of a college, though Jesus never went there, or anywhere else. The founders of religion have been generally illiterate—and always very solemn.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, February 18, The Athenæum Hall, London W.; 7.30, "The Greatest of Freethought Martyrs: A Tercentenary Address on Giordano Bruno."

To Correspondents.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—February 18, Chatham Secular Society; 25, Glasgow; 26, 27, and 28, Glasgow districts. March 4, Dundee; 11, Huddersfield. April 8, Camberwell.—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.

P. H. E.—Shall appear.

J. PARTRIDGE.—We are much pleased to learn that the Birmingham Branch has refused the School Board's offer coupled with such conditions. We did not care to express our opinion too strongly while you were deciding the matter, but we do not hesitate to say now that the opposite decision would have been almost abject. See our paragraphs in "Sugar Plums."

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

MARINE.—We gave the old ninny a paragraph some time ago, and don't think he is worth another quite yet. His fifty reasons for believing that the earth is flat should be supplemented. The fifty-first reason is the principal one—namely, that he is a flat himself.

W. S. CLOGG.—All right.

S. HOLMAN.—See "Sugar Plums."

STUDENT.—We believe that Mill's *Utilitarianism* has long been out of print, and second-hand copies are not often met with. The same is true, we think, of his Essay on *The Subjection of Women*. That was a very valuable little book when it was written, but the treatment of the whole sex-problem has much advanced since then. Mill's great defect was that he did not grasp the idea of evolution. His reference to Darwinism in the *Essay on Theism* is surprisingly unsatisfactory.

H. HUNTER.—You are entitled to ask as many questions as you please, in reason, after a Freethought lecture, but you should not assume to be orthodox. It is all right if you ask for the sake of information.

T. HUNT.—We will look through it and let you have our opinion.

A SOLDIER writes us from Estcourt, his letter being forwarded by a friend in London, who informs us that he has since been wounded at Spion Kop. He tells us how much he misses the *Freethinker*, and begs us to send out some Freethought reading for himself and some of his mates. They are deluged with pious, goody-goody stuff, and yearn for something more bracing. Of course we are complying with his request.

We have once more to call the attention of Branch secretaries, etc., to the standing announcement in this column that Lecture Notices must reach us by the first post on Tuesday. This rule is observed by the majority of correspondents, but every now and then we receive notices on Wednesday. We have even had them on Thursday, after this journal was on sale. To reach us in time notices should be posted early on Monday.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Freethought Magazine—Truthseeker (New York)—Secular Thought—People's Newspaper—Isle of Man Times—Liberator—De Vrije Gedachte—Crescent—Torch of Reason—Ethical World—Brann's Iconoclast—Der Arme Teufel—Progressive Thinker—English Mechanic—Leeds Daily News.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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

Sugar Plums.

IN spite of the snow and the bitter cold, there was a much improved audience at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday evening, when Mr. Foote lectured on "The Curse of Christianity." Mr. Foote lectures there again this evening (Feb. 18). His subject will be "The Greatest of Freethought Martyrs: A Tercentenary Address on Giordano Bruno." Bruno was burnt to death at Rome on February 17, 1600.

Mr. Charles Watts lectures this Sunday evening, February 18, at New Brompton. We hope the weather will permit his having a good audience.

The Birmingham Branch held a special meeting to consider the School Board's reply to the renewed application for the use of the Bristol-street Board-school. The official reply was: "That the School will be granted to the Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society on the same conditions as before, with this proviso: that no literature be sold or distributed in the school." The Branch members' meeting decided to send the following answer to the School Board: "That we, the members of the Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society, are unable to accept the tenancy of the School on the conditions laid down by the Board. That we shall be pleased to go back to the School on the same terms it is granted to others. That, being ratepayers, we are entitled to this. That we would accept the conditions as to literature if these were applied all round. That we trust the Board, after receiving our reply, will reconsider the question, with a view to altering its decision in a manner that will give this Society its just rights."

We are glad that the Birmingham Branch has taken this dignified attitude. Its members are citizens; they help to elect the Board and pay for the schools, and they are entitled to exactly the same rights as other citizens. It is not for the Board to set up a literary censorship, except on behalf of the children who are legally under its care. The citizens are not in this position of tutelage, and sooner or later the Board will see that it is acting foolishly.

Of course the principle at issue is the main thing, but the practical aspect of the question is very important. Of the two branches of Freethought propaganda, the press is more thoroughly effective than the platform. No doubt there is a charm and a stimulus about the living voice which the printed word can never rival. But lectures are, after all, only an introduction to articles, pamphlets, and books. Moreover, the writer addresses a wider audience than any speaker, and often with greater frequency and regularity. To use the platform and neglect the press would, therefore, be a very absurd policy. Our Birmingham friends may not be as advantageously placed in their present quarters as they were in the Bristol-street Board-school, but they are able to use both arms (so to speak) at their work. What the School Board wanted to do was to tie up the right arm.

