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THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

Room in Heaven.

TALMAGE, the great Talmage, is in England. He has come over from America with his large mouth and his large style. We are not in the habit of referring to personal peculiarities, but Talmage's mouth is so striking. You cannot escape it. It fascinates you—not like a Venus, but like a python. It reminds us of a text in the prelude to the Sermon on the Mount. The evangelist says of the preacher—to wit, Jesus—that "he opened his mouth." But most people do that when they speak. There must have been something peculiar about that organ of the Nazarene to attract the reporter's special attention. Was it wide? Was it deep? What was its peculiarity? We cannot tell, alas, for the reporter did not work on the penny-a-line system. In this instance it was—as Carlyle says of Dante's style—one smiting word, and then silence. "He opened his mouth." That is all. You must imagine the rest for yourself. But you need not imagine Talmage's mouth. You can see it. Indeed, you cannot help seeing it, if you look at him at all. Our old Archbishop of Canterbury has a fine aperture. When it is shut, as one critic said, it suggests a rat-trap. Talmage's mouth, however, while something like our Archbishop's, is like it with a difference. It is less cold, rigid, and cruel; and more ductile and fluent; reminding one of a prognathous Hibernian after kissing the Blarney Stone. And this gentleman's mouth is the key to his style. His oratory might be inferred from its instrument. Delicacy, subtlety, beauty, could never come from such a source; only resonant commonplace and melodramatic vulgarity. Listening to this orator is like watching a coarse display of fireworks. You may be dazzled for a minute, but you soon wish for less glare and more refinement.

When the great Talmage came to England before he was "on the make." He had not then married a rich wife. His terms were exacting. Cash down, and plenty of it, before mounting the rostrum. Report said that he cleared out the exchequers of half the Young Men's Christian Associations in this country. Some of them, perhaps, have had a balance on the wrong side ever since. Colonel Ingersoll made a big income by lecturing, but he did not work the "free admission" ticket at his meetings and bleed the promoters like veal. He charged for admission at the doors. Those who heard him paid him for speaking. That was fair and square, and he went on the platform to time whether the audience was large or small—and it wasn't often small, for more people paid to hear him than any other speaker in the United States, or, for that matter, in the world.

Talmage is not so badly in want of money now. He can afford to preach sometimes for nothing—perhaps as an advertisement. His first address, on this second visit to England, was delivered in a church at Manchester; where, by the way, a charge would have been illegal. Naturally the "free admission" brought a big

crowd of Christians, many of whom had to remain outside the sacred edifice. Still, they heard the great man's sublime accents; for he addressed a few words to an overflowing meeting. And what he said was characteristic. He told them that there was no room inside, but there was plenty of room in heaven.

We quite believe Talmage for once. There's many a true word spoken in jest, and the proverb was justified on this occasion. There *is* plenty of room in heaven. Not because it is big, but because it is empty. It is hell that is full. In the time of Isaiah, if the prophet is to be believed, hell enlarged itself. It was full to bursting, and something had to give way. Perhaps it has been enlarged several times since. Since the Christian era began—or at least since Christianity triumphed—the emigration to Hades has been strong and steady. Was it not Jesus himself—that is to say, God Almighty in the flesh—who declared that the road to hell is broad and easy, and profusely patronised? And is it not downhill all the way? Was it not the same Jesus who declared that the road to heaven is narrow and difficult and hard to find? And is it not uphill all the way? Yea, and if it be true, as the late Professor Mivart said, that there is plenty of happiness in hell, why should anybody take the trouble to climb up to heaven? Happiness is happiness anywhere, and as good in the pit as up amongst the gods.

Many are called, said Jesus, and few chosen. Those who are saved under the Christian scheme are called the elect. They must therefore bear a very small proportion to the lost. "In my father's house are many mansions." Yes, and most of them are "to let." Corner lots go cheap there. An everlasting lease, on a peppercorn rent, can be had for the asking—if you once get inside.

Saint Peter, who sits at the gate of heaven, holding the keys, must have almost a sinecure. He can hardly be roused up once a month. For what is the condition of access to that establishment? You must believe. Yes, but what? Why, all the miracles and nonsense of the Gospels, and perhaps all the miracles and nonsense of the rest of the Bible. You must believe—not merely *say* that you believe, but *actually* believe—that a boy was born without a father; that when he grew up to manhood he performed wonders which modern science is unable to imitate; that he cured even cripples by talking at them; that he put clay plugs in blind men's eye-sockets, and gave them sight; that he raised the very dead from their biers and graves; that he changed water into wine, and multiplied a few loaves and fishes into a luncheon for thousands; that he rose from the dead himself, and ascended into heaven, with an undigested meal in his stomach. You must also believe what he taught as well as what he did. You must accept a creed which, as the late Bishop of Peterborough said, cannot be practised without ruining society. You must believe it to be your duty to do what no man ever thinks of doing outside a lunatic asylum. That is the way, and the only way, to get to heaven. Is it any wonder, then, that the place has "plenty of room"?

G. W. FOOTE.

"The Return to the Cross."

THE above phrase has been of late extensively used in religious literature. It is the title of a work from the pen of the Rev. Dr. Nicoll. The object of the book is to induce its readers to return to the Cross, which is said to be a symbol of Christ, whose character and teachings, it is alleged, are of greater importance to human welfare than all "the secular teaching that has ever emanated from the brain of man." The Rev. S. A. Alexander, the Reader of the Temple, London, preached a special sermon during Lent, in which he condemned the substitution of the authority of the Bible and the Church for Christ. In fact, according to the *Church Gazette*, the burden of his sermon was, "Back to Christ." It has now become a regular habit of certain Christian ministers to ascribe the failure of practical Christianity to the fact that Christ is no longer followed as the "light of the world"; and to urge that the salvation of man depends upon a real belief in Christ, and not upon moral and intellectual inculcations. For instance, the Rev. S. A. Alexander says, what is required "is not an acquiescence in a system or rule of life; it is a belief in a Person." And Dr. Nicoll writes: "No teaching that is purely ethical or intellectual, or the result of the exercise of the human reason, will do other than lay waste the supernatural Church that is redeemed by the blood of the Lamb."

