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Shakespeare's Bible.

What a way journalists have of writing on subjects they don't understand! And how dogmatically they parade their ignorance as the top of knowledge! Only a month or two ago I had occasion to expose the nonsense of a writer in the London *Echo*, who described Shakespeare as a good Christian, and referred to his Will as containing the expression of his religious belief. This writer went even to the length of saying that Shakespeare's will was written with his own hand; a statement which is known to be false and absurd by everyone who has an elementary acquaintance with the facts relating to the life of "the greatest of the sons of men." I have now to expose another piece of nonsense from the pen of a front-page writer in the *Sunday Sun*. It is contained in the following passage:—

> "The mystical clothing of the great period of Puritanism arose from a very simple fact, but one that is mostly disregarded. The Scriptures only became accessible in the version dedicated to James the First. When we look for religious references in Shakespeare, we forget that the Bible was probably not on his bookshelves. As soon as it became accessible, it became part of every educated man's studies; and Scriptural references are just as frequent in the works of James I. as quotations from the pagan writers are in the *Histrio-Mastix*, the monument of Puritan defiance."

Now there are almost as many mistakes as clauses in this paragraph. But let us take the principal ones: *First*, that there is a lack of "religious references" in Shakespeare; *second*, that the Bible in English was not "accessible" before the publication of the Authorised Version in 1611; *third*, that the Bible was probably not one of the books that Shakespeare had read. Involved with these, or following from them, is a *fourth* blunder; namely, that Shakespeare's own religious (or irreligious) opinions are somehow lost to us, or at least obscured, in consequence of his having no Bible to quote from or refer to. I admit that the writer does not *say this*, but he *suggests* it; in other words, it seems a legitimate deduction from his large and liberal "religious references," which is a phrase that may be justly held to imply more than references only to the Bible.

With regard to the *accessibility* of the Bible, I venture to say it was no more accessible after 1611 than it was before, except in the sense that another edition of it was placed upon the book-market. This writer appears to imagine that the Authorised Version was the first great translation; whereas it was less a new translation than a revision of the existing translations; and its object was not to make the Bible more accessible, but to make the translation more "accurate," especially with a view to corroborating the doctrines and sentiments which were then prevalent in the Church of England. Without going to more recondite sources of information, this writer might have learnt the substantial truth of the matter from an ordinary book like Dr. Marsh's well-known *Lectures on the English Language*. Speaking of the authors of the 1611 Version, this able and accomplished lecturer observed:—

> "The translators, or rather the revisers, of the English Bible were not the teachers of a new doctrine: the public they addressed were not neophytes or strangers to the contents or the phraseology of the volume now again to be spread before them. England had been Protestant, already, for almost three-fourths of a century; and there were comparatively few of the English people who had not been taught the precepts of that faith, and made familiar with its oracles in their very cradles, through the translations of Tyndale, Coverdale, and others, which were made the basis, and furnished the staple, of the new recension."

Dr. Marsh pointed out that the Authorised Version of 1611—which has stood ever since, and is now likely to stand till the end—differs remarkably little from the previous versions.

> "Tyndale's, Coverdale's, Cranmer's, the Bishops', the Genevan, and the standard version coincide so nearly with each other, both in sense and in phraseology, that we may hear whole chapters of any of them read without noticing that they deviate from the text to which we have always been accustomed."

The explanation of this close agreement is simple enough. King James's first rule for the guidance of the revisers was this: "The ordinary Bible read in the church, commonly called the *Bishops' Bible*, to be followed, and as little altered as the original will permit." The fourteenth rule was: "These translations to be used when they agree better with the text than the Bishops' Bible—namely, Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's, Geneva." Such rules prove that there was no scarcity of Bibles in England. This is further proved by the events which led up to the undertaking of the Authorised Version. King James was approached by Dr. Reynolds, the spokesman of the Puritans, who begged that a new translation of the Bible might be made, as those which were allowed in the reigns of Henry VIII. and Edward VI. were corrupt, and not answerable to the truth of the original. James replied that he himself 'wished that some special pains should be taken in this matter for one uniform translation," to which the whole Church might be bound exclusively. Shortly afterwards he appointed a commission of learned men from both universities to do this work, and in due course the new Bible was printed and appointed to be read in all the churches. What was wanted was an *accurate* translation, for much controversy had been waged over alleged blunders in the former translations; and a *uniform* translation, for it was highly desirable that one and the same English Bible should be used in *all* the churches, now that Protestantism was firmly established. And both these reasons, so far from proving that the Scriptures "only became accessible" in King James's version, prove the very opposite—namely, that too many, and too various, Bibles were in general use.

Without going into the history of the many translations of the Bible, from Wycklif's down to the Douay, a Catholic version which anticipated King James's by a couple of years—for such a disquisition would extend this article too greatly; let it suffice to say that, so far from the Bible being inaccessible before 1611, there must have been myriads of copies of it scattered over England; and it should be remembered that the total population of this country did not then equal the present population of London. Moreover, it can be demonstrated from the theological works of the early seventeenth century that the Authorised Version did not immediately supplant its predecessors. For the next twenty or thirty years the older versions were frequently quoted in preference. Indeed, it is pretty certain that the Eliots, Pyms, and Hampdens of the great Puritan revolt were brought up on the older versions. Cromwell himself was about thirteen years old when the 1611 Bible was issued, and in all probability he made his first acquaintance with "Holy Writ" in the same manner.

It is perfectly clear, then, that there was no sort or presumption in the nature of the case against Shakespeare's having a copy of the Bible. Thousands of

people had a copy, and why should not he? True, it was not as cheap a book as it is now, but people did not buy *many* books in those days, and the cost of *one* was no insuperable barrier to its possession. Besides, it was then a book of such supreme importance, being the veritable, unquestioned Word of God to all Protestants, and not really a book in the common sense of the term, but something unique and superhuman. English Protestants would be certain to buy a copy if they could. In these circumstances, Shakespeare would naturally have a Bible himself. He was not exactly a poor man at any time during his manhood, and during a considerable portion of the time he was really well off. The price of the volume was not to him prohibitive; and being what it was to his contemporaries, it was a book that he could not fail to read, whether he believed in its divinity or not. For he was not only a poet, but the greatest of poets, and a mighty dramatist to boot; and it is simply inconceivable that he could be incurious about anything that was of superlative interest to his fellow men.

So much for the abstract question; *too* much, as some will think, and we almost agree with them. For when we drop down from the abstract to the practical, we find there is no room for discussion. Shakespeare's works show that he was well acquainted with the Bible; indeed, the fact has been made the basis of many an argument in favor of his orthodoxy. Just as he has been "proved" to have belonged to fifty or sixty different trades or professions, so he has been "proved" to have qualified for a doctor of divinity. To dilate upon this theme is impossible within the limits of this article. Fortunately it is not necessary. Every student—nay, every careful reader—of Shakespeare knows that his plays, and his comic plays particularly, contain a multitude of Biblical allusions. He ridicules the Bible and Christianity through the mouths of his fools and clowns, and sometimes through the mouths of graver characters. This has been noticed by some commentators. His "allusions" were stigmatised as "in the highest degree censurable" by the writer of his Life in Lardner's Cyclopedia. Gifford called him "the Coryphæus of profanation." It was certainly Shakespeare (and perhaps Jonson) that Gifford glanced at in his panegyric on Massinger.

> "But the great, the glorious distinction of Massinger, is the uniform respect in which he treats religion and its ministers, in an age when it was found necessary to add regulation to regulation, to stop the growth of impiety on the stage. No priests are introduced by him, 'to set on some quantity of barren spectators' to laugh at their licentious follies; the sacred name is not lightly invoked, nor daringly sported with; nor is Scripture profaned by buffoon allusions lavishly put into the mouths of fools and women."

The last clause of this orthodox rebuke is undoubtedly aimed at Shakespeare; for it fits him, and him alone, of all the Elizabethan dramatists.

Enough of this for the present. I have amply shown that the writer I set out to criticise is ignorant of the facts relating to Shakespeare and the Bible. Some day or other I will deal with the far more important question, whether Shakespeare's works hide or reveal his religious opinions—or rather his opinions on religion. Taken in connection with certain facts of his life, his writings, in spite of their dramatic character, seem to furnish conclusive evidence that he was a Freethinker, and probably an Atheist.

G. W. Foote.

Martineau's "Study of Religion."

The death of the late Dr. Martineau removed a striking, and in many ways an interesting, personality from the religious world. Belonging to the more advanced school of religious thinkers, possessed of considerable fluency of speech and grace of expression, combined with no mean philosophic culture, there was often a charm and a suggestiveness about his writings on religion that served as a pleasant change from the dullness and emptiness of religious writings generally. I do not wish it to be understood that I believe Dr. Martineau's arguments in favor of the fundamentals of religious belief were, at bottom, any stronger than those of his more orthodox contemporaries. Whether a man states the Design Argument in the language of the man in the street or in that of neo-Hegelianism does but alter it in appearance; it is the same argument fundamentally, embodying exactly the same fallacies, and open to a precisely similar refutation. A philosophical covering does not make a weak argument strong; it only serves to hide its weakness, and render its exposure a little more difficult.

But, although Dr. Martineau belonged to what is called the advanced school of theologians, he represented an advanced mind of a curiously old-fashioned type. He was conversant with modern writings and modern thought upon the subjects with which he dealt, and yet never seemed to have assimilated them sufficiently to understand all their implications. Scores of passages might be selected from his *Types of Ethical Theory*—particularly those dealing with evolution—to prove this, but it would needlessly extend the length of this article. On the whole, he represented an advanced Bishop Butler, keeping to the same methods of introspective analysis, without properly realising that the modern doctrine of development had completely changed the method of ethical and psychological investigation.

Dr. Martineau's principal religious work is that bearing the title, *A Study of Religion*. It was published about twelve years ago, and a digest of the two volumes has just been issued by one of his most enthusiastic disciples, the Rev. R. A. Armstrong, of Liverpool. It is about nine years since I read the work, and, consequently, my recollection of its contents is not quite so fresh as it might be. So far as my memory serves—I do not possess a copy of it—Mr. Armstrong's little volume is a faithful reproduction of the essence of the work, and I have no hesitation in taking that as a basis of criticism of Dr. Martineau's position. It will, at all events, serve to illustrate some of the fundamental flaws in the religious position. It will therefore be understood that, when I speak of Dr. Martineau's arguments, I am taking them as represented in Mr. Armstrong's book.

There is one point on which I am in thorough agreement with both Dr. Martineau and his expositor. This is in protesting against those who seek "to maintain the nomenclature of Theism without its faith," of using an old group of terms in entirely new senses, and claiming to have a "religion," while rejecting all that the phrase historically and properly implies. Reduced to its simplest term, religion implies the belief in deity and a future life; and it is wresting the term from all that it has ever properly implied to apply it to some vague emotional feeling towards one's fellows. Still less defensible is it to speak of religious feelings towards the universe, once we have reached the position of regarding it as a piece of unconscious mechanism, self-regulating, self-repairing, and self-adjusting. Reverence towards the unconscious forces of nature in the aggregate is every bit as absurd as the savage's worship of natural forces individually. The universe can only command reverence while we believe it to be alive; short of that, as Dr. Martineau says, "Homage to an automaton universe is no better than mummy-worship would be to one who has known what it is to love and trust and embrace the living friend." We must either take religion or leave it. It is simply foolish, if not worse, to reject all that religion properly involves, and then claim to be "religious," chiefly, I imagine, because we are afraid to own ourselves as being without something which the majority declare to be necessary to respectability.