Mr. Cohen delivers two lectures to-day (Feb. 18) in the Alexandra Hall, Islington-square, Liverpool—afternoon and evening. It is hoped that the local "saints" will ensure him good meetings.

Members of the Porth Branch are requested to meet to-day (Feb. 18), at 6 p.m., at 30 Middle-street, Pontypridd, for special business, including arrangements for Mr. Cohen's visit on March 4.

The East London Branch holds its annual meeting this evening (Feb. 18), at 7, at the Tower Hamlets Radical Association, 16 Durham-road, Stepney, E. Its tea and concert will be held on February 25 at the Montague Hall, Stepney-green, E. The Branch's Balance-sheet shows a small income for a lot of work in a poor district. No less than 140 lectures have been delivered under the Branch's auspices during the year.

The *Freethought Magazine* (Chicago), edited by H. L. Green, is one of our most welcome exchanges. The February number opens with a portrait of Dr. E. B. Foote, junior, the worthy son of the veteran Dr. E. B. Foote, who is one of the best known and most highly respected Freethinkers in America. Dr. Ned, as they sometimes call him, is a true chip of the old block. He is clever, accomplished, and modest, though firm enough in his convictions; and is in every way a liberal supporter of the Freethought movement in his great and wonderful country.

Shareholders in the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, may expect an early announcement of considerable importance—possibly in the next issue of the *Freethinker*. The Board of Directors have by no means been inactive, although they have not been making a noise, and they are now making a decisive move.

Geology and Faith.

It is instructive to observe the position of the science of geology at the present moment. Not only is it universally accepted in secular circles, but it is treated with respectful deference by theologians. And this in spite of the fact that the science is frankly atheistic. Modern geologists accept no supernatural interference with the earth's crust at any period of its history, but are content to refer everything they meet with to the action of natural causes. Such being the case, how are we to explain the attitude of the religionist to geology?

Two centuries ago, or even less, the clergy fancied that they stood upon a sure and solid foundation in dealing with the question of the origin of the earth. The Lord's chosen people were the sole repositories of the true account of the world's birth. Not only did the book of Genesis give us the order of the different acts of creation, but it also informed us of the exact time they took. It imparted to us the remarkable information that earth and heaven were all manufactured out of nothing in the short space of one hundred and forty-four hours, or six nights and six days, according to the programme. Theologians pointed with scorn to the puny efforts of Greek philosophers, who wasted their time in speculations upon the true nature of the cosmos, because they were unacquainted with the revealed account of the creation which would have explained the whole thing to them. We may, therefore, again inquire why the theologians have abandoned this commanding position. It cannot be asserted that they have done so on account of the evident truth of geologic science. Theology never gives way on account of the mere truth of anything opposed to it. If it did, it would have entirely disappeared by this time.

Cuneiform research has proved beyond question that the Jewish story of the creation is only a Bowdlerised version of a far more ancient heathen myth. Long before there were any Jews to write books, the Babylonian legend told how Merodach was elected by the pantheon to combat chaos; how he brought up light from darkness; and how he created the universe by stages. The more unpoetical Hebrew mind reduced these stages to seven *days* of twenty-four hours each, and for the name of Merodach substituted Elohim. Thus the first chapter of Genesis contains no correct and beautiful record of the very acts of creation imparted to man by the courtesy of the author. The recovery of these ancient Babylonian documents has taken away the ground from under the feet of theologians, and the defenders of Genesis are left in the ridiculous position of attempting to prop up an exploded heathen mythological story. But these discoveries were made *after* geology had justified itself. They did not come in time to share the fight, but only to mock the vanquished.

It has been known for many ages that diggers in the earth sometimes bring to light strange and monstrous bones, and that excavations upon dry land reveal sea-shells and marine remains; but the true significance of these discoveries was not grasped. The bones were accounted for by the supposition that the earlier races were men of giant stature. In the seventeenth century the remains of a mammoth elephant were gravely identified as parts of the skeleton of a Gaulish warrior who had fought with Julius Cæsar; and the earbone of an extinct species of whale was venerated in Spain as the knee-cap of St. James the Apostle. Presumptuous doubters were referred to the Holy Scriptures, which distinctly stated that there were giants in the earth in those days. A Douay Bible issued "with the approbation of the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster" lies before me, and says in a note on this passage: "It is likely the generality of men before the Flood were of a gigantic stature in comparison with what men now are." The sea-shells and fish-bones were welcomed as a proof of the occurrence and universality of the deluge; for these sea-shells were even met with on the tops of mountains, where it was supposed that nothing but Noah's flood could have taken them. In 1726 a fossil was unearthed at Oeningen, which the Swiss savant, Professor Scheuchzer, immediately recognised as the skeleton of a man who had witnessed the deluge, and