Supposing a "supernatural" Church could be found, the rev. gentleman's words would no doubt be partially true, inasmuch as ethical or intellectual teaching and the exercise of human reason would, in all probability, lay waste such a Church. But it would do more than this, in spite of the Christian statement to the contrary. It is to the power of intellect, allied with moral culture and the exercise of human reason, that we are indebted for what progress has been made in all things which tend to exalt human character and promote the material well-being of society. These secular agencies have done more; they have destroyed the supreme power of the Church, robbed priestcraft of its former sway over the minds of the masses, rescued education from ecclesiastical domination, and freed mankind, to a large extent, from the demoralising influence of theology. The absurdity of the rev. gentleman's statement is as glaring as its fallacy. If the Church has been "redeemed by the blood of the Lamb," no further redemption should be necessary. The return to the Cross would, therefore, be of no advantage to the "supernatural Church." But where is the evidence of any redemption in the case? The only redeeming force which appears to us to have been exercised upon the Church has come from that very reason and intellect which Dr. Nicoll condemns. But for the power of reason and intellectual discrimination the position of the Church would be far worse at the present time than it is. Scepticism—the offspring of mental freedom—has been the salvation of the Church. The growth of freethought among professed Christians has been followed by the giving up of the belief in old orthodox doctrines and ceasing to be guided by traditional creeds. There is no comparison between the Church of to-day and that of twenty years ago. Then its adherents readily accepted the theories of special providence, of Bible infallibility, of a personal devil with his abode of eternal torments, of the credibility of New Testament miracles, and of salvation "through faith," "not of works, lest any man should boast." Now, however, all these theories are given up by the leading minds within the Christian fold. The "higher criticism," the new form in which modern Christianity is presented, and the "rational" construction put upon the teachings ascribed to Christ, have entirely changed the aspect of the Christian faith. True it is that, in this particular, "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

If it were really possible to "return to the Cross," what would it mean? Let Christians answer for themselves. A few weeks since an authoritative article appeared in the *Christian Record* from the pen of Chancellor P. V. Smith, entitled "Some Defects of Evangelical Churchmen"—it originally formed a paper read on March 20 before the London Clerical and Lay Union, in which the writer asserts that "Evangelicals

have a tendency to consider 'true Gospel belief' to be of more vital importance than genuine sound and honest conduct." Sad as such teaching as this is, it is undoubtedly in accordance with the inculcations of the New Testament. Belief is therein taught as the one thing needful. It is put before aught else as the essential feature in the Christian system. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." St. Paul says, Jesus shall come "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." If this be true, he will have more than enough to do, for no sane person even attempts either to follow his example or to obey his teaching. Further, the signs that were to "follow them that believe" are nowhere to be seen. Who among the disciples of Christ are capable of casting out devils? Who will take up serpents, or "drink any deadly thing"? Who possesses that faith which is said to give them power to remove a mountain? The teaching of the Cross is, that in man "dwelleth no good thing," that his body is "vile," his righteousness is as "filthy rags," and that his "heart is deceitful, and above all things desperately wicked." The inculcation of the Bible is, that faith and belief are of greater importance than morality, which is really an absolute necessity to sound and health-giving conduct. In fact, the Rev. Dr. Nicoll, in his work already referred to, writes: "To say that Christ came merely to reveal a higher morality is to be outside of Christianity..... I know no Christian teacher who maintains that Christianity is a system of ethics." This is a frank, but, with respect to the Christian religion, a most damaging, admission. For, if Christianity is not "a system of ethics," it lacks one of the greatest essentials of mundane activity.

To return to the Cross implies that it has been left. It would be exceedingly interesting to learn when this happened, and why the departure took place. From our knowledge of history it would be difficult to discover when the Cross was ever strictly adhered to. We grant that in the early ages of Christianity its teaching had a more powerful effect upon the conduct of its professors than it has had subsequently. And those were the very times of moral corruption, intellectual darkness, and the grossest forms of lust and cruelty. It was then, as James Cotter Morison says, that "we find a state of things to which our imaginations are scarcely able to do justice in these comparatively tame and moral days." Moreover, it may be here observed, that for centuries after the dawn of the Christian era the cross was not accepted as a symbol of Christianity. Professor Buchanan, in his work on *Primitive Christianity* writes: "The emblems of Christ in the early Church were the 'Good Shepherd' and the Lamb, while the Cross was held in high honor by all the ancient Pagan nations. It was not until the year A.D. 680 that the crucifix was substituted for the Lamb as the Christian emblem."

It is nothing more than a groundless assertion to allege that it was reserved for Christ to initiate the principles upon which the progress of the world is based. We have frequently shown in these columns that long before his time a high state of civilisation prevailed. In Professor Sayce's latest book, not long since published, on the Babylonians and Assyrians, we have corroborative evidence of our contention. He tells us that written records of the people of Babylonia which date six thousand years before Christ have now been found; and that these records show that at that period considerable advance was going on in a social system founded on individual rights, rather than on the strength of might. In reference to woman he says: "The position of the women in regard to equality with men during the many centuries of Babylonian prosperity was perhaps stronger than at any other time in the world's history. Both married and single women could trade, independently or in partnership with men—the former with either their own husbands or with other men. They were educated equally with men—might possess independent property, and were fully protected by marriage settlements, numbers of which are extant. These settlements, which appear to have been in the usual course, provided for the wife's position in the event of the husband's death or of divorce. Though polygamists, such a condition was rare."

CHARLES WATTS

The Insanity of Conversion.

WHAT are called "Studies of Religion" are usually disappointing performances. Putting on one side the work of a few leading anthropologists in this direction, they are usually by members of the clerical profession, and are far more remarkable for the ingenuity of their speculations than for the cogency of their reasoning. For the most part they are studies *for* rather than of religion; special pleadings on behalf of an accepted creed, not impartial studies of its real nature, in which all that militates against religion is carefully suppressed, and all that tells in its favor is drawn out and exaggerated. A really scientific inquiry into the origins of religious ideas, or into the nature of the frames of mind that give them permanence in modern times, is seldom attempted, and never is the attempt made by those who stand forward as religious representatives.