A Study of Religion is the title Dr. Martineau gave his principal religious work, and it exhibits to the full his characteristic habit of taking the human mind as it is, examining its contents, and almost entirely ignoring the course of development that has given man his present feelings and tendencies. His object, to use Mr. Armstrong's words, is "to seek and find its [religion's] sources in the intellectual and moral constitution of man." And, of course, by the method adopted, Dr. Martineau is certain to get out of the human mind all that he requires to establish his case. No one doubts for a moment that, if the average individual examines his or her mental constitution, they will discover there certain tendencies that may easily blossom into religious beliefs. The fact that we are the children of our ancestors, a knowledge of the principle of heredity, will guarantee this much. "The intellectual and moral

constitution" of man has been framed by ancestral experiences, co-operating with present conditions; and that the present individual yields, in the majority of cases, a ready assent to religious teachings does not prove that those teachings are sound; it only proves that with certain inherited tendencies the human mind yields a special response to a special stimulus to the environment.

The real point at issue between non-believers and believers of the type of Dr. Martineau is, "Is religion innate, or is it the result of education, either individual or ancestral?" Now, to answer this question an examination of the objective aspect of religion is indispensable. In any of its phases the human mind is not the result of internal forces only, but of these acting upon, and being acted on by, the forces of the surrounding medium. From the evolutionist point of view, the craving for religion is, when active, simply the result of centuries of training, artificial and natural, in a particular direction; and it is clearly no reply to this position to say: "When I examine my own mental states I find there a desire to believe in the existence of God and a future life." No one disputes the existence of the feeling; a great many dispute its validity or utility.

That the particular form taken by religious beliefs is wholly a matter of education and of position; that, to use Montaigne's phrase, "Christianity is a mere geographical expression.....we are Christians for the same reason that we are Germans," will hardly be denied; and that even the most fundamental of religious ideas are the result of education, using that much-abused word in its most general sense, seems to me also clear. The great obstacle in the way of demonstrating the last contention is the difficulty of keeping the individual free from educative influences.

There is one piece of evidence, however, which may be adduced that seems to me conclusive. Deaf mutes, who are by their infirmities prevented from receiving education through the ear, and who are often only dumb because they are deaf, are found prior to instruction to be altogether destitute of religious ideas. Although they have accompanied their parents or guardians to church or chapel, and have witnessed all the formularies of religious belief, no corresponding chord has been awakened in their minds. It is only after they have become acquainted with some method of holding intercourse with their fellows that religious beliefs have arisen.*

I must confess that this single case seems to me conclusive. Surely, if religious feelings are part and parcel of the nature of man, they should manifest their presence independent of any instruction received by the individual from society. But this, as we have seen in the only case where people can be completely isolated, is not the case. And even when the sense of sight is unimpaired, and the dormant "intuition," if any such existed, might receive a quickening from witnessing others engaged in religious devotions, the deaf mute is left wondering what it is all about. I might have shown the same thing by detailing what we actually know of the history of religious beliefs, and the conditions under which they were generated; but I am content to let the case against those who hold that man is "essentially" a religious being rest upon this single instance.

Dr. Martineau's object, according to Mr. Armstrong, "is to build an edifice of which no man shall be able to shake the metaphysical foundations." This edifice is, of course, the belief in God and a future life. In a future article we shall see in what manner Dr. Martineau sets about the task. For the present I will conclude by replying to his statements concerning the necessity of tracing out the "ultimate causes" and "ultimate issues" of phenomena, in the words with which Walter Savage Landor makes Diogenes address Plato. Says Diogenes:—

> "I meddle not at present with infinity or eternity; when I can comprehend them I will talk about them. You metaphysicians kill the flower-bearing and fruit-bearing glebe with delving, and turning over, and sifting, and never bring up any solid and malleable mass from the dark profundity in which you labor.....Keep always to the point, or with an eye upon it, and, instead of saying things to make people stare and wonder, say what will withhold them hereafter from wondering and staring. This is philosophy: to make remote things tangible, common things extensively useful, useful things extensively common, and to leave the least necessary for the last."

Had this advice been acted upon, a great deal of the *Study of Religion* would never have been written.

C. Cohen.

(To be continued.)

* See for further proof Francis Galton's *Inquiries into Human Faculty*, pp. 208-10. There is a collection of similar instances in Dr. Ireland's *Blot upon the Brain*, chap. x.

Foundation of Christianity.

So far as Christianity may be regarded as a system of religion, there is no doubt that, next to the belief in a God, the hope of a future life constitutes its principal element. In fact, it may be said that the doctrine of Immortality is the very basis of the Christian faith. Upon this belief all its other figments rest. And, strange to say, although this teaching is not anywhere elaborated in the Old Testament, it is there we find the initiation of the Christian idea of continual existence after death. It is true that we are told that Christ "brought life and immortality to light" (2 Timothy i. 10), but where and how he did so it is not easy to understand, seeing that a belief in a future existence extensively prevailed long before the time when Christ is said to have first appeared. Moreover, the supposed events which gave rise to the Christian notion of a life beyond the grave are recorded in Genesis. According to orthodox Christianity, if there had been no Fall there would have been no sin and no death; consequently, the term "hereafter" would have had no meaning in reference to immortality, and there would have been no necessity for Christ to have "brought life and immortality to light." Let us now inquire into the nature of this Bible foundation of Christianity.

Theologians declare that their belief in immortality is a revealed certainty, and yet its real nature has never been made known to mortal man. The very inception of the idea, as set forth in Genesis, appears to have been so alarming to the Christian's God that he adopted prompt measures to prevent it becoming a reality. After Adam had "become as one of us," and was enabled "to know good and evil," there arose a fear "lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever." To prevent this attempt upon the part of Adam to become like God being successful, he (Adam) was sent forth from the Garden of Eden, and "a flaming sword, which turned every way," was placed "to keep the way of the tree of life." Why God should desire mankind to live for ever, and yet seek to prevent Adam from doing so, is beyond our ability to comprehend. Neither is it made obvious that he was at any future time to be other than mortal. What became of that famous "tree of life" has not been revealed to Adam's posterity. Perhaps, when Adam and Eve left Eden, God destroyed it; for, so far as we know, it has never been heard of since. There is in an old history of travels in India an account of a similar tree of life. In this story there is no mention of a flaming sword, but it is stated that the tree could be seen on the payment of a sum equal to half-a-crown of English money.

The statement in Genesis in no way indicates that man was created an immortal being, or that in the future he might have become so. Hence, any deduction drawn from the early Bible reference to "immortality" must necessarily be the negative of the present popular belief, which is, that man *is* immortal. If the opposite conclusion were reasonably possible, then immortality would have been natural, not supernatural, and would also have been the result of physical causes admitting of scientific observation, and not, as now alleged, the consequence of a special divine purpose. It is worthy of note that in the Bible account we have the positive statement made to man: "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." So that, according to this, man is only immortal in the same sense that dust is, which is no confirmation of the modern belief, since that implies perpetual consciousness. One thing is clear: that the Bible writer makes no distinction between the origin of man and that of the lower animals—all are made from dust. The end of their

existence is also described in the Old Testament as being the same. Thus we read in Ecclesiastes: "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?"

In spite of the many absurdities which the notion involves, some learned Divines have professed to believe that, by a simple taste of "the tree of life," Adam would have become immortal. But, if so, human nature would have been constructed upon a totally different plan to what it is. As man is at present organised he grows, wastes, renews, and ultimately decays, his career culminating in Death, which is a necessity, regardless of what Adam did or did not, and man cannot but experience it while he is what he is. Change is a universal law of existence; for, as soon as we enter upon the stage of life, we become subject to that change until we progress to a given point; then our organisation begins to lose its vitality, and we slowly, but surely, exhaust life's powers, and death ensues as certainly as a fire will cease to burn when no longer supplied with fuel. This condition of things has always existed, so far as science can discover. The truth is, if Adam were constituted similar to us, he must have been liable to death. If, on the contrary, his organisation were of an entirely different structure, how could he have been our first parent? Children do not differ in their nature from those whose offspring they are. Certain it is that man's constitution is such that he cannot avoid death. He is so organised that all the influences operating upon him, while for a time and under certain conditions they afford him sustenance and support, must yet, diverted from their normal purpose, cause him to cease to live. Indeed, it is impossible even to conceive of a human body which is possessed of immortality. The phrase is used glibly enough, but let one reflect upon it, and ask himself what is the meaning that he attaches to the expression, "immortal man." A human being lives by taking food, and that very food, wrongly used, may cause death. Excretions of a poisonous character are continually being eliminated, and, should the glandular organ, whose function it is to remove these deleterious substances, cease to act, then the result is as fatal as though a poison had been swallowed. If it be said that this would not occur because there would be no disease, we reply that there is still the impossibility of supposing an organism, whose existence is dependent on something outside itself, being at the same time independent of its liabilities.

We are sometimes asked to admire the design manifested in nature, yet here we have a tree designed by God himself to prevent people dying, and a sword provided to prevent anyone obtaining a taste of this very tree. Mark the inconsistency of this Bible story. If Adam had not eaten of the "tree of knowledge," he would not have been mortal; but, having partaken of it, he brought about his death and his mortality. So, but for the "tree of knowledge," the "tree of life" would have been unnecessary. This was, indeed, a case of the "bane and antidote" with a vengeance. Why, in the name of common sense, were the two trees placed in the Garden of Eden? The only answer we can give is, that it makes the absurdity of the story complete. Then we are told in the New Testament that life eternal is only obtainable through Christ, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Yet in the Old Testament it is said that eternal life could have been secured by eating the fruit of a particular tree. If this garden product had been preserved with its alleged original vitality, and the human race had been allowed to eat thereof, the sufferings and the death of Christ would not have been required. Another absurdity associated with the basis of orthodox Christianity is the idea that souls are rescued by Christ from eternal death, which was caused by Eve acting upon the statement of the Devil in Paradise; yet there is no evidence that the Hebrews professed any knowledge of such a personage until the Babylonian captivity. The writer in Genesis, it is true, attributes all the mischief to "serpent," but no mention is made by him of a devil. Perhaps this was in consequence of the writer's ignorance of the existence of his Satanic Majesty.

Such is the nature of the foundation of the doctrine phase of Christianity. Is such a religion worthy of the age of thought and intellectual discernment? We think not, for it is simply a faith, the credentials of which are ignorance, credulity, and submission to priestly inventions. If there be any truth in the remark that "whatever is built upon a mistake must be a mistake also," then orthodox Christianity is one of the greatest mistakes that have ever deluded the human mind. Our duty, as Secularists, is to labor to destroy the power of this delusion, and to evoke a desire to substitute for it a reliance upon rational principles, which tend to elevate the human mind and to consolidate the intellectual progress of modern times. Charles Watts

Christianising the Drama.

Talmage Play-Acting on His Own.