he composed a long dreary Latin poem in its honor. Modern geologists have shown that it is a large extinct species of freshwater salamander, and a cast may be seen at the Natural History Museum. It belongs to the Miocene period, which is a trifle remote even for Noah. But the comparative enlightenment of the eighteenth century disputed these conclusions both as regarded the giant bones and the sea-shells. Voltaire suggested that the shells had been dropped upon the mountains by passing travellers. Other people pointed out that these shells were often found deeply embedded in the earth, where they could never have been carried by any flood. Furthermore, the examination of very ancient buildings showed that the people who lived in them were no taller than they are to-day; consequently gigantic fossil bones could not be attributed to giant forefathers. Finally Baron Cuvier demonstrated by the aid of comparative anatomy that the presumably antediluvian bones had no relation to humanity, but were the relics of species of animals not now found upon the earth.

Theologians were inexpressibly shocked at this presumptuous man of science; but as the opinion gained ground that animals had lived upon the earth in past ages differing from those of to-day, it was concluded that these creatures belonged to other worlds that had preceded the one we live in. At a later date this view was seized on as a buttress of orthodoxy—flimsy as usual. Controversialists pointed out that wicked scoffers had insinuated that the book of Genesis represented the creator as having woke up after an eternity of doing nothing in order to make a world; whereas the remains of these preceding creations showed that he had been creating worlds from time immemorial, and destroying them again. As the science of geology advanced, however, this theory was wrecked, because there was no evidence of the existence of former complete worlds, and another hypothesis was propounded. It was supposed that the universe had been formed by stages corresponding to those in Genesis, but the stages covered a few thousand of years or so instead of twenty-four hours; and pietist geologists were at pains to show the accordance of the earth's successive strata with the verses of Genesis. But Genesis and geology could not be made to agree; the best-known reconciler of the two, Hugh Miller, committing suicide in despair on finding that facts and faith were incompatible; and since his time we have had no orthodox geologist of any note upholding the theory.

We may, therefore, return to the question: Why has geology triumphed over theology? The answer is simple. Geology proved to be profitable. The land-owning and capitalist classes found that there was money in it. In this country the coal-measures lie in a certain formation, which is accordingly termed the "carboniferous"; and geologists acquainted with the superposition of strata could tell pretty nearly how deep it was necessary to bore to find the coal-seams. In other formations the geologist could predict the presence of inexhaustible stores of water. As soon as the propertied classes discovered that geology was not an idle speculation, or a mania for collecting fossil shells, but a practical means of finding mineral wealth, they took to it quite eagerly. As soon as the squire learned from the geologist that coal existed under his estate at a workable depth, the local parson who inveighed against infidel science was told to mind his own business. Even ecclesiastical landowners, with the keen thirst for the mammon of unrighteousness which always distinguishes them, called in the aid of geologists to advise them as to possible mines; and the Emperor of priest-ridden Russia actually invited Sir Roderick Murchison to visit his territories to guide his miners in their search for hidden metals. Hence theologians were constrained to veil their diminished heads and speak with bated breath of this new science, for they knew quite well that their only supporters, the men of property, would make short work of anything that opposed their comfort or their profit.

Science made little headway in ancient Greece, because it was never shown to be of practical value. Archimedes thought he was degrading his talents by applying his knowledge of mechanics to practical purposes. In modern times chemistry has revolutionised industry, astronomy has assisted navigation, and geology brings

out the treasures of the earth. These sciences have triumphed by their utility, and smoothed the way for other lines of research of less immediate pecuniary profit.

CHILPERIC.

The Poets and Death.

"And the worst that we dread is, after a short, fretful, feverish being, after vain hopes and idle fears, to sink to final repose, and forget the troubled dream of life."—*William Hazlitt.*

PRIESTS, in all ages and in all countries, have ever sought advantage from the fact that man is mortal. They have taught men that death was the most dreadful evil. All the terrors that theology could gather from savage nations were added to increase the horrors of their various superstitions. They invariably tried to paralyse reason with the clutch of fear. Freethought, upon the other hand, destroys the fear of death. To the Freethinker death is but one incident of life, and often the least important. He will not allow the tomb to cast its shadow over his existence.

Most of the great poets have been Freethinkers, and it is gratifying to turn for a few moments from the horrible conceptions of the priests to the ideas of the poets. Lucretius, the greatest Roman poet, writing, as he is remembered, twenty centuries ago, tells us that death is dreamless rest. In a very fine passage he says:—

Thou not again shalt see thy dear home's door,
Nor thy dear wife and children come to throw
Their arms round thee, and ask for kisses more,
And through thy heart make quiet comfort go;
Out of thy hands hath slipped the precious store
Thou hoardest for thine own, men say, and lo,
All thou desired is gone! But never say
All the desire as well hath passed away.