Under these conditions, any move in the direction of a scientific study of religion is welcome; and, in spite of many shortcomings, a recent work by an American professor* contains much that is suggestive on the subject. Dr. Starbuck has limited his investigations to inquiries concerning the conditions preceding and following "conversion"; and, as he disclaims anything in the nature of finality or absolute certainty in the results arrived at, it would be unfair to criticise his conclusions on the score of their insufficiency or inadequacy.

Following the method initiated by Mr. Francis Galton, question papers were sent out to large numbers of people asking for particulars concerning the conditions of their "conversion" to religion, the permanence of its results, religious influences of early years, and a number of kindred questions. Some thirteen hundred replies were received, and these strongly emphasised the fact that the whole phenomenon of "conversion" is more or less abnormal or pathological. Dr. Starbuck does not lay much stress upon this circumstance, although he does quote the opinions of various medical writers to this effect—a course probably dictated by motives of policy. Thus, the replies received as to the age at which conversion is experienced disclosed a close agreement between that and the age at which the sexes reach puberty. From the tables supplied, it is clear that conversion, as the writer says, "belongs almost exclusively to the ages between ten and twenty-five.....Conversion is a distinctly adolescent phenomenon." Between these years the age of sixteen supplies an enormous preponderance of cases, the highest point in the number of female conversions occurring about two years earlier than in the case of males, which again agrees with the fact that puberty is reached earlier in the female than in the male.

Dr. Starbuck has brought together a large number of cases establishing this agreement between adolescence and conversion, and which goes far towards making the whole phenomenon pathological. This is, indeed, only what one might expect. At puberty "the individual is transformed.....Strange and vague feelings, aimless longings, obscure impulses, and novel ideas witness the commotion which the newly-developed function is making by its eruption into the mental life."† It is the period of the greatest physical and mental instability, and not only the period when religious conversions are the most numerous, but also when epilepsy is most liable to occur, and when criminal tendencies manifest themselves most strongly. The real significance of these figures, therefore, is not that there is an awakening to a larger social life and a greater development in the ethical sense, as Dr. Starbuck assumes there is. This is not the immediate cause of conversion; the immediate cause of the phenomenon is that, peculiarly sensitive as the organism is at this period, it is liable to be moved by the first strong stimulus that affects it, and this in the cases examined happened to be of a religious nature. The same inquiry might show the same result in matters other than religion.

On the whole, there can be little doubt that the

general phenomena of conversion deserve to be classed as abnormal. Dr. Boris Sidis remarks: "It is not healthy, normal life that one studies in sudden religious conversions, but the phenomena of revival insanity." Galton notes that disorders of the sexual organisation frequently accompany excessive piety in the insane, and that "the frenzies of religious revivals have not unfrequently ended in gross profligacy."* Dr. Mercier traces a distinct connection between puberty, general hysteria, and sudden manifestations of religious devotion.† The extravagant performances at revivalist meetings, the shouting and springing over benches, jumping in the air, and similar antics, which are most marked amongst the negro population of the States, and which were common features of the great revivalist meetings in this country in the earlier portion of the century, all support the view taken by Dr. Sidis.

A scrutiny of Dr. Starbuck's cases leads to the same conclusion. The following typical cases are all I have room for. One man writes: "The forces which led to my conversion (at 15) seem to me now hypnotic in character. My will seemed wholly at the mercy of others.....There was absolutely no intellectual element.It was followed by a complete relapse from orthodox religion. I look back upon my experience now with shame and repugnance. It was an unnatural state, and could not be maintained." Another one, a lady teacher in a prominent American college, writes of her conversion: "I was simply carried away by the excitement, and did not know what I did.....I was much excited and became hysterical under the emotions aroused and under the prevailing excitement.....The experience had been unnatural, and therefore could not last. I lived for a short time, perhaps six months, under an unnatural excitement, and then relapsed into a state of utter indifference. I feel now that the result of the 'conversion' was bad." When one remembers that all this unnatural excitement and perturbation is experienced at a season when the organism is peculiarly liable to become permanently deranged, it would seem that "conversion" deserves to be ranked along with drunkenness and gambling so far as its general influence is concerned.

Dr. Starbuck's analysis of the motives leading to conversion is highly instructive, and bears further witness to the hysterical nature of the majority of the converts. Fourteen per cent. of the cases alleged, as a motive leading to conversion, the fear of hell; thirty-three per cent. gave social pressure, imitation, example, etc.; fifteen per cent. only gave "following out a moral ideal" as having had any influence in their change of attitude. Says the author: "Fears are a large factor.Fears appear to be present about fifteen times as often as hope. Only five per cent. are altruistic motives; and if we select from these the ones who mention love of God or Christ as leading to a higher life, we find only two per cent." The figures are specially instructive in view of the attempt so generally made to place Christianity before the people as an ethical ideal.

The hysterical condition of the converts is strongly evidenced by the following confessions:—"I was very wicked; my heart was black." "I experienced nothing but unaccountable sadness." "Everything went wrong with me. It seemed like Sunday all the time." "I felt wrong mentally and morally. I could not keep my mind on anything." "Hymns would sound in my ears as if sung." "I had visions of Christ." "Just before conversion I was walking along a pathway, thinking of religious matters, when suddenly the word H E L L was spelled out five yards ahead of me." "I fell on my face by a bench and tried to pray. Every time I would call on God something like a man's hand would strangle me by choking. I made one final effort to call on God for mercy.....and the last I remember was falling back on the ground with that unseen hand on my throat. When I came to myself there was a crowd around praising God." Thirty-nine per cent. of the

* *Inquiries into Human Faculty*, p. 67.

† *Sanity and Insanity*, chap. 8. Dr. Mercier also observes (p. 282): "Every 'revival' is attended by its crop of cases of insanity, which are the more numerous as the 'revival' is more fervent and long-continued." In the West of Scotland, I am informed by a medical friend, the increase of insanity following "revivals" is most marked.

* *The Psychology of Religion*. By E. D. Starbuck, Ph.D. (Walter Scott.)
† Maudesley, *Physiology of Mind*, p. 372.

females and eighty-eight per cent. of the males experienced loss of appetite or sleep, general nervousness, affections of sight, hearing, or touch, preceding their conversion. It is impossible for anyone who has the least knowledge of physiology to doubt the true significance of such cases. To a medical man there could not be the least doubt that these represent cases of temporary derangement induced by violent excitement acting on a susceptible organisation.