"America's greatest preacher," the Rev. Dr. T. DeWitt Talmage, has been discoursing at Washington on the drama in relation to Christianity. He says the leading newspapers of America invited him to "inspect and report" on two popular plays of the day. The newspaper proprietors, no doubt, scented "copy" in it. If one American sky-pilot takes editorial control on Christ-like lines, there is no reason, of course, why another should not give an impersonation of Jesus as a dramatic critic. Unfortunately, neither of the plays which Witt was invited to criticise seems to have been that which Miss Olga Nethersole recently figured until it was incontinently stopped by the police.

We are, therefore, without the judgment of Dr. Talmage on that piece of alleged naughtiness which so violently shocked the moral feelings of the American police. We mention the police because the play-going public were ready enough, and eager enough, to crowd the house to overflowing at each representation. We haven't even the benefit of Dr. Talmage's opinion on the two plays he was asked to "inspect and report upon"—just as if he were some Sanitary officer submitting the instructions of a Vestry or Local Board of Health. He didn't go to see either play, but discreetly preferred to deliver in the pulpit a discourse designed to cover the whole subject. It is always best, when contemplating a pronouncement, to dispense with the tiresome preliminary of actual investigation. You are then delightfully embarrassed by facts, and can revel in a delightful licence, either of denunciation or eulogy.

Why Dr. Talmage's opinion should thus have been solicited it is easy to understand. He is more than a bit of an actor himself. Max O'Rell, in his *French Men in America*, devotes several pages to a piquant dissection of Dr. Talmage and his style of oratory. Talmage, he says, is not so much a preacher, a spiritual pastor, an expounder of religious doctrine, as an actor, a comedian, and—he as good as says—a clown. This estimate, in the lowest form, is practically correct. No unbiassed person who has heard Talmage as we have will dispute it. The actor himself, Talmage is, curiously enough, not admired "down" upon his theatrical brethren, which, in view of the extraordinary jealousy that prevails in the profession is something in his favor. In that respect he affords an agreeable contrast to the preacher whom, it is said, Sarah Bernhardt casually dropped in to hear, and who afterwards received from her a polite note in which she asked him why he was so hard on theatrical people. "Are we not, my dear friend," she asked caressingly, "like children playing with a mouse; "Are we not—you and I—both actors?"

Talmage bestows his approval on the drama on the element because it is "an echo of the feeling which God has implanted in our immortal souls." He says we are nearly all moved by the spectacular element even in our Churches. That is quite true, as it is also true that we may be moved in diverse directions. It is not inconceivable, for instance, that some visitors to a Romish or Ritualistic church may be moved by

spectacular effects to sardonic laughter or contemptuous pity. Continuing, Dr. Talmage inquires, What shall we do with this implanted dramatic element? For answer he treats us to the following fine example of Talmagese: "Just as we cultivate the taste for the beautiful and the sublime by bird-haunted glen and roystering stream and cataracts let down in uproar over the mossed rocks, and the day lifting its banner of victory in the east, and then setting everything on fire as it retreats through the gates of the west, and the Austerlitz and Waterloo of an August thunderstorm blazing their batteries into a sultry afternoon, and the round, glittering tear of a world wet on the cheek of the night—as in this way we cultivate our taste for the beautiful and sublime, so in every lawful way we are to cultivate the dramatic element in our nature, by every staccato passage in literature, by every tragic passage in human life."

Is not this really beautiful? Can we any longer wonder that Talmage should attract so many admirers, and that religious weeklies in this country should compete for the reproduction of his sermons? This passage, with its fine imagery, such as "the cheek of the night," is worthy of selection because we can just imagine its delivery by Talmage to his Washington audience, who, of course, were spell-bound. We can picture the lank form of the preacher, the wild eye, the long, thin arms whirling about the head, the cadaverous jaws shrieking out this rhapsody as if it were indeed poetical expression of the highest order. With the class of people he addresses, and those who read his published sermons, it will pass. His hearers desire entertainment, and he affords it in his own particular style. One remembers, however, that it offended Hamlet to the soul to hear a fellow "tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise."

When we open the Bible, says Talmage, our eye falls upon the dramatic. In the "intense, gorgeous, all-suggestive story of Solomon's Song." Yes, certainly in the *all-suggestive* story of Solomon's Song. In the Book of Job, too, where the poor tormented patriarch cuts so much better a figure than the Lord who permitted his torture. In the Book of Revelation, where, says Talmage, we see "cavalrymen of heaven galloping on white horses; nations in doxology—hallelujahs to the right of them, hallelujahs to the left of them." Here, again, we have an example of Talmagese. "Hallelujahs to the right of them, hallelujahs to the left of them," volleying and thundering whilst, we suppose, the beasts with eyes within and eyes without are squatted on their haunches, watching the heavenly French's charge.

"The tendency," says Talmage, "in some quarters is to drone religion, to whine religion, to moan religion, to croak religion, to sepulcharise religion, when we ought to present it in an animated and spectacular manner." This is quite true; but does it not sound like Talmage's apology to his critics for shrieking religion and gesticulating religion, and generally behaving as if the whole thing were a screaming farce, or a burlesque, or the melodrama of a penny gaff—as, indeed, one is often inclined to think it is, without Talmage's histrionic assistance.

On the strength of two obscure prophetic announcements in the Bible which do not seem to bear upon the subject at all, Talmage says that "in the good time coming we have positive announcement that the amusements of the world are to be under Christian sway." What a prospect! Ought we not to rejoice that that "good time" is admittedly a long way off? Fancy a return to miracle plays, dramas on Scriptural lines, the Archbishop of Canterbury or Dr. Parker appointed censor of plays, and all our actors Wilson Barretts!

Talmage gives a glimpse of the kind of thing we may expect by sketching the great spectacle of the day of judgment in the following dramatic fashion:—

"Scene: The Last Day. Stage: The Rocking Earth. Enter: Dukes, Lords, Kings, Beggars, Clowns. No sword. No tinsel. No crown. For footlights: The kindling flames of a world. For orchestra: The trumpets that wake the dead. For applause: The clapping floods of the sea. For curtain: The heavens rolled together as a scroll. For tragedy: *The Doom of the Profligate.* The tramp of nations across the stage—some to the right, some to the left. Then the bell of the last thunder will ring and the curtain will drop!"

This particular discourse by Dr. Talmage, like most others to which he treats his hearers, is chiefly remarkable for its proportion of a ha'porth of sense to an intolerable deal of rhapsodical, hysterical sensationalism, mixed metaphor, ludicrous grandiloquence, and "high falutin'." There is one passage, however, to which we must take specific objection. He says: "It was not original with Shakespeare when he said 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.' He got it from St. Paul, who, fifteen centuries before that, had written, 'We are made a spectacle unto the world and to angels and to men.'"

Got it from St. Paul, indeed! The spectacle, says Talmage, is in a colosseum—the Christians fighting with wild beasts. Very well; but how, in the name of all that is rational, can Shakespeare be said to have "got" his immortal simile from these words of St. Paul? The latter does not say the world is a spectacle, but that Christians are a spectacle to the world; which is an entirely different thing, as any schoolboy might perceive. There isn't a shade of suggestion in the Pauline utterance from which the Shakespearean lines might have sprung. The man who could pretend that Shakespeare is thus indebted must be—well, he could only be Talmage, and that's the worst thing that can be said of him from a rational point of view.

Francis Neale.

The Beautiful Garden.

(*With apologies to the author of the song with that title.*)

They lived in the beautiful garden,
The children of high degree;
The one was the wife of the other,
The "she" was a rib of the "he."
Up above, with His face at the window,
Was their Heavenly Father, J.;
He wanted to catch them tripping,
So He watched them day by day.

He'd planted some trees in the garden,
And loaded the boughs with fruit,
And said: "You can gather from that one
And that one, and that one, to boot;
But the tree that you see over yonder
I shouldn't advise you to climb;
It is bearing some capital apples,
But to eat them's a *capital* crime."

"Old Harry" came into the garden,
In the form of an *upright* snake;
He'd instructions to try and induce them
To pluck of the fruit and partake.
He offered them some, and they took it,
And the Lord at His window spied,
For the ways of the Lord are "narrow,"
And His range of vision's wide.

As soon as they'd eaten the apple
It opened the eyes of the pair;
Each one of them looked at the other,
And they saw that they both were bare.
"The voice of the Lord they heard walking
In the cool of the day"—so they "guyed";
For those that He loveth He spanketh,
And the palm of His hand is wide.

. . . . . .

They were "chucked" from the beautiful garden,
And the gate of the garden was slammed;
And you're all well aware of the sequel—
We are most of us doomed to be damned.
A few will be "crowned" and "feathered,"
But the rest will all be "fried";
For the gates of Heaven are narrow,
And the mouth of Hell is wide!

Ess Jay Bee.

Be a Man.

The sophist sneers: Fool, take
Thy pleasure, right or wrong.
The pious wail: Forsake
A world these sophists throng.
Be neither saint nor sophist-led, but be a man!

—*Matthew Arnold.*

Acid Drops.

President Kruger has challenged God. "So surely," he is reported by the New York *World* as saying—"So surely as there is a God of righteousness, so surely will the Vierkleur of the Transvaal be victorious. It may be in a month, or it may be in three years, but there can be no other ending." This is quite as good as the fabulous old watch story told of Charles Bradlaugh, and of most other leading Atheists during the present century. According to this story, Bradlaugh (or some one) took out his watch and gave God Almighty five minutes to strike him dead and prove the divine activity. At the expiration of the five minutes the Atheist pocketed his watch and said: "You see there is no God." So runs the story, and President Kruger's utterance is on the same level. If the Boers win, it will prove God's existence; if they lose, it will prove his non-existence. The question is thus simplified down to the level of the man-in-the-street's intelligence. And as the war is going, and seems likely to go, Lord Roberts will plant the British flag at Pretoria, while President Kruger will see that the flag of Atheism floats beside it.

President Kruger is promising heaven to his burghers if they fall in fighting the British. "The Lord says," he tells them, "that they who fight in faith, and who fall by the sword, are dear in his sight, and that their death is a sacrifice upon his altar. This is the strife by means of which we may hope to win the crown, both in a material and a spiritual sense." There is something very pawky in that "both."

Reynolds' seems to be animated now and then by anti-patriotic bias, which is at least as bad as patriotic bias. It speaks of Lord Roberts's "impudent assumption" that God helped him to capture Bloemfontein. Where the *impudence* comes in we don't quite see, for Lord Roberts simply handed over *his* share of the glory to God. President Kruger, on the other hand, claims God as being on his side every day and all day long; but our contemporary does not regard this as "impudence"—it is only the superstitious habit Oom Paul has of talking. For our part, we have a shrewd suspicion that both Lord Roberts and President Kruger are using God (who can't help himself) for politic reasons. We smile impartially at the pair, but rather less at Lord Roberts, because he gives the God racket a good rest between victories.

According to the Rev. J. G. Locke, a Wesleyan minister in Cape Colony, the Boers have said that "if they were defeated in this war they would destroy all their Bibles." We rather doubt the reverend gentleman's accuracy, but if he tells the truth, and the Boers keep their word, the war will have at least one good result.

A Wesleyan chaplain writes from Klip Drift to the *Methodist Times*, giving an account of his spiritual labors at the front. He says that after Cronje's surrender he went from shelter to shelter among our men, telling them that the "fervent prayers of the folk at home had probably not a little to do with this astounding transformation in our outlook, and that beyond almost all other men they had good cause to drop upon their knees and thank God for a great deliverance."