Omar Khayyam, the most splendid poet whose lyre sounded under the Mohammedan crescent, was a Freethinker. Listen:—

Oh, threats of Hell and hopes of Paradise!
One thing, at least, is certain—This life flies;
One thing is certain, and the rest is lies;
The flower that once has blown for ever dies.

Shakespeare, the supreme genius in literature, tells us:—

We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

Matthew Arnold introduces pure Secularism into his language about death. In his monody on his friend Clough, he tells us:—

Bear it from thy loved, sweet Arno vale,
For there thine earth-forgetting eyelids keep
Their morningless and unawakening sleep
Under the flowery oleanders pale.

This feeling assumes at times tones of irony, as in his fine lines on the death of a dog, entitled "Geist's Grave":—

Stern law of every mortal lot
Which man, proud man, finds hard to bear,
And builds himself I know not what,
Of second life I know not where.
But thou, when struck thine hour to go,
On us, who stood despondent by,
A meek last glance of love did'st throw,
And humbly lay thee down to die.
Thy memory lasts both here and there,
And thou shalt live as long as we,
And after that—thou dost not care!
In us was all the world to thee.

Swinburne, who wears the imperial purple of the great poets, has quite a materialistic view of death. In his superb "Ave Atque Vale: In Memory of Charles Baudelaire," he strikes the keynote:—

Thou art far too far for wings of words to follow,
Far too far off for thought or any prayer;
What ails us with thee, who art wind and air?
What ails us gazing where all seen is hollow?
Yet with some fancy, yet with some desire,
Dreams pursue death as winds a flying fire;
Our dreams pursue our dead, and do not find.
Still and more swift than they, the thin flame flies,
The low light fails us in elusive skies;
Still the foiled, earnest ear is deaf, and blind
Are still the eluded eyes,

And again, in the same poem:—

Content thee, howsoe'er, whose days are done;
There lies not any troublous thing before,

Nor sight nor sound to war against thee more,
For whom all winds are quiet as the sun,
All waters as the shore.

Byron did not believe in immortality. How finely he apostrophises the longing for a future life:—

Bound to the earth; he lifts his eyes to heaven;
Is't not enough, unhappy thing! to know
Thou art? Is this a boon so kindly given
That, being, thou would'st be again, and go
Thou know'st not, reek'st not, to what region, so
On earth no more, but mingled with the skies?
Still wilt thou dream on future joy and woe?
Regard and weigh yon dust before it flies;
That little word saith more than thousand homilies.

But no poet peers with such longing and audacity as Walt Whitman into the "superb vistas of death." Whatever else may be said of Whitman's poetry, it must be conceded that he has treated this eternal theme of death with a new power and significance. The awful dreams that may come in that sleep of death have no terror for this poet. The dead are made one with nature. Throughout the poetry of Whitman death is presented as a friend, is "lovely and soothing," is the "dark mother always gliding near with soft feet"; and the body, weary with life, turns, like a tired child, "gratefully nestling close" in the bosom of this soothing mother.

Truly the poets have left the priests far behind. Beyond the fabled hells, the tiresome purgatories, and the tawdry paradises, the songs of the great poets flood the night and pour their serene melody over the world.

MIMNERMUS.

Coming Away from the Bells.

THE PROVINCIAL ENGLISH SUNDAY.

"The more a man is advanced on human knowledge, the more is he opposed to religion, and the more deadly enemy he is to the truth of God."—*Address by the Rev. Francis Close to the Church of England Tradesmen and Working Men's Christian Association of Cheltenham, 1842, quoted by G. J. Holyoake in his defence before Justice Erskine, August 15, 1842.*

"I have fought, and ever will fight, against the School Board, as a work of the devil and his crew."—*Thomas Price, vicar of Prestalyn, North Wales, on the formation of a School. (See "Reynolds," August 13, 1899.)*

"It is vanity for Christians to shut their eyes to the fact that attendance at public worship is decreasing."—*Ian Maclaren's "Yale Lectures."*

THAT the ideas of 1842, as voiced by the Rev. Francis Close, still hold, is proved by the Rev. Thomas Price of 1899, and there seem to be very few like the Rev. John Watson who dare to be honest as to why.

Numbers of writers since Charles Dickens have dwelt on the miseries of the English Sunday in towns and cities. Not quite so much attention has been given to the country aspect, although it is in many respects a much more ghastly misery.

Some recent experiences during a health hunt in Derbyshire may be interesting. At the particular institution where I found myself located, morning and evening prayers, with liberal doses of generally lugubrious hymns, were the regular daily formula. I used to retire to another room, and do some reading and writing.

Observation and conversation soon proved to me that with many who *did* attend it was the most empty of forms.