One expression often found in these tables needs a word of explanation. Dr. Starbuck points out that the "sense of sin" appears to be wholly independent of actual conduct. People who have before conversion led thoroughly upright lives refer to themselves as "sinful," possessing a "black heart," as being "wholly bad," quite as readily as others of a contrary character. In other words, the "sense of sin" is simply an expression put into their mouths to describe their unconverted state, and has no real connection with their moral status. The artifice is, to my mind, infamous. To teach boys and girls of from twelve to eighteen years of age to describe their absence of religious convictions by all the terms that characterise the moral reprobate is a course of procedure that is simply damnable. It has, too, the further effect of cementing the assumed connection between non-religion and immorality, and to that extent plays into the hands of the Churches by identifying in thought the absence of religious belief with an absence of social and domestic virtue.

Inquiries as to the nature of the external influences that induced conversion showed that forty-six per cent. of the cases were aided by the example of parents, twenty-five per cent. by Church or pastor, about ten per cent. by art, music, and nature, and the balance by various miscellaneous agencies. The small percentage of conversions from purely intellectual causes is striking.

It is not surprising that but very few of the total number of conversions are permanent. A series of revival meetings, conducted by a professional Evangelist, produced ninety-two converts. Out of that number sixty-two "dropped" within six weeks, thirty were received into full membership, of which number fifteen have "relapsed" since, leaving twelve only out of the original ninety-two. Dr. Starbuck's inquiries appear to have been limited to those who are at present members of some church or other, and so there are no very lengthy tables of relapses. I should imagine, however, that the above would represent a fair average, or, judging from the statement in another part of the book that ninety-three per cent. felt, when the excitement was over, pretty much as they did before, it would be too high rather than too low.

As I have said, the chief significance of Dr. Starbuck's statistics is that "conversion" is primarily due to the functioning of new powers in the individual, and which are directed by preachers into theological channels. Given a different set of instructors, and the unhealthy emotionalism of the revival meeting might be replaced by a sympathetic guidance of individual energies, so that it may form a useful portion of that larger social life to which maturity is an introduction. What takes place when the child reaches school age takes place again when the child reaches maturity. In each case it is delivered over to theological teachers, who color its mind with their special form of belief. Dr. Starbuck's work, therefore, accentuates two important lessons: first, that the whole phenomenon of "conversion" is of an unhealthy, anti-social character; and, secondly, that it can only be successfully counteracted by providing a healthy outlet for those forces of which the growing youth or maiden is the expression. C. COHEN.

Cacophonous Eccentricity.

A NOTE ON POPULAR HYMNS.

"Talk about it as much as we like, a man's breeding shows itself nowhere more than in his religion."—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

HYMNS have always held an important place in the Christian superstition. From the days when the Early Christians got into trouble with the Roman police, down to the most elaborate choral services of the present day, they have been ever growing in popularity. Yet it is

doubtful if the average hymn of to-day has any more claim to be considered as literature than the usual music-hall song. This may well appear a grave indictment; but the hymns which are regarded as being eminently suited for public worship are, as a rule, ungrammatical, unrhythmical, and silly. The hymns used by Churchmen and Nonconformists are not really much better than those painfully familiar and disgraceful compositions which are used by Salvationists and other howling Dervishes of our streets and alleys. The charge of silly sentimentalism is not the only one that can be brought. Some hymns are brutal in tone and language, and written in the worst possible taste. The hymns on the Passion are full of sanguinary details and a gloating satisfaction which is eminently repulsive. Here are some samples:—

Here I rest, for ever viewing
Mercy poured in streams of Blood.
By Thy red Wounds streaming,
With Thy Life-blood gleaming.
There is a fountain filled with Blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins.
Drinking of His roseate Blood.

It is hard to think the above are addressed to the August Wire-puller of the Universe.

The following displays a beautiful tranquillity in the presence of physical suffering; worthy of Torquemada or a horse slaughterer:—

Come let us stand beneath the Cross;
So may the blood from out His Side
Fall gently on us drop by drop;
Jesus, our Lord, is crucified.

The "coon" songs of the music-halls are paralleled by some well-known hymns:—

O, Jesu, Thou the Beauty art.

Hairdressers please note.

Dear, dying Lamb.

Not a word about mint-sauce.

Coming! O my glorious Priest,
Hear we not Thy Glorious Bells.

As musical as the tintinnabulations of a muffin-man.

Jesu, best and dearest.

O Lord divine, how sweet Thou art.

The following apostrophe to the Cross is unadulterated doggerel:—

Faithful Cross, above all other
One and only Noble Tree,
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit Thy peer may be;
Sweetest wood, and sweetest iron;
Sweetest weight is hung on Thee.

For sheer, downright bathos this triplet is worth noting:—

Upon the Crucified One look,
And thou shalt read, as in a book,
What well is worth thy learning.

But, perhaps, the silliest and most contemptible couplet of all occurs in this hymn:—

May these all our spirits sate,
And with love inebriate.

"These," as a reference to the preceding lines in the hymn will show, refers to thorns, cross, nails, lance, wounds, vinegar, gall, reed, and other "properties" connected with the farce of the crucifixion. We fear that the inebriation was not confined to the poem. A splendid example of unconscious parody occurs in this verse:—

But birds and flowerets round us preach,
All, all the present evil teach
Sufficient for the day.

One of the most popular hymns is Toplady's "Rock of Ages." Very little is to be said in its favor. It is a medley of confused images and misapplied metaphors. "Cleft rock, riven side, to Thy Cross I cling; to the fountain fly," are examples.

Another favorite, "Hark! hark, my soul! angelic songs are swelling," is not above criticism. Bishop Alexander, who is himself a poet, has said of this gem that it "combines every conceivable violation of every conceivable rule with every conceivable beauty."

The solitary attempt at rhyme in the next sample is enough to break a critic's heart:—

Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask,
This is the total sum;
For mercy, Lord, if all my suit,
Then let Thy mercy come.