With the usual theological blindness, this Wesleyan sky-pilot ignored the fact that Cronje and his men, with Kruger and all the rest of the Boers, had been praying day and night to the same God for victory, and that if the efficacy of prayer was proved in one case, it was at the same time disproved in the other. And why should our men thank God for deliverance from a tight corner in which, if God had been really protecting them, they would never have been placed?

This chaplain, continuing, says that to these sentiments all the men heartily agreed "save one, an intelligent soldier who frankly said he was a Secularist, a disciple of Tom Paine; and he thought it hard that, being such, he should be marched to a compulsory church parade every Sunday morning. I, however, reminded him among other things that Paine in his *Age of Reason* quoted Addison's hymn concerning the Creator of the starry heavens as an exact embodiment of his own creed. I then tenderly urged this frankly outspoken Guardsman to become a *willing* worshipper of Tom Paine's God; the God who created the heavens and the earth, and who, in spite of Tom Paine's scornful protests and denials, gave his own Son to be the Savior of us all."

This story sounds more than a little apocryphal. For one thing, we can hardly credit the statement that the Guardsman described himself as "a Secularist and a disciple of Tom Paine." We don't usually find present-day Freethinkers describing themselves as disciples of Paine, and certainly they would no more think of calling the author of the *Age of Reason* Tom Paine than this Wesleyan chaplain would think of referring to Jack the Baptist. In discovering that Paine was a Theist, the Wesleyan sky-pilot shows that he, at any rate, does not share the ignorance that seems to prevail amongst so many of his brethren in Christ who undertake to talk about Paine and Voltaire.

Some little time ago the *Christian Budget* copied into its pages a silly story that was going the round of the religious press. It purported to be a conversation between Henry Ward Beecher and Colonel Ingersoll about a crystal globe in a drawing-room, and who made it, or whether it came into existence by chance. Members of the Ingersoll family were questioned on the subject, and they all denied that, as far as their knowledge went, any such conversation ever took place.

Now here is the sequel. Recently the *Christian Budget* was transferred to new proprietorial hands, and various changes were made in the paper. Probably a new sub-editor was engaged, for in last week's issue we have the globe story turning up again. But mark! this time it is related not of Beecher and Ingersoll, but of an old astronomer called Athenasius Kirchner and an atheistic friend not named!

An elderly Jew suddenly died the other day in the Jewish synagogue, Houndsditch. As he went on his knees to pray his head fell on one side, and he commenced foaming at the mouth. Another Jew was near him, and noticed his condition, but went on with his prayers, which lasted three-quarters of an hour. The Coroner: Did you wait three-quarters of an hour before sending for the police? Witness: Yes. The Coroner: You delayed all that time? Witness: I finished my prayers. A juror: You would have been better employed looking after the man. This observation, we learn, was received with appreciative "Hear, hears" in the court.

Admiral Field is a breezy speaker. He smacks of the quarter-deck. The other day he attended a meeting of the Committee of Church Defence, and exclaimed "Pish!" "Nonsense!" and "Rot!" while grave orators were talking about the advisability of having a religious census. It is not often that the voice of truth gets heard at these gatherings, but Admiral Field is "an original."

A correspondent tells us that Dr. Peebles—whoever the gentleman is—is "praying" for the late Colonel Ingersoll. "Dr. Peebles," our correspondent says, "should pray for his grandmother." But perhaps his grandmother is past prayer for.

The London City Mission had a legacy of £40,000 quite recently. The treasurer states, however, that this "will not allow of additions to the staff of missionaries, as owing to the increase of population the funds of the Mission have already been largely drawn upon." This is really funny. What does the "increase of population" mean? Have the missionaries been getting larger families? What on earth is the explanation? The only thing quite clear is that outsiders mustn't expect to get any bites out of that £40,000 cake.

Wesleyan Methodists are building a great hall in the heart of Bermondsey. The freehold cost £8,000, and the whole scheme will cost nearly £30,000. A number of cottages have to be cleared away for the site, but the *Daily News* says that "cottages are really worse wanted in Bermondsey than mission halls." What does that matter? A home on earth is nothing to a home in heaven.

At a recent inquest at Pontypridd one of the jury, Mr. John Jones, of Trallwn, desired to affirm, as he was entitled to do by the Oaths Act. The coroner, however, objected, although he had no right whatever to do so, and sent a policeman in search of another juror. It is high time that judges, magistrates, and coroners had their attention formally drawn to the law on this matter. But nothing is likely to be done while Lord Halsbury sits on the woolsack; for he is an old Tory bigot, who earned the Lord Chancellorship by baiting the late Charles Bradlaugh and prosecuting the editor of the *Freethinker* for "blasphemy."

We are informed that when the Pontypridd coroner tried to browbeat Mr. Jones, that gentleman quietly remarked that the Bible was no more to him than an old rag. Of course it is *something* more than that, but the strong retort was obviously invited.

What on earth was Magistrate Cluer thinking about when he fined that working-man named Aries the sum of ten shillings and two shillings costs for not taking out a seven-and-sixpenny license for a dog? The man explained that his boy took it in lame and ill from the street, and it was

nursed back to health and strength again in their home; when, as it was too big a dog for their small place, they found it a comfortable home at a neighboring baker's. Mr. Cluer's action may be strict law, but strict law is sometimes wild injustice. To fine a poor man half a week's wages for helping a strange, sick dog through its trouble is hardly the way to promote kindness to animals.

Kindness to animals, by the way, noble as it is, may be advocated in something like an evil spirit. Opening the pages of that excellent anti-vivisectionist organ, the *Zoophilist*, we came across the report of a meeting connected with this cause in Philadelphia. One of the speakers, and an eloquent one, was the Rev. F. H. Allen. This gentleman wound up, amidst "prolonged cheers," by declaring to those who have been cruel to animals: "You will seek for mercy, and find none in all the breadth of the universe; you will writhe, and none shall release you; you will pray, and none shall hear. For the Angel of Mercy shall pass by on the other side, and hath no tear to shed when a cruel man is damned." This man of God seems to think that one cruelty balances another—in other words, he believes in revenge, and makes God believe in it too. But this is not the road to kindness. Moreover, the gentleman might reflect that

> Evil is wrought by want of thought
> As well as by want of heart.

Pope said that "want of decency is want of sense," and the same might be said of a great deal of cruelty. It often springs from thoughtlessness and lack of imagination. Indeed, an infinitely greater being than Pope, as the Christians believe, cried out when he was being judicially murdered, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." How strange it is that Christians so frequently remember only the worst parts of their religion!

The *Christian* affects to despise the inroads of modern criticism on orthodox belief. All the same, that journal is more than a little disturbed, as its frequent reference to the topic plainly shows. Last week it said: "Every now and again we get one of those cumulative attacks upon the Bible narratives which seem to mark the high-water point of what has been misnamed 'religious thought.' At almost stated intervals our monthly reviews are flooded with discussions which have been met and disposed of again and again during the last half century."

"At the present time," it continues, "we are suffering from such an infliction, but fortunately it is not necessary to re-read these attacks upon Divine truth—they duly pass into the waste-paper basket as their predecessors did before them. The word of God abideth for ever with its gospel of pardon and peace, 'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.'" That is just what it is not. So far from being the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, it is undergoing constant changes in the way of modification as the only method of meeting the difficulties which modern criticism has raised.

A missionary in Arabia has calculated that the number of Mohammedans at the present day is not fewer than 195,500,000, including 20,000,000 in China and 58,000,000 in India. The study of comparative theology does not tend to impress one with the superiority of Christianity as a divinely-revealed faith. Its spread is singularly slow.

The *Anglo-Russian* states that the Yaroslav Circuit Court has just heard a case in which Father-Superior Gavril was accused of the murder of a peasant woman Sukhanova, having as his accomplices the novice Sokoloff and the Deacon Kolobanovitch. The details of the crime were so revolting that the case was heard with closed doors, the chief accused being committed to five years' hard labor in the mines, the others to transportation to Siberia.

Archbishop Trench's poem from his new "In Time of War" begins:—

> O life, O Death, O World, O Time.

Is this an unconscious recollection of Shelley's:—

> O World, O Death, O Time,
> On whose last steps I climb.

A rich farmer, living in Stamford, Connecticut, has created a mild sensation by inserting this advertisement in the local papers:—"Wanted, a kind, Christian lady, named Eve, to marry a Modern Adam, and who is willing to live in a garden of Eden. Only women named Eve need apply." The man declares that the competition for his hand shall be open until July 4, 1900.

The London Tram Car and Omnibus Scripture Text Mission will, it is announced, place a text for £1 in a car or 'bus for a year. We should hope that even pious folk can find some better means of expending a £1. These idiotic texts, confronting one all through a journey, are a greater nuisance than the trade advertisements. Besides, how absurd it is to read "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ" and "Buy Davies' Pea-fed Bacon."

That fussy body, the Lord's Day Observance Society, has addressed a circular to British exhibitors at the Paris Exhibition, expressing their very earnest hope "that exhibitors will maintain the national regard for the sanctity and rest of the Lord's Day."

The Rev. Dr. J. H. L. Zillman, who has just left Sydney for America, seems to have had some experience amongst the sects. He began as a Wesleyan, was then ordained in the Church of England, afterwards deflected to Congregationalism, later on returned to the Church of England, and has of late been a minister in the Unitarian Church.

From the good old *Rock* we learn that the Pope's blessing may now be obtained for a penny. You put a penny in the slot of a machine, when the Pope's figure raises its right hand, and, making the sign of the Cross, solemnly blesses the pious giver. "This dummy Pope's blessing," says the *Rock*, "will prove quite as valuable as the real Pope's one. It is a notorious fact that those blest by the Pope come to grief, as witness Bonita of Naples, Queen Isabella of Spain, Louis Napoleon, the Prince Imperial, and others, all sadly unfortunate. The Pope cursed Victor Emmanuel, Garibaldi, Mazzini, all the liberators and unifiers of Italy, and they all prospered. If one is blessed by the Pope, he had better reflect, for he is sure to be on the wrong rails."

"Scrutator," in the *Church Gazette*, deals with an article in the *Temperance Record* which argues that to say Jesus at the marriage feast at Cana made and drank intoxicating wine is a reflection on his prescience of the dire effects in the world of alcoholic compounds. "Scrutator" endeavors to dispose of this difficulty. He does not attempt to deny that the price of the grape is wine before it passes into a state of fermentation. "In Paul's Epistles to Timothy and Titus," he says, "we read that elders and deacons were to be guarded against such wine, evidently because of its intoxicating quality. The Ephesians were not forbidden wine, but to be drunk therewith as going to excess in the use of it. No distinctions seem to have been made in the particular qualities of the wine whereby to confine Christian drinkers to the unfermented kind."

When, however, "Scrutator," on the lines of the voluntary "kenosis" and humiliation of Jesus, proceeds to argue that it was not incumbent upon Jesus to avoid setting an example in the way of drinking, it is impossible to agree with him. Surely it was specially incumbent upon him, as a moral teacher and perfect exemplar, to have made a clear pronouncement on this most important point, and not to have acted in such a way as to imply a sanction which he did not intend.