On Saturday evening the general talk was a long lament over the desperate tediousness of the coming Sabbath. It was positively laughable to hear these Christians of various sects bewailing themselves for having somehow to live over another Sunday. It decided me, however, to get away from such a company, so I got up in time to catch the one morning train, and started to see something of the famous town of Buxton.

Trains in rural districts have their own special bedevillments for the plaguing of Sabbath-breakers, and so, on arriving at Peak Forest Station, we found it was a change and a wait or a walk. It was an ideal morning, bright, slight frost, ground crisp and clean. Peak Forest seems to be so named because there is no forest anywhere near; a few poor clumps of trees, but no "forest" certainly.

Being Sunday morning and early, just after nine, all the cottages seemed to be of the dead; hardly a fire alight anywhere yet. The one or two men seen were in their shirt sleeves, boots unlaced, short pipe in mouth, and generally looking dirty and disagreeable.

One thing which was soon borne in upon me was the really surprising amount of Sunday labour going on in this out-of-the-way district, and for which Christian railway shareholders and directors may have to answer some day. It seems a bit difficult to understand *why* it is wicked to run cheap passenger trains on Sunday, but not wicked to carry

on such an amount of goods traffic as is done. From every direction for miles could be heard the struggling "puff-puff" of the heavy goods trains; while a look down the ordinary time-table shows only long rows of dots. This is evidently one of the peculiarities of the modern English Sabbath.

Keeping steadily on, I came upon a fine open area, no hedges or fences, evidently common land. Two boys are playing about, looking for a place to make a slide—Sunday morning, too! I ask the name of the place—"Fairfield Common."

Just then the church-bells begin to ring, and then came out another peculiarity of the English Sunday morning. I am walking *towards* the church-bells, and *meet* and see on the road and here and there about the common on either hand quite a respectable crowd, for a small place, of men and lads. All on the road I *meet*, their backs are therefore all turned to the bells; all those on the common are travelling in various radiating paths, but all *their* backs are to the bells.

Away on the left, down in a hollow, is evidently a small pond, and there a small cluster of youngsters carefully trying to see if the ice will bear. They are not worrying themselves about the calling bells.

Here four men and a dog, next two men, then a young man and girl, very busy with one another, all with their backs to the bells; and then a cyclist. He certainly is not going to St. Peter's, Fairfield; he will be a mile off when the peal is done.

On the right are schools: children are just turning out; some are off over the common in a wink; some, not many, seem slowly going round to the back of the school-house to see what the bells are talking about.

Just by the gates of the church we come up a few settings towards the bells. Two women, four women, three women and one man, then another dribble of women, and so it seems at last there will be a congregation; but one cannot help but notice that there are eight women at least to every man.

Maybe the war accounts for it; maybe the parson is going to preach a special sermon on peace, and that always appeals to Christians and women, you know.

Just past the church gates, and we meet the one aristocrat of the district; carriage—emblazoned panel—two horses, two servants in livery, one passenger, face towards the bells.

Before I get very far through the town this carriage, with two horses and only one servant and no passenger, overtakes me, so the parson at St. Peter's was secured at least two flunkies to listen, unless, as is sometimes the case, the flunkie in livery waits in the porch, and does a quiet smoke. Anyhow, the driver and the two horses are in a fair way for everlasting demnition.

For some time I have been noting passers-by with brass instruments under their arms, and had wondered which it was, Club Band parade or Slammation Army. I pass under a railway arch, and there is no more doubt. I can't see the crowd; but oh, ghost of Dan Godfrey, what a row! A positive desecration!

On the left, the road to Millers Dale and Lover's Leap; on the right, a stone viaduct, one pier in the midst of a pretty recreation garden; just beyond, at the wide corner of the roadway the band, and the voice; oh, that voice!

It would take a Dante-cum-Milton pen to do justice to that band, and that voice.

How people, in a place like Buxton, can bring themselves to tolerate such an outrage on peace and quiet is hard to conceive. For I was in Buxton, but did not know it. A wide straight street of rather fine shops, having that most decided advantage in a pleasure town—the whole of the pavements covered with glass roof. I looked up at the name plate—"Spring Gardens." I didn't yet realise I had arrived, so asked two young fellows if I was going right for Buxton; whereupon they looked at one another with a true yokel snigger, and a long pause, and then said: "Oh, yas, orl reet on." I looked into an electrical engineer's shop window—very few shutters anywhere—and, on a list of installations fitted, saw the line "Spring Gardens," Buxton, and at last realised I was there; as the Dutchman said when he fell out of the loft, "I was comdt."

And now I began to enjoy more of the peculiarities of Sunday in the country—that is, the country town.

It was getting close to dinner time, I had had breakfast early, and nature abhors a vacuum. I had made sure of a restaurant or cafe, or at the worst a coffee-house somewhere; but you never know your luck.