The author's reason must have been tottering on its throne when he penned these ridiculous lines :—

God the Word, the sun maturing
With his blessed ray the corn,
Spake of Thee, O sun enduring,
Thee, O everlasting Morn,
Thee in whom our woes find curing,
Thee that liftest up our horn.

This is a pretty piece of flattery for the Trinity-in-Unity :—

Laud to Him to whom supernal
Thrones and virtues bend the knee ;
Laud to Him from whom infernal
Powers and dominations flee ;
Laud to Him the Co-eternal
Paraclete for ever be.

Another invocation to the same Arithmetical Party begins :—

Most ancient of all mysteries.

If the theme is high in the next quotation, the poetry is deplorably low :—

O those limbs how gaunt their leanness,
Tortured, torn for our uncleanness,
On these stiff branches weltering.

There are numbers of hymns in which the authors attempt to pour out the vials of Divine wrath over lands and seas ; to track the course of God-like Vengeance, to prefigure Antichrist, and assign to people their parts in the Divine Comedy ; but we refrain from quotation. Certainly, we have seen that popular hymns need not rely on poetry, nor even common sense, for their success. Christian congregations must have lost, wholly or in part, the power of distinguishing between poetry and doggerel, pathos and bathos. Singing their "delirious slush," they are intellectually on a level with barbarians. Savages do this one way, and Christians another ; but the nature of the act, and the results, are very much the same.

MIMNERMUS.

Woman and Modern Religion.

HER DEBASEMENT UNDER JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY.

(Continued from page 300.)

How or when the change came from the matriarchal period to the patriarchal period we do not know. We only know that it came. We only know that there was a time when we find man in absolute and complete control. The rule of the mother had ceased. Love was no longer the procuring and efficient cause in civilisation ; the sword, the warrior, the invader, the robber, had usurped the functions of the lover. The affairs of State and Church had passed to the control of man. The Bible, singularly enough, begins with the patriarchal period. It is the history of the patriarchate. It knows nothing of the sanctity of motherhood. It knows nothing about the superiority or equality or dignity or the rights of woman. The Bible is the charter of masculine tyranny. The Bible is the instrument that has forged chains for the enslavement of woman ; the Bible and Christian theology, copying from it and continuing its old tradition of inequality, injustice, and usurpation, perpetuate the masculine arrogance that insults and subjugates the mothers of men.

It might be reasoned *a priori* what the effect of a book like the Bible would be if we had known nothing about its actual influence. We might have stood two thousand, four thousand years back, and have taken the Bible and predicted its influence in the human world. Observe how it starts the human story—a man and a masculine God. That is all there is, and all that was thought of, all that was intended. The creation was complete. There was no woman, nor any need for one. Then, when this masculine God and this man came to think about it and talk it over, they concluded it necessary to have some being, some subordinate, subject being—what for? To help man, to be his servant. According to the Biblical conception, woman was an afterthought, an amendment, a sort of necessity that they had not counted upon, and would have been glad not to have had, but were forced by the exigencies of circumstances to provide. Such is the Biblical conception of woman. Now, if we proceed a little further,

this woman, having been made subsequently to man and a part of him, so that his mastery over her should be complete, so that she should know that she was ever dependent upon and amenable to him—after this secondary creation the trouble begins. She is now the mother of sin, the parent of it all. Man was created to be holy and deathless, so the Christian theology held for hundreds of years ; and there are men still living and standing before intelligent audiences that will argue that, if woman had not sinned, the physical death, the putting off this body, had never been ; woman is responsible for it all. One of the old monks used to argue that when God had decided to make woman to wait on man he caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. You would never guess the monkish reason for that, but it was because she was such an undesirable amendment that if Adam had been awake and had known that God was going to create her he would have opposed it.

After the first sin had been committed, God returns to the garden. The man and woman hid. When God finds them the man runs out, and, pointing to the woman, cries, "She's it." Then God curses her, and lays upon her the awful burden of childbirth pain. The coward man and the masculine God have terrorised and subjugated woman. Their miserable conspiracy is complete. That man is a disgrace to humanity, and that God is a disgrace to deity.

The only respectable person in the garden was the woman. Having brought sin into the world, woman became and continued, and, be it said to the shame of every Christian Church extant, is still considered to be the source of original sin. All through the Old Testament this conception of woman is maintained. She had absolutely no rights to her own person, her own property, her own conscience, or her own children. She was utterly and completely subjected to man. He possessed over her the power of life and death. She was not permitted to have her own way or to think her own thoughts. On the contrary, her husband was directly and specifically commanded, if his wife sought another religion, believed in another God, grew tired of Jehovah, turned to worship the sun, that fireside of the world, or the stars, the beneficent lights that make glad the night—if that should occur he should cause her to be stoned to death, and he himself was to hurl the first cruel rock against her faithful breast.

The New Testament makes no advance towards the elevation of woman. Jesus seems to have had no regard for women. He says nothing about home, nothing about the duty of man to treat his wife as his equal. At the marriage feast at Cana he said to his mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" And for fifteen hundred years theology took that sentence from the lips of the Christ and urged it as an illustration of his contempt for womanhood.

Paul, the inspired bachelor, carrying on the old tradition that came from the very beginning of the Bible, uttered the rules for female slaves. He says, "Wives, be under subjection to your husbands." It is always the bachelors that are telling married men and women how to live and bring up their children. "Wives, be under subjection to your husbands." Keep your heads covered in church as a mask of subjection. You are not allowed to speak in the churches. You may support them, but you must not talk. The man is the head of the woman. Then, what an anatomical wonder is woman! For man was created first, and after that the woman ; and he implied that because woman was made last in the order of the creation she was inferior. Paul did not know that according to science the superior, the most refined, the most complex, the most suitable organism, the finest brain, the highest type, is the one that comes last.