Another writer in the *Church Gazette*—"M.A. (Cantab)"—is very wroth with the *Guardian*. "The said journal coolly says that it is regrettable that our Lord's words about the Prophet Jonah should be dragged into the controversy. Is it 'regrettable' because it exposes the extreme absurdity and profanity of suggesting that he who was 'before all worlds,' as the creed of the Church of England states, or an infinitely higher authority—viz., St. John by the Holy Ghost—that 'without him was not anything made that was made' (John i. 3), actually did not know whether he was quoting fiction or fact?"

The great John Roberts has left the Egyptian Hall, where his unapproachable billiard playing for years delighted all sorts and conditions of men, from judges and members of the Cabinet down to the clerk who has just learnt to handle a cue and is anxious to learn how to make a fifty break. For two years John Roberts will be billiarding in the colonies and other parts of the world, and the Egyptian Hall is now being used for very different purposes. Mr. A. E. Emslie is exhibiting there his pictures of "God is Love"—really nine pictures of scenes in the fabulous life of Jesus Christ. He has favored us with a private-view press ticket. But we are not using it. We have seen enough Jesus Christ pictures in our time, and we don't think the world at large is dying for a larger stock of such commodities.

They have—that is to say, the Christians have—a "boy preacher" in America. We understand he is now six, and has been two years in the business, which seems to be a paying one, for we read that he took $4,000 out of Los Angeles, California. He will probably earn less as he gets older.

Mr. Haldane, M.P., wishes that Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener had the job of dealing with slum London. He

sees very little hope from parliamentary agency. Nor do we. Seven hundred talkers are not worth a single man of action where something has to be *done*. With a free press as a corrective and safeguard, a practical dictatorship is simply good business. We should like to see a slum landlord trying to make an impression upon Lord Kitchener. A snapshot of the scene would be one of the best pictures going —with a body of sappers in the background.

The *Westminster Gazette* poked fun at the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes for referring to Herodotus four times, when the author he should have referred to was Thucydides. Mr. Hughes replies with his usual dexterity in such matters. He says he had Thucydides in his hand when making the quotations, and yet "four times over I wrote Herodotus." He considers it a "curious psychological phenomenon," and asks, "What is the explanation?" Some of us could suggest one a good deal short of a miracle.

Rev. Mr. Donaldson, of Leith, is wise in his generation—professionally wise, we mean. He is aware that religion does not attract men; in fact, he says so. He therefore advocates organs and singing in churches in order to draw the young women there; then, as he says, the young men will come too, and the church will be "a trysting place." Does he mean a house of assignation?

Rev. L. G. Broughton, of Brooklyn, declares that "the man who believes in Unitarianism, and sticks to it, will go to hell." This may be true, for all we know; but we conceive it possible that Unitarians may meet Mr. Broughton in God's kitchen, where Old Nick is *chef*.

Rev. J. W. Leadbeater, at a meeting of the Council of the Free Churches, deplored the drunkenness of Dartmouth, and said he had seen young men lying about totally intoxicated in the public streets, not only at night, but in the full noon of day. He is called to account for this in the local *Chronicle* by Mr. C. H. Westmacott, who denies the statement indignantly, and says this man of God has "been in Dartmouth scarcely long enough to know one street from another." He advises Mr. Leadbeater to ponder the fate of Ananias.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is a friend of religion. He ought to be so, as it yields him £15,000 a year. It was natural that he should sing its praises in opening the new "Paragon" Board School, in the New Kent-road. "More attention," his Grace said, "should be given to formation of character, which was as important as the knowledge imparted. Children should be brought up on moral principles, and with this there should be religious training, which would keep those moral principles alive and active." This is very pretty, of course; but does the Archbishop of Canterbury seriously believe that his own moral principles are any more "alive and active" than those of (say) the late Charles Bradlaugh or the late Colonel Ingersoll? Both these Atheists died a great deal poorer than Dr. Temple is likely to, and they were not engaged in preaching "Blessed be ye poor."

The New York *Truthseeker* prints a good "Irish bull," worthy to rank with that of Mr. Flavin, who said the other day in the House of Commons that "the Irish soldiers lose their lives in South Africa, and on their return home are starved to death by the War Office." It appears that Mr. Weekes, a New York Assemblyman, in the discussion on a Bill to abolish common-law marriages, said: "A man dies, and along comes a woman heavily veiled and in deep mourning and claims to be his wife, and for the first time the man hears that he is married."

Will the Queen's visit to Ireland result in any durable good to that "distressful" country? It is certainly a courageous action on her part to go there at her time of life. But some people say she ought to have gone there many years ago. Perhaps it is better late than never. The Irish are a quick-witted race, yet they are much governed by sentiment, and a little human kindness goes a long way with them. It would be a fine thing if this royal visit were to pave the way for acts of political justice. That is really what Ireland wants from England. What she wants at home is release from the thraldom of priestcraft, but that is hardly possible while every priest can pose as a patriot.

Father Lambert's paper, the New York *Freeman's Journal*, denounces the Giordano Bruno statue at Rome as "an abiding insult to the Papacy." What absurdity! How can the Papacy be insulted by reminding it of what it is proud of—the murder of that heroic Freethinker? We quite understand, though, why the Pope should refer to the recent Italian celebration of the tercentenary of Bruno's martyrdom as "the work of Satan," for it included speeches of a very anti-clerical and "infidel" character.

Seventh-Day Adventists in America believe that Saturday is the true Sabbath. They observe it accordingly, and work on Sunday. For this they are bitterly persecuted by their fellow Christians. Many of them have been chained in convict gangs and set to public work on the highways. We are glad to see, however, that the persecutors of this harmless sect have met with a rebuff in Tucson, Arizona. Methodist ministers in the district had some of the Adventists arrested and brought before the judge. This gentleman asked the prosecutors, "Have these Adventists molested you in any way?" The answer was "No." "Have they," he asked, "interrupted your services or religious meetings?" Again the answer was "No." "Then," said the judge, "you go home and mind your own business and let them alone."

"What would Jesus Do?" Sheldon's one-week attempt to show how the Jew Christ would edit a Yankee newspaper is admitted to be a failure from a journalistic point of view. Colonel McClure, in the New York *Journal*, calls the whole thing "a new species of yellow journalism." "It is unfortunate," the Colonel continues, "that it is not to continue for a month or two, and thus enable him to learn the full lesson of his enterprise. The novelty will last for a week, and he will close the experiment with apparent evidence of success. But if he were to continue it for a year, a sheriff's sale of the newspaper property would be the sequel of the story."

"Providence" continues to favor India. The latest figures show that 4,879,000 persons are in receipt of famine relief. These figures throw the war figures in South Africa quite in the shade. Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn. The inhumanity of "Providence" inflicts suffering on millions.

The *Daily News* came out pretty strong in its article on the death of Dr. St. George Mivart. "Very few priests," it said, "understand science, but they can all say 'You be damned' to those who do." It reads like an extract from the *Freethinker*.

The "Body Politic."

Help in thought about the human world may be gained from physiology, based on the conformation and order of the individual man. First from his health, and next from his diseases. The healthy body of him is one integral person of mean stature; giants and dwarfs being malformations. The constituents of the man-body are organs and members. A skeleton of organic architectural bone is the basement and rock of its order; the last charter of the natural person. Founded on bone-individuality, other individuality reigns throughout this free kingdom. The whole is a living man, singular and indivisible. Agreeably to complete unity he is affectioned into many organs, which are generally mated or reduplicated that bilateral mind may be in them; will and wit representatively present. Separatist, and zealous, not jealous, frontiers unite them, and externise oneness after oneness from bone to skin. Each organ—brain, heart, lungs, liver, spleen, stomach, kidneys, and the complements of gender—again consists of its own individualities; its leasts or special personals. Use, office, function, unfathomably deep and immeasurably high intention, follow the mechanism throughout. The leasts of each organ, diverse for each, perform their use in the hands of life, just as one man or one woman, a least in any society, executes an office and fills a place which should be substantial to the general weal. The leasts, therefore, secrete, absorb, manufacture, and support themselves on the treasury of the circulating blood, turning its plastic salts and savors into their own several ideal structures, feeding upon the blood which is the life. The organs and members dine at this table, dress and show from it, work and discourse from it, in general commerce and communion. They sit and stand in a scale of dignities from the highest to the lowest, from the starry firmament of the brain to the leathern plant of the feet. Use fulfilling divine purpose is the ticket and badge of the dignity of each. The blood is the capital, the industrious doers are the laborers, and discrepancy between these is as impossible in health as fight between body-structure and soul-function. This is because, health taken for granted, all work done must be good, and have good wages in order to continue good work

—*Dr. J. Garth Wilkinson, "Affections of Armed Powers, pp. 72-74.*

It is a curious kind of spectacle to see a few hundred people paying a few thousand dollars a year for the purpose of hearing these great problems discussed: "Was Adam the first man?" "Who was Cain's wife?" "Has anyone seen a map of the land of Nod?" "Where are the four rivers that ran murmuring through the groves of Paradise?" "Who was the snake? How did he walk? What language did he speak?" This turns a church into a kind of nursery, makes a cradle of each pew, and gives to each member a rattle with which we can amuse what he calls his mind.—*Ingersoll.*

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, April 8, The Athenæum Hall, London, W.C.; 7.30, "Is Dr. Mivart in Hell?"

April 22, Camberwell; 29, Liverpool.

To Correspondents.

Mr. Charles Watts's Lecturing Engagements.—April 8, Camberwell; 22, New Brompton; 29, Athenæum, London. May 27, Bradford.—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.

A. S. Robinson.—We quite agree with you that Shakespeare is reverenced more than studied, but that is always the case with the very greatest writers. It may even be true, as the writer in *Literature* suggests, that many so-called literary people have not read more than four of the plays right through. Sometimes our great poet is quoted in a curious way. Mr. John Burns, for instance, spoke of himself on the London County Council the other day as "frosty but kindly," alluding humorously to his years of service and his grey hairs. So far it was all right; the quotation was apt enough; but he ascribed the words to Jack Falstaff of all men! The speaker was really a very different person—old Adam in *As You Like It*.

J. Titherington (Lower Darwen) wishes the well-to-do Freethinkers would "shake off their drowsy lethargy" and do their duty, financially, to the cause they profess to support.

E. A. Charlton.—Good sentiment, but indifferent verse. Not even a born poet can write good verse without a lot of careful practice. Natural faculty is congenital, but technical skill is acquired.

S. W. Baynard.—You cannot prevent your daughter from joining the Salvation Army. Morally speaking, of course, we know what to think of those who quoted the text to her about forsaking father and mother for Christ; but, legally speaking, you are quite helpless.

J. Partridge.—Pleased to learn from you that Mr. Watts was in good form, and had good audiences on Sunday at Birmingham.

James Neate.—Thanks. See "Sugar Plums."

W. P. Ball.—Always glad to receive your useful cuttings.

W. Clark.—Both are summaries, and we should like to see the full text of the original. There can be no doubt, at any rate, about the Public Meetings Law in the Transvaal. You are quite right in saying that people are more or less unwise and unjust in a time of excitement; but does not the truism apply on both sides?

C. D. Stephens.—We cannot share your hope. The journals that cry out against "Peace" meetings being interfered with will *not* cry out against Freetbought meetings being interfered with. The political game is one thing; justice all round is quite another.