I went right through Spring Gardens, on past the Devonshire Hospital, along the Manchester-road, and then back and along the main front in the Devonshire-road. I wanted much to look in underneath the really magnificent dome which forms such a striking landmark; but, of course, like everything else, on the big notice board, "Visitors may, etc., but no admittance on Sundays."

There are a number of places in India which begin with "Dhamapa." I said some of them, abbreviated.

But the iron gates stood wide open, so I went towards the main door; a service was going on somewhere, and, door ajar, I had a look in anyhow. It was worth it; a really noble hall, and, certainly, a noble object to devote a peer's riding-

school to. Some of the emblazoned laudation around the springing of the dome might be dispensed with, perhaps; but it will not do the sufferers much harm.

But it is nearer still to dinner time, so I keep on looking for a decent place to get something of a meal at; less than seven-and-six at the grand hotel.

But that is another of the peculiarities of the swagger pleasure town under our Sunday laws and Sunday conventions.

For the ordinary traveller there is often nothing between going to the big hotel and becoming a guest—paying whatever is demanded, or going into an ordinary public-house and dining luxuriously on bitter and bread and cheese; in the hours allowed by the Act.

After foraging about in various directions, and noting some more peculiarities, I had at last made up my mind to the bread and cheese and a small lemon, so planted myself at the entrance of the Railway Hotel to pass the few minutes to the legal opening time.

At last we are within reach of bread and cheese; but put forth a tentative, on the off-chance, query as to anything in the way of a hot dinner.

"Oh, er yes, well we don't reckon to serve dinners on Sunday; but I think we can manage you one, if you can wait a little while till ours is ready."

As I only wanted one, I was pleased to wait, and patience was rewarded.

"Would I step round into the smoke room for a few minutes."

Smoke room in real truth; the fire had just been lit, and the place was so full of smoke you could have cut it with a knife, and I was glad when the invitation came to another room and dinner.

T. SHORE.

(To be concluded.)

Colonel Ingersoll's Household.

THE late Colonel Ingersoll managed his household on purely communistic principles. There were several members of the family, which, besides himself, included his wife, his two daughters, his son-in-law, his mother-in-law, and his brother-in-law. All of these stood on an equality, and a common treasury was kept in a strong-box for their support and for whatever use each chose. This box was kept supplied with money by the Colonel and the two other men of the family. To it each member went for whatever he or she required. Money was taken in such quantity as the taker wished, and no memorandum was made nor explanation given. If one of the men wanted a horse, he bought it with the money in the strong-box; if one of the ladies wanted a fur coat, she took the necessary money from the same place.

They must have been a very united family of very unselfish members when they could live in such freedom without one or the other taking advantage of the lack of restraint. But it is said to have worked admirably. When the Colonel died, his estate was valued at only ten thousand dollars. This, his best friends say, was only what was left after he had provided for those who were dependent upon him. He really left in excess of two hundred thousand dollars, which was a large fortune for him to have accumulated, considering the procrastinating habits of his professional life, and the generous way in which he gave to those who were needy and in distress.—*Saturday "Evening Post."*

The Circuit Rider's Horse.

When the Rev. Frank Gunsaulus was a poor circuit-rider he at one time found himself in possession of enough money to buy him a horse. It was a sorry-looking steed, but it was cheap. So, after he had bought it, he rode it home. His father was in the barnyard when he came in, and he looked critically at the animal.

"Where did ye git that hoss, Frank?" he asked.

"I bought him cheap, father," said the young preacher.

"He's a sorry-lookin' critter, I must say," said the father.

"Well, father," said Frank, "you remember that our savior rode into Jerusalem on a worse-looking animal than this."

And the old man looked at the horse again, and said: "Durned if I don't think it is the same one!"

—*Chicago Chronicle.*

'Twas evident that there was some trouble about "Jerusalem the Golden." The applicant sat in the ante-room waiting to be fitted with his golden crown, and he heard shouts of excitement all about him. At last the attendant returned. "Here's your crown and a check for a harp. Get a pair of rubber boots, too." "Rubber boots! What for?" "The milk-and-honey tanks have sprung a leak." "Why don't you get them fixed?" "Can't." "Why not? Get a plumber." "Plumber? That's just the trouble; we've never let one in." —*Boston Traveller.*

Enlightening a Missionary.

BY MARK TWAIN.

In Sydney I had a large dream, and in the course of talk I told it to a missionary from India who was on his way to visit some relatives in New Zealand. I dreamed that the visible universe is the physical person of God; that the vast worlds that we see twinkling millions of miles apart in the fields of space are the blood corpuscles in his veins; and that we and the other creatures are the microbes that charge with multitudinous life the corpuscles.