What now has been the influence of these ideas about woman as illustrated and applied in the history of the Church? One single result, one sad and pathetic consequence, almost without exception to relieve its deep gloom—the absolute and complete debasement of woman intellectually. That result has held so persistently that there have been men within the last twenty-five years educated men, men of power and intellect, who have argued solemnly for the natural intellectual inferiority of woman. It may be that, in many instances, woman is intellectually inferior to man,

but the astonishing wonder is that she is not so far beneath him, in view of all the ages of repression and submission that she has suffered, as to be entirely of another intellectual type. If man had borne the insults, the debasement, the odium that religion has heaped upon woman, if man had endured for two thousand years what woman has endured, he would have become a miserable and grovelling imbecile. The reason that woman has been able to advance is because she has had within her heart and brain the original instincts of freedom and equality. It is not intellect that woman has lacked in all these centuries; it is simply opportunity.

The practical result upon Christianity for the first three centuries of debasement of woman was her gradual expulsion from religious functions. Under the old regime the temple was divided into courts. Woman was compelled to worship in the outer court. She could not enter the inner court. If the mother had given a son to the world, she was not permitted for the space of forty days even to enter the outer court. If her child happened to be a girl, destined to grow up and become another iniquitous and odious woman, the mother was compelled to pass eighty days in the period of unfitness. Every mother was compelled to make a sin-offering to atone for being a mother. So did the old custom, the old idea, lay its brand of infamy or shame upon the divinity of motherhood. In the Christian centuries, after the first three, her expulsion from all religious functions was complete and entire. Then there began to grow up the idea that in the touch of woman there was contamination, defilement. She had been called by the monks and theologians the mother of evil, the parent of all sin, the instrument of the devil, the door of hell. Such were the flattering epithets that theology-makers applied to their mothers. So impure was the presence of woman, so full of contamination was her touch, that she was not allowed to receive in her naked hand the symbol of the communion. Unless she had upon that palm a glove so she could not touch the bread, the priest with his consecrated and sanctified fingers put the bread directly into her mouth. She was not allowed to sing in the church, because the sound of her voice was displeasing to God and contaminating to holy things. When they came afterwards to sing music in different parts they needed the soprano voice which nature had made inherent in woman, but woman could not be permitted to sing, so they sought out eunuchs with their thin treble voices to carry the soprano parts. The Church did not hesitate to make eunuchs for that purpose, and if I had been pope I would have encouraged the custom and would have taken the subjects from the priesthood. I would have kept the soprano factory running full time.

J. E. ROBERTS.

(To be concluded.)

Courtship in Church.

A young gentleman happening to sit at church in a pew adjoining one in which was a young lady, for whom he conceived a most sudden and violent passion, felt desirous of entering into a courtship on the spot, but the place not suiting a formal declaration, exigency suggested the following plan:—

He politely handed his fair neighbor a Bible open with a pin stuck in the following text: 2nd Epistle of St. John, verse 5—"And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another."

She returned it with the following: 2nd chap. of Ruth, 16th verse—"Then she fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, 'Why have I grace in thine eyes that thou shouldst take notice of me, seeing I am a stranger?'"

He returned the book, pointing to the 12th verse of the 3rd Epistle of St. John—"Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink, but I trust to come unto you and speak face to face."

The marriage took place the ensuing week.

A Scotch parson once upbraided the blacksmith of the village for not paying his church rate. "But I never go to the kirk," said the blacksmith. "That is your fault," said the minister; "the kirk is always open." A few days later the blacksmith sent a bill to the minister for shoeing his horse. The minister indignantly protested that his horse had not been shod. "That's your fault," said the smith; "the forge is always open."—*New York Observer.*

Who is an Atheist?

MEN tremble at the very name of an Atheist. But who is an Atheist? The man who brings mankind back to reason and experience, by destroying the prejudices inimical to their happiness; who has no need of resorting to supernatural powers in explaining the phenomena of nature.

It is madness, say the theologians, to suppose incomprehensible motives in nature. Is it madness to prefer the known to the unknown? to consult experience and the evidence of our senses? to address ourselves to reason, and prefer her oracles to the decision of sophists who even confess themselves ignorant of the God they announce?

When we see priests so angry with Atheistical opinions, should we not suspect the justice of their cause? Spiritual tyrants! 'tis ye who have defamed the divinity by besmearing him with blood of the wretched! You are the truly impious. Impiety consists in insulting the God in whom it believes. He who does not believe in a God cannot injure him, and cannot of course be impious.

On the other hand, if piety consists in serving our country, in being useful to our fellow-creatures, and in observing the laws of nature, an Atheist is pious, honest, and virtuous when his conduct is regulated by the laws which reason and virtue prescribe to him.

It is true the number of Atheists is inconsiderable, because enthusiasm has dazzled the human mind, and the progress of error has been so great that few men have courage to search for truth. If by Atheists are meant those who, guided by experience and the evidence of their senses, see nothing in nature but what really exists; if by Atheists are meant natural philosophers, who think everything may be accounted for by the laws of motion, without having recourse to a chimerical power; if by Atheists are meant those who know not what a spirit is, and who reject a phantom whose opposite qualities only disturb mankind—doubtless there are many Atheists, and their number would be greater were the knowledge of physics and sound reason more generally disseminated.

An Atheist does not believe in the existence of a God. No man can be certain of the existence of an inconceivable being in whom inconsistent qualities are said to be united. In this sense many theologians would be Atheists, as well as those credulous beings who prostrate themselves before a being of whom they have no other idea than that given them by men, avowedly comprehending nothing of him themselves.

—*Liberator* (Melbourne).

HORACE SEEVER.

Acid Drops.

THE victory of the so-called Nationalists at the recent municipal elections in Paris bears out what we said at the close of the Dreyfus agitation—namely, that the liberation of that martyr to injustice did not by any means imply that the clerico-military party in France was decisively defeated. That party has been steadily and subtly at work for many years. It has captured the "higher education" agencies, has made Catholicism more fashionable and powerful, and has filled all the important posts in the Army with Jesuit-trained officers. This perpetual howling at England in the Nationalist press is not an accident, neither is it a mere spontaneous outburst of "patriotic" emotion. It is deliberately worked up by the leaders of the Nationalist party. They want to destroy the Republic, and to restore the Monarchy, with all its traditional features in Church and State. Whether they will succeed or not is more than any man is able to predict; but they may succeed, and their capture of Paris is an ominous fact—however true it may be that Paris is no longer France, but has to be kept in check by the steadier common sense of the provinces. England's policy is not to give any provocation, to be as polite and friendly as possible, but still to keep ready for any emergency. War is a hateful thing at best, but if the French Nationalists should force it upon us in carrying out their evil policy we should be prepared to defend our Empire—however we got it, for that is not the point here—against a Franco-Russian attack. Unfortunately the party of Zola and the intellectuals is meeting with sad reverses. The other party is getting more power, and there is no use in shutting our eyes to the plain facts before us.