S. Holman.—See paragraph. The contents-sheet shall be sent to Mr. Lewis. Thanks.

F. A. Davies.—You need not send a request for insertion with such notices.

T. Holstead.—We are much obliged. Do you wish the correspondence returned? We are sorry to hear of your ill health, but hope you will soon be in a tolerable condition again. You bear up wonderfully for such a patriarch. We look forward to shaking hands with you once more—and not for the last time either—when we next visit Bolton.

W. Cox.—Glad to hear that the Liverpool Branch is going on with its work with a lighter heart. Mr. Foote will forward subjects for April 29.

C. W. O.—Pleased to have your interesting and sympathetic letter, but you could hardly assist us in the way suggested, as we have already as many articles as we can make use of.

D. Saxter (Glasgow).—Miss Vance executed the order you sent her as Secretary of the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited. The books and pamphlets were not "out of print," and it was monstrous to report them so. The person who did so knew better. He was simply trying to cover his own default at the Company's expense. Any newsagent who is told that the Company's advertised publications are "out of print," or in any other way unobtainable, should write direct to the Secretary.

Miss Vance, the N. S. S. Secretary, asks us to remind Branch secretaries that all amounts due from them to the Society should reach her on or before April 23, upon which date the books will close for the year. Individual members would also oblige her by referring to the date of their last receipt and forwarding subscriptions now due.

Papers Received.—Truthseeker (New York)—Anglo-Russian—Dartmouth Chronicle—De Vrije Gedachte—Liberator—Isle of Man Times—Sydney Bulletin—People's Newspaper—Blue Grass Blade—Natal Mercury—Ethical World—Edinburgh Evening News—El Libre Pensamiento—Boston Investigator—Progressive Thinker—World's Advance Thought—Two Worlds—New Century—Freidenker—Crescent—Torch of Reason—Zoophilist—English Mechanic.

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.

Special.

Christian bigotry has once more been too many for us. I am sorry to say that we have, after all, lost the premises I spoke of last week. They were in a capital position, and very suitable for all our purposes. The lessor had no objection to our using them for our special business; the lease was ready, and, indeed, the keys were handed over to us; but we had to hand them back again, for at the last moment the Duke of Bedford's steward refused to sanction the lease being assigned to Mr. Hartmann, as he considered the contemplated business was "an unsuitable one." I may add that the leases on the Bedford estate are terribly stringent covenants, such as the law ought never to permit. They make the Duke's steward the absolute master of everything that goes on. All the legal right the tenants have is to pay rent and discharge other obligations. So the great ground-landlord's great man rules out Freethought from the whole area. It was maddening after all the trouble we had taken; and I beg all Freethinkers to note whether religious intolerance is really dead. To me it seems strong and active in many directions. There is a pretence of fair play, but when it comes to the "sticking place" Freethought is still treated as a pariah.

We did not know our fate absolutely until Monday afternoon. Since then we have carried on negotiations with electric speed for a shop and offices in the vicinity of Ludgate Hill; and, as I had the *Freethinker* in hand, the major part of this work fell upon Miss Vance, who has been indefatigable, as she always is when there is any hard job to be done. We have gone so far, up to the time of going to press, early on Wednesday, as to have the agreement duly signed on our part, and a cheque for the first quarter's rent drawn in advance. The final answer, with (or without) the keys, is expected later in the day. It is to be hoped that we shall be all right this time. Another failure would be sickening; although, even in that case, we should still persevere.

There are circumstances, already known to a good many Freethinkers, and which others may suspect, that make it a matter of vital necessity for the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, to be carrying on its own business entirely. I cannot say at the present moment how far we shall be compelled to enter upon a public statement in mere justice to ourselves, and to prevent worse evils than publicity in the future.

Meanwhile, the shareholders of the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, and the friends of the Freethought movement in general, may rest assured—and probably will not doubt—that we are doing our best in face of very serious difficulties.

G. W. Foote.

Sugar Plums.

There was an improved audience at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday evening, when Mr. Foote lectured on "Some Suggestions for God." His address was freely punctuated with laughter and applause. Mr. S. Hartmann officiated as chairman. Mr. Foote lectures there again this evening (April 8). His subject will be "Is Dr. Mivart in Hell?" This lecture ought to be of some interest to Catholics as well as other Christians, seeing the state of practical excommunication in which Dr. Mivart died.

Last Sunday Mr. Charles Watts lectured twice in Birmingham. There was a fair gathering in the morning, when Mr. Stepto presided. In the evening there was a capital audience. Miss L. Goyne made a most efficient "chairman," and delivered a brief address in her usual graceful manner. This lady is a great acquisition to the Birmingham branch. Both lectures were enthusiastically received, and we are glad to hear that Mr. Watts was in his best form.

This evening (Sunday, April 8) Mr. Watts lectures in the Secular Hall, 61 New Church-road, Camberwell, taking for his subject, "Can a Scientist be a Christian?"

We venture to repeat the announcement that the N. S. S. Annual Excursion takes place on the first Sunday in July. Brighton or Margate will be the place of destination. The weather has been duly ordered. We are also in a position to announce that the N. S. S. Annual Conference, which is a fixture for Whit-Sunday, will be held this year in London.

Mr. James Neate, of the Bethnal Green Branch, informs us that his Branch has decided to close its outdoor lecture-stations on both these Sundays. "We mean to be at the Conference," he says, "and we intend to work the Excursion tickets for all they are worth." Mr. Neate thinks this may serve as a hint to other Branches. We hope it will.

Mr. Cohen opens the outdoor lecturing season for the Bethnal Green Branch this afternoon (April 8) with a lecture in Victoria Park, at the old stand near the fountain. No doubt there will be a good rally of the "saints" on this occasion.

While the *Morning Leader* is indignant, and justly indignant, about the breaking-up or preventing of Stop-the-War meetings, it occurred to Mr. C. Stephens to write a letter reminding our contemporary that Secularist meetings in England had been treated for many years in the same way, with practically no protest on the part of the ordinary press. Mr. Stephens's letter was inserted, minus the uncomplimentary reference to the press. But that was really the most important part of it. However, we were glad to see Mr. Stephens's letter inserted in any shape, for it will do good. *All* such letters do good. They are a form of propaganda which Freethinkers should cultivate more extensively.

Quoting some press-notices under the head "Friendly Recognition," the *Anglo-Russian* says: "The *Freethinker* apparently finds us too orthodox and narrow. Still, it does not mind quoting an anecdote about a High Churchwoman 'from the little sheet called the *Anglo-Russian*.' Big sheets do not necessarily contain great thoughts, and the littleness of this paper, alas! we cannot help."

The size of the *Anglo-Russian* that we saw led to the description of it as a "little sheet." But the term was not in any way used disparagingly. We are glad to see that the present issue shows such a development in dimensions that the term would now be quite inapplicable. It is still true, however, that the journal is a trifle too orthodox and narrow.

The House of Commons is improving—in some things. It had the sense to throw out the Flogging Bill by a decisive majority. This is doubly good news in a Christian country, for the Bible gives divine sanction to the use of the rod. We think we ought to congratulate *Humanity*, the organ of the Humanitarian League, on the success of its well-sustained crusade against this kind of legislation.

The *Truthseeker* (New York) reproduces Mr. Foote's article entitled "An Eccentric Agnostic," written on the death of the late Marquis of Queensberry. The same number of our esteemed Transatlantic contemporary contains another admirable address by Mr. J. E. Roberts, which we shall reprint for the benefit of our own readers. Exchanges of this kind are a good form of internationalism.

Mr. Joseph Symes's *Liberator* (Melbourne) for February 24 reproduces "Mimnermus's" article on Zola from our columns. Mr. Symes also reproduces our reply to the attack made upon him by Mr. Alexander Sutherland in the *Ethical World*—for which (the reply, not the attack) our far-off old friend and colleague is "obliged." He adds a few manly words of his own. "Men of Mr. Sutherland's stamp," he says, "have always been welcome to occupy my platform, or to make use of my paper. I have, to the best of my ability and opportunity, encouraged every sort of Freethinkers, except the lawless and the criminal. If Messrs. Sutherland & Co. have so heartily disliked my methods and propaganda, why have they not started something of their own? Why grumble with, boycott and hamper, the only man who has persistently fought Melbourne savagism in the only style the savages could appreciate?" Mr. Symes adds, very justly, that his life is as good as that of his critics', and very much more self-denying.

It is always pleasant to record anything creditable to human nature. The following extract is from a letter by a *Daily News* war correspondent, who was wounded and taken prisoner, and nursed in the hospital at Bloemfontein:—"For a day and a half I lay at that laager whilst our wounded men were brought in, and here I should like to say a word to the people of England. Our men when wounded are treated by the Boers with manly gentleness and kindly consideration. When we left the lagaar in an open trolly, we, some half-dozen Australians and about as many Boers, all wounded, were driven for some hours to a small hospital, the name of which I do not know. It was simply a farmhouse turned into a place for the wounded. On the road thither we called at many farms, and at every one men, women, and children came out to see us. Not one taunting word was uttered in our hearing, not one braggart sentence passed their lips. Men brought us cooling drinks, or moved us into more comfortable positions on the trolly. Women, with gentle fingers, shifted bandages, or washed wounds, or gave us little dainties that come so pleasant in such a time; whilst the little children crowded round us with tears running down their cheeks as they looked upon the blood-stained khaki clothing of the wounded British. Let no man or woman in all the British Empire whose son or husband lies wounded in the hands of the Boers fear for his welfare, for it is a foul slander to say that the Boers do not treat their wounded well. England does not treat her own men better than the Boers treat the wounded British, and I am writing of that which I have seen and know beyond the shadow of a doubt."

Lord Roberts's telegram to President Kruger on the death of General Joubert may be mentioned in this connection. War is ugly enough, but it may be tempered by courtesy and humanity.

Death of Dr. Mivart.

Dr. St. George Mivart died on Sunday at the age of seventy-two. He had been ailing for some years. One of his letters to Cardinal Vaughan, who wanted his recantation but could not obtain it, was written when he believed he was at the point of death. It will not do, therefore, for the Catholics to represent his decease as a "judgment." No doubt it was the consciousness of approaching death which prompted Dr. Mivart to obey his conscience and free himself from the thraldom and hypocrisy of belonging ostensibly to a Church which no longer commanded his adherence or his respect.

Dr. Mivart was for many years the only scientific champion of Catholicism in England. At last he told the truth as he saw it, and was excommunicated by Cardinal Vaughan. He died presumably without what the Church calls "the last consolations of religion." He appears to have believed in a future life, and we daresay he was prepared to meet its justice without a priest's certificate. His death foils our curiosity as to his further intellectual developments; on the other hand, it prevents the possibility of his being "reconciled" in a feebler old age with Rome.

Dr. Mivart was born in 1827. He was educated at Clapham Grammar School, at Harrow, and at King's College, London. He joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1844. This prevented his going to Oxford. He was called to the Bar in 1851, but he turned his attention to medicine, and in 1862 became a Lecturer at St. Mary's Hospital Medical School, a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1867, Vice-President of the Zoological Society in 1869, and Secretary of the Linnæan Society from 1874 to 1880. University College was liberal enough to appoint him Professor of Biology in 1874. Besides the volumes which bear his name, Dr. Mivart wrote many biological articles in the new *Encyclopædia Britannica*. He was not a mere specialist, but was profoundly interested in history and philosophy. Hence his severance from his Mother Church at the close of his career.