Mr. X., the missionary, considered the dream awhile, then said: "It is not surpassable for magnitude, since its metes and bounds are the metes and bounds of the universe itself; and it seems to me that it almost accounts for a thing which is otherwise nearly unaccountable—the origin of the sacred legends of the Hindoos. Perhaps they dream them, and then honestly believe them to be divine revelations of fact. It looks like that, for the legends are built on so vast a scale that it does not seem reasonable that plodding priests would happen upon such colossal fancies when awake."

He told some of the legends, and said that they were implicitly believed by all classes of Hindoos, including those of high social position and intelligence; and he said that this universal credulity was a great hindrance to the missionary in his work. Then he said something like this:—

"At home, people wonder why Christianity does not make faster progress in India. They hear that the Indians believe easily, and that they have a natural trust in miracles and give them a hospitable reception. Then they argue like this: since the Indian believes easily, place Christianity before them, and they must believe; confirm its truth by the biblical miracles, and they will no longer doubt. The natural deduction is, that as Christianity makes but indifferent progress in India, the fault is with us; we are not fortunate in presenting the doctrines and the miracles.

"But the truth is, we are not by any means so well equipped as they think. We have not the easy task that they imagine.

To use a military figure, we are sent against the enemy with good powder in our guns, but only wads for bullets—that is to say, our miracles are not effective; the Hindoos do not care for them; they have more extraordinary ones of their own. All the details of their own religion are proven and established by miracles; the details of ours must be proven in the same way. When I first began my work in India I greatly underestimated the difficulties thus put upon my task. A correction was not long in coming. I thought as our friends think at home—that to prepare my childlike wonder-lovers to listen with favor to my grave message I only needed to charm the way to it with wonders, marvels, miracles. With full confidence I told the wonders performed by Samson, the strongest man that had ever lived—for so I called him.

"At first I saw lively anticipation and strong interest in the faces of my people, but, as I moved along from incident to incident of the great story, I was distressed to see that I was steadily losing the sympathy of my audience. I could not understand it. It was a surprise to me, and a disappointment. Before I was through the fading sympathy had paled to indifference. Thence to the end the indifference remained; I was not able to make any impression upon it.

"A good old Hindoo gentleman told me where my trouble lay. He said: 'We Hindoos recognise a god by the work of his hands—we accept no other testimony. Apparently, this is also the rule with you Christians. And we know when a man has his power from a god by the fact that he does things which he could not do, as a man, with the mere powers of a man. Plainly, this is the Christian's way also of knowing when a man is working by a god's power and not by his own. You saw that there was a supernatural property in the hair of Samson; for you perceived that when his hair was gone he was as other men. It is our way, as I have said.

There are many nations in the world, and each group of nations has its own gods, and will pay no worship to the gods of the others. Each group believes its own gods to be strongest, and it will not exchange them except for gods that shall be proven to be their superiors in power. Man is but a weak creature, and needs the help of gods—he cannot do without it. Shall he place his fate in the hands of weak gods when there may be stronger ones to be found? That would be foolish. No; if he hears of gods that are stronger than his own, he should not turn a deaf ear, for it is not a light matter that is at stake. How, then, shall he determine which gods are the stronger, his own or those that preside over the concerns of other nations? By comparing the known works of his own gods with the works of those others; there is no other way. Now, when we make this comparison, we are not drawn towards the gods of any other nation. Our gods are shown by their works to be the strongest, the most powerful. The Christians have but few gods, and they are new—new, and not strong, as it seems to us. They will increase in number, it is true, for this has happened with all gods; but that time is far away, many ages and decades of ages away, for gods multiply slowly, as is meet for beings to whom a thousand years is but a single moment. Our own gods have been born millions of years apart. The process is slow, the gathering of strength and power is similarly