The Russian alliance has been the evil genius of the French Republic. What natural sympathy could there be between a Republic and a Czardom? Between a land of manhood, suffrage and a land without so much as a constitution? Between a nation used to free thought and free speech and a nation in which both are suppressed with the dungeon and the knout? Between the country of Voltaire and the country of the exclusive and persecuting Greek Church? History and experience teach us that if the good and the bad associate too closely, the bad will sooner corrupt the good than the good will elevate the bad. This has been proved again and again by the Franco-Russian alliance. Russia has not gravitated

towards France. France has gravitated towards Russia. And a large number of French Reactionists look for their future ruler in the young Bonapartist prince who lives at St. Petersburg and wears the uniform of a Colonel in the Russian army.

Religious bigotry has increased in France ever since the approachment towards Russia began. Again the worse has corrupted the better. Jew-baiting has spread from Russia to France, and a general spirit of intolerance has swept from the Tartar steppes to the fair plains of Gaul. We do not believe that France will utterly and forever succumb to this moral blight. We believe she will right herself in the end. But meanwhile there is danger ahead, and those whom it may concern should beware.

President Kruger is reported to be at it again. His piety seems to have recovered from the shock of the Johannesburg explosion, which tempted him to ask, "Is there a God?" Addressing the Transvaal Volksraad, he is said to have delivered himself as follows: "O God of the Volksraad, and of the Republics, shall this be the final act? No, it shall not. God will be merciful, and strengthen the right. We are an independent State with an international status. To avert bloodshed we conceded the five years' franchise. Documents in the possession of the Government prove the existence of a devilish conspiracy for the annihilation of the two Republics in the year 1896. I appealed to the English nation, to Mr. Chamberlain, and Lord Salisbury. They said: 'This miserable nation of Afrikanders must cease to exist.' But God said: 'It shall not.' Thirty thousand burghers contested the right of way against 200,000 British, and 30,000 are still alive, who fought against a vindictive and voracious foe, our eternal and everlasting enemy since 1836."

Kruger's arithmetic is evidently modelled on that of the Old Testament, which was such a worry to Colenso. A good many more than 30,000 burghers have been fighting the British. But if the number was only 30,000, it is perfectly clear that there must be less than 30,000 left now; for it has been officially admitted by Kruger himself that some of the burghers have been killed. As to God being "merciful" and determined to "strengthen the right," it is sufficient to remark that he hardly seems to be doing it in Kruger's sense of the words. Lord Roberts, with his overwhelming forces and splendid equipment, is moving forward with the steady, irresistible power of an avalanche. God or no God, it is pretty clear what the end will be. And perhaps Kruger knows it, only he thinks it worth while to trust to the chapter of accidents, and therefore he keeps his burghers fighting a forlorn hope by appealing to their religious prejudices; although some of them must see that if God did not keep Roberts out of Bloemfontein he is hardly likely to keep him out of Pretoria.

Politics is being played pretty low—or high, if you will—when schoolboys meet and pass resolutions and appoint delegates. Twenty thousand Philadelphia boys have dispatched a messenger to President Kruger to tell him personally how much they wish for the success of the Boer Republics in the South African struggle, and how much they detest the arbitrary interference of Great Britain. It seems a pity that the zeal for justice and freedom of these American boys is not used, first of all, at any rate, for home consumption. If the British have no right to be fighting the Boers—which we admit to be arguable—what right have the Americans to be fighting the Filipinos? The Philippine Islands are much farther from American territory than the Transvaal is from British territory; and, on the whole, this case is one in which "Physician, heal thyself!" seems fairly applicable.

Lord Salisbury's cynicism is sometimes refreshing. We particularly like what he said in the House of Lords the other day about Sunday drinking. Lord Salisbury informed the House that he did not drink beer himself, but he also informed them that if he did drink beer he should want to drink it on Sunday as much as on other days. And why not? It seems to us that this Sunday-closing policy is sheer humbug. The parsons used to get on very well with the publicans, but as the churches get emptier, and must be filled somehow, the parsons have begun to wage war against the publicans, with a view to closing the public-houses on Sunday and drafting their customers into the places of worship. Of course they don't admit this; they sing quite another tune; but this is what they really mean. It is Sabbatarianism and clerical professionalism all along the line. Only on religious grounds can drinking beer be made a crime on Sunday, while it is legally permitted on every other day in the week.

The Archbishop of Canterbury headed the episcopal revolt against Lord Salisbury. His Grace is a good and loyal Tory until his professional interests are at stake. In that case he is prepared to vote for or against any conceivable Government. Every man of sense knows it is bunkum that the Bishops are talking about "the welfare of the people" in relation to Sunday drinking. Whoever found them displaying any concern for the people's welfare in regard to any other question?

While the "beer" question is before us the reader will pardon us for bringing in, however irrelevantly, a good Cruikshank story, told by Mr. H. Sutherland Edwards in his new volume of *Personal Recollections*. Here it is:—One day he seized in the street a man who had been trying to pick his pocket, and, not content with giving him in charge, administered to him a lecture on the evils of intemperance. "I feel sure," he said, "that you have been demoralised and ruined by the love of drink. I, on the other hand, have not touched a drop of intoxicating liquor for the last twenty years." "What!" cried the horrified prisoner; "I've let myself be took by a teetotaler! Why, if I'd known you was a water drinker, I'd have knocked your bloomin' head off."

Vesuvius has been "going it" again, and proving once more the truth of Buckle's theory that natural calamities are a great fosterer of superstition. "The inhabitants of all the villages about," says a newspaper report, "are panic stricken, and refuse to sleep in their houses, gathering on the piazzas at every roar of the mountain, and kneeling to pray to the saints for protection." Good old (wooden) saints!