On the Monday evening following his death Dr. Mivart was to have been the guest of the Author's Club, in honor of his defiance of priestly intimidation. On Sunday morning he was preparing his speech for that occasion. But he felt ill, and expressed a belief that he would die at the board of his hosts. A few hours later he quietly breathed his last, attended by his wife and his only son.

Mr. Joseph McCabe, another convert to Freethought from Rome, knew Dr. Mivart personally, and sent him a copy of his *Twelve Years in a Monastery*. What followed is told by Mr. McCabe in a letter to the (Tuesday's) *Daily News* :—

> "To my infinite surprise, I received a letter from him, a few days after publication, thanking me for the way I had spoken of him in my book, which he had 'read with great interest.' The letter was exasperatingly sympathetic. I was 'blue-mouldy for want of a batin',' as they say in certain parts of the Empire, and I was repelled with an invitation to lunch. Under the influence, however, of an overpowering curiosity, I betook myself to the Oriental Club, and we had a long, almost perfectly harmonious, conversation on all things, philosophical and theological. Mivart proved to be considerably broader than any of us had ever dreamed. Under a promise that I should keep silence 'for the present,' he expressed himself with perfect freedom. He mercilessly ridiculed the belief in the supernatural birth of Christ and the virginity of Mary. 'Do they really teach you such stuff seriously in the seminaries?' he asked, with a smile of amused incredulity. And the virginity of Mary is a solemn article of faith, it must be remembered, in the Roman Catholic Church."

Mr. McCabe adds that Dr. Mivart said, "I am not even a Christian in the ordinary sense of the word." This is fully borne out by his last article in the March number of the *Nineteenth Century*.

We understand that Dr. Mivart was a man of exemplary character and tender refinement. Some months ago he sent us a letter which was published in the *Freethinker*, and a private note about its insertion, which could only have been written by one of great natural modesty, considering the position he occupied in the world of science. We rejoice that such a man broke away from "the great lying Church." His defection gave another tremendous blow to the greatest system of superstition and priestcraft on earth.

The Bible as Literature.

In talking of the sacred scriptures of foreign faiths, people often say to me, "Are they anything like our Bible?" This, however, is a somewhat misleading method of comparison, because the Bible is a book with which we are all familiar. Constant repetition has blinded us to its many faults, and custom has surrounded it with a kind of respect. This generates an unconscious bias, which renders it difficult to judge a foreign sacred book upon its merits. The adherents of every faith claim the highest literary excellence for their own scriptures, and are very much surprised if strangers do not agree with them. Theologians will, of course, print long lists of names of people who have praised the thought and language of the Bible, but these are invariably persons who have been brought up under Biblical influence. Moslems will cite hundreds of eulogists of the Koran; but these are invariably persons who have been brought up under Koranic influence. The Moslem considers the Christian Bible intolerable rubbish; the Christian considers the Koran arid silliness; the independent student will say that they are both perfectly correct. The Bible is familiar to us in a certain standard version and a certain style of language. The instant it is put into another dress, we begin to perceive its real character, for we are no longer hypnotised by the familiar phraseology. Every now and then some well-meaning idiot attempts to improve upon the language of the Authorised Version, and publishes a translation in ordinary, or more dignified, language. The result is invariably ludicrous; not owing to any unskilfulness of the translator, but simply because of the innate absurdity of the book itself.

Regarded as literature, the Old and New Testaments offend every recognised canon. But this is not to be wondered at, for the editors had no intention whatever of preserving beautiful pieces of composition; their aim was to collect a few religious treatises to be used for their own ulterior purposes. The Hebrew language, in which the Old Testament was composed, is a Semitic tongue, imperfect, halting, and quite incapable of expressing the finer shades of meaning. Parts of the work profess to be historical; other parts profess to be poetical. In order to be good literature, history should be vivid and accurate; Old Testament history is neither. Poetry should have beauty of form and beauty of thought; Old Testament poetry has neither. Hebrew "history" was, of course, never intended to inform the reader of past events; it was merely written to support some religious theory of interest to the writer. Hebrew "poetry," so-called, has neither rhyme nor alliteration. That might have been expected. But neither has it rhythm or regularity. Its sole artificiality of structure is its parallelism, where the substance of one line is repeated in the next, in a most monotonous and mechanical manner :—

> The king cometh, sitting upon an ass;
> And upon a colt, the foal of an ass.
>
> Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder,
> The young lion and the serpent shalt thou trample under foot.

And so on. And this pitiful ingenuity was regarded as poetry! The poet also introduced, as far as he was able, uncommon and archaic words, obsolete expressions and grammatical forms; in the idea that the less his composition resembled ordinary language the more poetical it must be. But, perhaps, we should not be hard on him for that, for many modern English poets seem to be of the same opinion. Hebrew poetry, then, possessed no regularity, and no rhythm, and the length of the lines was of no importance. We are thus left to wonder at the character of the Hebrew music, which accompanied this bizarre poetry. None of this music has survived to us; and we should probably be thankful that it has not. There was apparently more noise than melody about it; for Lamentations compares the musical services of the Temple on feast days to the ear-splitting yells of an army storming a city.

If the Old Testament was written in a Semitic idiom, however, the New was composed in Aryan Greek, a language possessing a copious and justly admired literature. But, so far from the New Testament equalling the pagan books, it does not even approach them. The greater the attainments of a Greek scholar, the greater his contempt for the compositions of the Apostles. The Ancient Greeks were the only people who took for their sacred book an acknowledged literary masterpiece; and we dare not mention in the same breath the sublime poems of Homer and the doggerel lays of Luke.

When Christianity succeeded in imposing itself upon Europe, it necessarily embraced not only mediocrity, but also occasional genius, in spite of the deadening influence which religion exerts upon the human mind; and men of talent have arisen in all departments of religious literature who have surpassed and outshone the feeble glimmer of the Biblical compositions. The consequence is that, notwithstanding the vaunted excellence of Scripture literature, there are many books whose interest, beauty, and value are recognised by religionists of the most opposite sects. The clergy profess to be lost in admiration at the simplicity and the human character of the tales in Genesis. To the unbiassed reader they are insufferably stupid. But what a contrast to these vapid fables is found in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, with its natural and simple narrative. The *Pilgrim's Progress* had no laws to enforce it; no powerful sect to thrust it upon the attention of the religious world; it has succeeded by its own intrinsic merits. The literary genius of the Bedford tinker has made even dry seventeenth-century allegory to blossom into living flower; and he has produced a work which is read in all languages, by all classes, not as a ceremonial duty, but as a real pleasure. John Bunyan's military career as a Parliamentary soldier was not very long, but it enabled him to describe the "Holy War" of his fancy in a style which has charmed many a boy whose reading was limited by parental wrongheadedness to "religious" works. And there is not a reader of the "Holy War" who will not confess a sneaking preference

for it, rather than the impossible and uninteresting battles of the Old Testament.

The Bible is supposed to be a *religious* book, yet it is surpassed in pietistic feeling by many an uninspired volume. The treatise of Thomas à Kempis, "Of the Imitation of Christ," rises to a far higher level than any Biblical writing. Its ethics and philosophy commend themselves to all schools of thought, whilst its religious teaching evokes the sympathetic admiration of all Christian sects. The ultra-Protestant, with hatred of monkery in his heart, finds Thomas à Kempis so overpoweringly seductive that he is almost inclined to retire into a monastery at once. And the rabid opponent of Catholicism learns with surprise that the most exquisite delineation of religious experience has proceeded from the Church he opposes. The reading of President Kruger seems to have been limited to the Psalms; but he might study with advantage the much superior work of this mediæval Dutchman.

If we take any single Biblical narrative or doctrine, it is wonderful how much improved, or even transformed, it becomes when treated with Christian talent. In Matthew xxiv. and xxv. is a dreary and tiresome discourse upon the Consummation of the Age, put into the mouth of Jesus Christ, and supposed to have been delivered as a solemn message. The Evangelist actually supposed that divinity could talk like this! But how different from the feeble deliverances of Matthew are the majestic thunders of the *Dies Iræ* :—

> That Day of wrath, that dreadful Day,
> Long since foretold by Sybil's Lay,
> When earth and sky shall melt away.

Then, again, many of the scenes narrated in the Bible seem utterly dead, and devoid of human feeling. What can be tamer and more commonplace than John xix. 25–27? Jesus, suffering an agonising death, sees, standing upon one side, his heart-broken mother, and on the other his best-beloved disciple; and hands one over to the other with the calm, matter-of-fact air of a man transferring an ordinary piece of property. To show what can be made of only one aspect of this scene, we need only refer to that magnificent hymn, the *Stabat Mater*, palpitating with life, and gushing out its floods of human sorrow.

The principal authors of the Bible were, avowedly, Oriental dervishes and Galilean peasants. We could expect no literary excellence from either; and we certainly can find none. The volume is only kept alive by artificial methods. It has to be distributed gratuitously; it requires thousands of hirelings to find in it imaginary merits, and it has to be forced into schools and universities by those interested in its supremacy. Works of real literary merit require no such aids, and have risen into notice in spite of them. The religious Scriptures of the world are, after all, but sorry rubbish; and it is a satire to find that the works declared divine are so inferior to those avowedly human.

Chilperic.

The Future of Religion.

In the current number of the *Agnostic Annual* there is a series of papers under the above title, which, with perhaps one exception, leaves the whole speculation in some confusion. One would think that, apart from the fact that the matter in itself of course partakes somewhat of the nature of prophecy, the essential of all accurate thinking is to define the terms we are using. It can scarcely be said that accurate definition is a striking characteristic of these articles.

In Mr. Allanson Picton's paper, the first in the series, the confusion is perhaps seen at its worst. Mr. Picton sets out by declaring that he uses the word *religion* "in the old-fashioned sense." Other people, he says, may "speak of patriotism or of devotion to humanity as a religion, for, of course, custom may make a word mean anything." But Mr. Picton will stick to the old meaning. Yet he goes on to describe his idea of religion as a worship not merely of humanity, but of the universe :—

> "But how can we stop here? Are we not conscious of an indefinitely greater Whole embracing, subordinating, and blessing humanity?"

In sober truth, I do not think we are really conscious of any such "blessing" entity. This Whole—which is only the "old-fashioned" religionist's God spelt differently—is frequently anything but a blessing or a benevolent protector. The attempt of the Theist to attribute human characteristics to a personal deity governing the universe is futile enough, and is countered at every point by the facts of existence. But the attempt to erect the impersonal Infinite into a similar position is surely, if anything, more illogical and absurd. Why should we feel any reverence for the earthquake or the cyclone? How can we feel the "blessing" of the drought or the famine? Surely Mr. Picton has not yet quite outgrown the anthropomorphic stage without retaining the only intelligible formulas which can support such a level of thought. For a conscious, intelligent personality we can have respect and reverence, in so far as the conduct of such an individual, in our opinion, merits them. For the universe, which in its totality we cannot in any way comprehend in human terms, reverence and worship are surely absurd. And so far even from this attitude of mental prostration and awe, which is generally implied by the term worship, being a healthy state, to be encouraged, it is rather a morbid condition, more and more found to be associated with lower mental types. Why should man, as apparently even some Rationalists desire, be anxious to prostrate himself before something or other? Why can he not just stand on his feet, and—seeking to know as much as possible—leave what he does not, or cannot, know to take care of itself, without either his contempt or reverence? We must, in fact, counteract this tendency to "worship" in any of its disguises. It is manifest that it does not insure morality or the highest thinking, since it is frequently found in conjunction with the antithesis of both. And it is also manifest that numbers of the most moral men and most acute thinkers (if not, indeed, the majority of them) have never experienced the necessity for this worship. It is, therefore, neither essential nor helpful, and in reality is merely a relic of past stages of culture.