slow. In the slow lapse of the ages the steadily accumulating power of our gods has at last become prodigious. We have a thousand proofs of this in the colossal character of their personal acts and the acts of ordinary men to whom they have given supernatural qualities. To your Samson was given supernatural power, and when he broke the withes, and slew the thousands with the jawbone of an ass, and carried away the gates of the city upon his shoulders, you were amazed, and also awed, for you recognised the divine source of his strength. But it could not profit to place these things before your Hindoo congregation and invite their wonder; for they would compare them with the deed done by Hanuman, when our gods infused their divine strength into his muscles; and they would be indifferent to them—as you saw. In the old, old times, ages and ages gone by, when our god Rama was warring with the demon god of Ceylon, Rama bethought him to bridge the sea and connect Ceylon with India, so that his armies might pass easily over; and he sent his general, Hanuman, inspired like your own Samson with divine strength, to bring the materials for the bridge. In two days Hanuman strode fifteen hundred miles, to the Himalayas, and took upon his shoulder a range of those lofty mountains two hundred miles long, and started with it towards Ceylon. It was in the night; and, as he passed along the plain, the people of Govardhun heard the thunder of his tread and felt the earth rocking under it, and they ran out, and there, with their snowy summits piled to heaven, they saw the Himalayas passing by. And as this huge continent swept along, overshadowing the earth, upon its slopes they discerned the twinkling lights of a thousand sleeping villages, and it was as if the constellations were filing in procession through the sky. While they were looking, Hanuman stumbled, and a small ridge of sandstone twenty miles long was jolted loose and fell. Half of its length has wasted away in the course of the ages, but the other ten miles of it remain in the plain by Govardhun to this day as a proof of the might of the inspiration of our gods. You must know, yourself, that Hanuman could not have carried those mountains to Ceylon except by the strength of the gods. You know that it was not done by his own strength, therefore you know that it was done by the strength of the gods, just as you know that Samson carried the gates by the divine strength, and not by his own. I think you must concede two things: first, that in carrying the gates of the city upon his shoulders, Samson did not establish the superiority of his gods over ours; secondly, that his feat is not supported by any but verbal evidence, while Hanuman's is not only supported by verbal evidence, but this evidence is confirmed, established, proven, by visible, tangible evidence, which is the strongest of all testimony. We have the sandstone ridge, and while it remains we cannot doubt, and shall not. Have you the gates?"

Ingersoll.

'Twas when I read thy rich-phrased eulogy
Of him who made the world more glad and learn'd,
Revered Shakespeare, that my mind discern'd
The greatness of thy mind. It came to me
As doth the unexpected minstrelsy
Of grateful birds, that hail late spring return'd,
With its mass'd leaves, for which so long they've yearned,
Its laughing sun and blue immensity.

Born orator, well fitted to enchain
An audience with thy frolic-loving eyes;
Arch foe of superstition, priestly lies,
And tricks which do perplex th' unwary brain.
Upon Fame's long and everlasting scroll
Conspicuously shines the name of Ingersoll.

P. H. ECHLIN.

Correspondence.

A. BONNER AND THE BEDBOROUGH CASE.
TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As the only statement in Mr. A. Bonner's long letter in the last number of the *Freethinker* which is to the point refers to me and to my husband, ignoring or even denying our existence, you will allow me to state that I have paid all Mr. Bonner's accounts, amounting to over £900, with my own cheques, and that all these paid cheques bear Mr. Bonner's endorsement. I have letters in my possession which prove that Mr. Bonner was fully aware of the fact that my husband and I provided the capital for the purchase and publication of the *Free Review*, and I know positively that Dr. de Villiers, my brother, has never had any financial interest in this concern.

It is the same false statement which Mr. Bonner makes in his letter to you that led to the issue of a warrant against my brother, and, if nothing else, it afforded counsel for the defendant in the Bedborough case a pretext for the compromise with the police, the particulars of which are known to your readers.

GEORGINA N. SINGER.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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

LONDON.

THE ATHENÆUM HALL (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The Greatest of Freethought Martyrs: A Tercentenary Address on Giordano Bruno."

CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, J. M. Robertson, "God in Politics."

NORTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Leighton Hall, Leighton-crescent, Kentish Town): 7, Joe Clayton, "Shelley the Prophet of Democracy."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, Stanton Coit, "The Need for a New Party."

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Royal Palace Hotel, High-street, Kensington, W.): 11, Stanton Coit, "Thou shalt not murder."

WESTMINSTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Grosvenor Arms, Page-street): 7.30, F. A. Davies, "Fallacy of Patriotism."

COUNTRY.

BELFAST ETHICAL SOCIETY (York-street Lecture Hall, 69 York-street): 3.45, G. Gibson, "Giordano Bruno."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): H. P. Ward—11, "Giordano Bruno: Martyr for Freethought"; 7, "Witches and Witchcraft."

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday School; 7, C. Watts, "The Defeat of the Cross."

EDINBURGH (Moulders' Hall, 105 High-street): 6.30, Mr. Crawford, "All Sorts of Hells and Devils."

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): 12, Discussion Class—J. Culligan; 6.30, A. G. Nostik, "Bacteria and their Influence on Life." With lantern illustrations.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, A. Milnes, "Utopias."

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): C. Cohen—3, "The Perils of Patriotism"; 7, "Religion and War."

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): 7, L. Small, B.Sc., "What do we Know of God?"

PORTH BRANCH (30 Middle-street, Pontypridd): 6, A Meeting.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): Open discussion on the question, "Is the Present War a Justifiable One or Not?"

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, An Address.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—February 18, Liverpool; 19, Preston; 20 and 21, Blackburn; 22, Darwen; 25, Manchester. March 4, Pontypridd, South Wales.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham.—February 18, Birmingham; 25, Birmingham. March 11, Sheffield; 18, Birmingham. April 1, Glasgow; 8, Birmingham; 15, Stockton-on-Tees; 29, Birmingham.

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