The Rev. Charles Voysey writes another somewhat confused paper, though one must recognise the cultured and gentlemanly tone which pervades it, in common, indeed, with all the others. At the outset he rather quaintly, but naturally enough, says that "no human being, having religious convictions at all, can doubt that his own views of truth will prevail in the end over all the rest." Mr. Voysey, of course, is minister of a little Theistic Church in London, and he looks forward to its spread, indulging, by the way, in much dialectic against "priestcraft"; though surely one man giving to himself the title of "Reverend" is one of the most distinctive marks of the priestly caste. It is not likely, however, that many people of either side share Mr. Voysey's natural enthusiasm. After all, the real, intellectual struggle nowadays is between Christianity and Atheism or Agnosticism. Erasmus Darwin, in his day, described Unitarianism as a feather-bed to catch a falling Christian; and, varying the metaphor, one might say that Theism merely represents the last wayside station on the line before one reaches the Rationalist terminus, and there seems no reason why any considerable number of persons should alight at it. In plain speech, the day when pure Theism or Deism represented a serious phase of Rationalist evolution is surely past.

There is one point, however, in Mr. Voysey's contribution which may be noticed, because it almost magically illustrates the intellectual bias or deformity which positively seems to lie at the back of all Theism. Mr. Voysey is remarking and commenting on the good influences at work which are moulding the future, and professes some surprise at finding one of these influences in a "sphere from which such a phenomenon was hardly to be expected"—namely, the modern Rationalist movement. And he goes on: "In olden times, it cannot be denied, Atheism was generally associated with disregard of the moral law, and with desperate forms of anarchy." And the fact moves Mr. Voysey to more or less wonder that "a school of thought sometimes called Atheism, sometimes Agnosticism," should set before it the inculcation of morals.

Now, is not all this stamped with the disingenuousness

of the average religionist mind? Who associated Atheism "in olden times" with disregard of the moral law, and the desperate anarchy, and all the rest? The very people and types, it may be remarked, who "in olden times" associated Deism with the like misconduct, as Mr. Voysey, *qua* Deist, very well knows. If we professed surprise at Mr. Voysey, a representive of Theism, writing in general courtesy, and humanely, notwithstanding the fact that Theism was identified "in olden times" with ruffianism, he would surely be led to interesting reflections on our honesty or our manners.

Mr. F. J. Gould's paper, any more than Mr. Picton's or Mr. Voysey's, is not quite satisfactory. Mr. Gould has done such good work for Freethought, and is so thoroughly high-minded and conscientious, that an humble critic like the present writer is somewhat loath to indulge in what might be considered hyper-criticism. But Mr. Gould seems to be latterly developing a mystical style which is anything but reassuring. Mr. Gould, for instance, in this paper, taking religion to mean the "religious temper," and taking the religious temper to mean ethical straightforwardness, looks with confidence and hope to the future of religion. At other times he has written of "worship" and "services," and in this *Agnostic Annual* paper he puts in a plea for "those aids of music and ritual by which the religious temper often makes itself known and felt." Now all this confessedly strikes me as a trifle objectionable. We ought surely to be careful, lest in twisting words out of their ordinary plain meaning we do not land ourselves in a moral equivocation. For the thing can be carried to dangerous lengths. If Agnostics can speak of "religion" and "worship," using the words in a special sense, there seems no valid reason why an Atheist, say, should not come out with some such declaration as this: "I believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ who died for sinners." That is, provided the Atheist explained that "God the Father" was a figurative expression to signify the infinite existence which included all phenomena and all that might lie behind phenomena; and that "Jesus Christ" was merely a poetic simile to typify the pioneers of the race who died in order that their fellows might advance to wider knowledge and strength. Of course, it is not suggested for a moment that Mr. Gould goes to any such extremes as this, though it is difficult to see how, on his own method, he would check anyone who did. And certainly the present writer has seen examples of word-jugglery on the religious side of which the above is not by any means an extravagant parody.

But, soberly, one asks oneself what purpose is served by verbal quibbles of that kind? And why should Agnostics or Rationalists in any way encourage, or seem to encourage, them? We confuse other people, we confuse ourselves; we tend to lose the respect of clear-headed and straight-thinking people on all sides; and, in short, achieve a maximum of injury with a minimum of good. Indeed, what good is achieved it is hard in any wise to say. Men surely have to be educated and their minds enlarged and their characters rendered more humane; and these things cannot effectively be achieved by tricks, however well-intentioned, or catch-phrases, however cunningly devised. All that is only the pretence and parade of progress which is serious and difficult and slow. There is no royal road to learning, and there is no short-cut to intellectual advance.

The remaining paper in the series is by Mr. J. M. Robertson, and to him the problem of religion is the problem of the social future. As to the meaning given to the word "religion," Mr. Robertson well says:—

> "The question whether every serious conception of life should be called religion is one of simple verbal convenience. Any other word could by this time have acquired the due associations of respectability if the effort spent in trying to retain 'religion' had been constructively rather than conservatively applied."

That surely is the end of that particular controversy. The only point calling for notice in Mr. Robertson's paper is what appears to be a suggestion, that disestablishment or disendowment ought not to take place until a clear majority has rejected supernaturalism. "Once," he says, "the clear majority have rejected supernaturalism, existing State endowments may properly be withdrawn; yet it is not unlikely that a socialised State would provide for the support of priests of all sects in a certain ratio to the number of those who want their services." Doubtless the endowments *will not* be withdrawn until at least a voting majority desire their withdrawal; but surely they could "properly" be withdrawn at any time the thing became politically practicable.

The problem of the future of religion would really seem to be the problem at bottom of intellectual progress, the problem of human evolution. If there is advance at all, then religion in the sense of supernaturalist hopes and fears must undoubtedly tend to vanish, as human sacrifices and witchcraft, once elements in religion, have vanished. Whether we can be optimistic enough to confidently predict or reasonably hope for such a consummation is a problem in itself, the solution of which need not be attempted here.

Frederick Ryan.

National Secular Society.

Report of monthly Executive Meeting held on Thursday, March 29th; the President, Mr. G. W. Foote, in the chair. There were also present:—Messrs. E. Bater, C. Cohen, C. Cooper, W. Heaford, W. Leat, A. B. Moss, B. Munton, J. Neate, C. Quinton, E. E. Sims, T. Thurlow, and C. Watts.

New members were received from East London, Bethnal Green, and Liverpool branches.

The arrangements for the Annual Conference were then considered. Mr. Bater moved, and Mr. Leat seconded, "That the Conference for 1900 be held in London." This being carried unanimously, the details were left in the hands of the officers.

The Annual Excursion, the date of which had been already fixed (July 1st), was again discussed, and the Secretary was instructed to make arrangements either for Brighton or Margate.

Grants were promised to certain Branches for outdoor work, and the meeting adjourned.

Edith M. Vance.

Influence of Power on Opinion.

How wicked (it is frequently said)—how absurd and hopeless the enterprise, to make war upon opinions! Alas! would it were as absurd and hopeless, as it is wicked and pernicious! Upon opinions, in an immediate way, yes. To crush the idea in the mind, to act upon it by mechanical pressure or impulse, is not in the power of the sword or the rod. In an unimmediate, though, for efficacy, not too remote way, through the medium of discourses, no: for what, in the case of opinions (unhappily for mankind) is but too much in the power of the sword and of the rod, is, to crush the enunciating and offending pen or tongue: to cut asunder the muscles by which they are moved.—Unhappily, the power of the will over opinion, through the medium of discourse, is but too well understood by men in power. Meantime, thus much is plain enough: the more credible the facts in themselves are, the less need has a man to seek to gain credence for them by such means. By such means, credit may be given to facts the most absurd, currency to opinions the most pernicious. Facts which are true, opinions which in their influence are beneficial to society, have no need of such support. If this is to be admitted, the consequence seems undeniable. To employ such means for securing credence to any fact is to confess its falsehood and absurdity; to employ such means for the support of any opinion is to confess its erroneousness and mischievousness. To pursue such ends by such means is to betray, and virtually to confess, the practice of imposture, the consciousness of guilt.—*Bentham.*

Preaching.

Perhaps the great triumph of all moral writings, including sermons, is that at least they have produced some sweet and innocent sleep.—*Arthur Helps.*

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, "Is Dr. Mivart in Hell?"

Camberwell (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, C. Watts, "Can a Scientist be a Christian?"

East London Branch (Swaby's Coffee House, 103 Mile End-road): 8, W. Ramsey, "What Secularism has Accomplished during the last Thirty Years."

East London Ethical Society (78 Libra-road, Old Ford, E.): 7, W. G. Howard, "Education in England."

North London Ethical Society (Leighton Hall, Leighton-crescent, Kentish Town): 7, Harry Snell, "One Hundred Years of Science and Invention."

Mile End Waste: 11.30, C. Cohen.

South London Ethical Society (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, Professor Earl Barnes, "The Development of a Child's Moral Sense."

West London Ethical Society (Royal Palace Hotel, High-street, Kensington, W.): 11, Stanton Coit, "The South African Gold-seekers."

Victoria Park (near the Fountain): 3.15, C. Cohen.

COUNTRY.

Birmingham Branch (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): 7, H. Percy Ward, "Did Jesus Christ Rise from the Dead?" Open-air meeting in the Bull Ring at 11—"Hell, and How to Get There."

Chatham Secular Society (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday School.

Glasgow (110 Brunswick-street): 12, Discussion Class—Impromptu Speeches; 6.30, Social Meeting.

Liverpool (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, Dr. Nicholson, "The Golden Mean."

Manchester Secular Hall (Rusholme-road, All Saints): 7, M. Moscow, "Spiritualism Answered by Science."

South Shields (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, "Old-age Pensions."

Sheffield Secular Society (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 3, Quarterly Meeting; 7, Lecture or Reading.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. Cohen, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—April 8, m., Mile End Waste; a., Victoria Park. 15, a., Peckham; e., Camberwell. 22, Pontypridd. 24, Cardiff.

Arthur B. Moss, 44 Credon-road, London, S.E.—April 22, m., Mile End; a., Victoria Park; e., Stratford. May 6, m., Camberwell; a., Brockwell Park. 13, a., Peckham Rye; e., Brockwell Park. June 17, e, Stratford. 24, m., Camberwell; a., Peckham Rye.

H. Percy Ward, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham.—April 8, Birmingham; 15, Stockton-on-Tees; 29, Birmingham.

F. A. Davies, 65 Lion-street, S.E.—April 8, m., Battersea; e., Stratford. 15, a., Victoria Park. 29, m., Camberwell; a., Brockwell Park. May 6, m., Clerkenwell Green; a., Finsbury Park. 13, m., Hyde Park; e., Kilburn. 20, a., Peckham Rye; e., Brockwell Park; 27, m., Westminster.

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