Now that Vesuvius has become quieter, we read that the inhabitants are "calm." They have also risen from their knees. Some of them will soon be begging those same saints to give them a winning number in the next public lottery.

A special committee of the Lower House of Convocation has reported on the "appalling diminution in the number of candidates for Holy Orders." Bishops are urged to impress upon Churchmen the necessity for an adequate supply of ministers, and the Universities are implored to provide more facilities for clerical training. It is mercilessly noted in the *Daily News* that the Church is "appealing not only to fewer young men every year, but also to a less intellectual class."

Twenty-five years ago that fine poet, and unhappy man, James Thomson, the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*, wrote an article on "Great Christ is dead!" ending with the following strong and significant passage, which is worth reproducing in this connection:—"At the risk of being thought bigoted or prejudiced, I must avow that to my mind the decomposition of Christianity is so offensively manifest and advanced that, with the exception of a very few persons whose transcendent genius could throw a glamor of glory over any creed however crude and mean, and whom I recognise as far above my judgment, I can no longer give my esteem to any educated man who has investigated and still professes this religion, without grave deduction at the expense of his heart, his intellect, or his conscience, if not of all three."

Thomson was thinking of Newman in that reference to a few persons of transcendent genius. Newman was a very great man and a wonderful writer. He was probably the last of the great Christian leaders.

Lord Russell, who is an Irishman and a Catholic, is Lord Chief Justice of England, in succession to the late Lord Coleridge, who was an Englishman and a very liberal Protestant. This is as it should be, as far as we are concerned; for we agree with the great Oliver Cromwell in thinking that if men can render any service to the State, the State should take no notice of their opinions. Mr. Carson, another Irishman, and we suppose a Catholic, has just succeeded to the English Solicitor-Generalship. This again is as it should be, if he is the fittest man for the post. But in the face of such appointments how comical it is to see the Irish Bar protesting against Sir N. Lindley, an Englishman, being appointed to succeed Lord Morris, an Irishman, as Lord of Appeal in Ordinary. Still more comical is the Irish Bar's claim that Ireland should have "at least one of the four" Lords of Appeal. "At least" means presumably two, which is a very large share of four for the little sister island; little, that is, in the matter of population.

St. Nicholas Industrial School, Ilford, is a Roman Catholic institution. Twelve months ago it came into very unfavorable public notice by the sudden death of one of its youthful inmates, by the severity of its discipline, and by the number of lads who escaped or attempted to escape. It is now attracting notice again by an inquest on a boy who appears to have jumped out of a window during the night. A representative of a leading daily newspaper interviewed Mr. Westall, the Superintendent, and Father Barnes, a member of the Management Committee; and these gentlemen, while denying that there is any harshness or cruelty at present, admitted that there was both up to the beginning of this year. The school was then in the hands of the Brothers of Mercy, who seem to have grossly belied their designation. They were largely drawn from the Belgian peasant class, and their treatment of the boys was so scandalous that the Home Office stepped in with a private inquiry. The result was that Cardinal Vaughan took the school out of the hands of the Brothers, and placed it under lay management. This is far from being

the first case in which laymen were called in to remedy the mischief of the inhumanity of monks and priests.

Mr. John Morley, the *Westminster Gazette* says, is making rapid progress with Mr. Gladstone's biography, and is "reported to be greatly interested in the religious side of the character of his late illustrious leader." This is natural enough, but we expect to see it made use of by the religious press as an indication that Mr. Morley is beginning to turn a Christian.

The Reading School Board has had an extremely lively meeting. One of the members, Mr. F. W. Mays, moved that Bible-reading should be dropped, at least to the extent of obviating the possibility of "statements not in accordance with science and history being received by the children as facts, and narratives of an indecent character from coming under their observation." In supporting this motion Mr. Mays indulged in some pretty plain speaking. We are surprised that he found a seconder, but he did so in Mr. J. F. Hodgson, who said he was "in favor of secular education, that was the removal of religious teaching from the schools." Opposition was offered by some "firm believers in the Word of God," indecency and all, and the motion was lost; only the mover and seconder voting for it, and all the other members voting against it. Messrs. Mays and Hodgson have done good, however, in raising this question on the Board, and we hope they will raise it again by-and-bye with a greater measure of success.

Mr. Joseph Turner, of Ipswich, writes a pawky letter in the *East Anglian Daily Times*. Mr. Turner says that he listened with pleasure to a lecture in the Co-operative Hall by the Rev. Robinson Lees on "Jerusalem and Her People." In the course of his lecture the reverend gentleman referred to an Ipswich curate who, in the course of his parochial visitations, called at the house of a Jew, and read the Bible to him; and after a while that Jew, his wife, and all his children (fourteen of them) became converted to Christianity. Mr. Turner says that he would like to shake hands with the curate and congratulate him on winning such a "victory for the Master." He would also like to be introduced to the Jew. But we don't suppose the Rev. Robinson Lees has jumped at the bait.

Rev. Charles Sheldon is reported to have been paid 5,000 dollars, or £1,000, for his one week's editorship of the *Topcka Daily Capital*. It is said that all the first apostles of Jesus faced poverty and hardship, and finally suffered martyrdom. But it pays a great deal better now to follow "In His Steps." Mr. Sheldon has just crossed the Atlantic in order to do a stroke of work for Jesus in England; or, as some cynics say, to get an agreeable holiday. We read that he booked a luxurious saloon berth on a fashionable Cunarder. But, as an aged, poor minister was overheard to say, "One would have thought that the author of 'In His Steps' would have walked across."

Rev. A. C. Dixon held forth on "Christ and Him Crucified" before the Brooklyn Philosophical Association. After the lecture, address, or sermon—call it what you will—came the usual discussion, and the reverend gentleman was not too happy in his replies. Once he said, "I am not a broad man," and a child's laugh rang through the hall. Fun ran riot in the meeting for nearly a minute. When it subsided, the reverend gentleman hardly improved matters by observing, "You notice that even a baby can see the foolishness of my remark."

This Rev. C. A. Dixon, by the way, was an industrious circulator of lies about the late Colonel Ingersoll. But as our contemporary, the *New York Truthseeker*, says, he "is the Christian champion, and if Christians are content with his championship of their faith nobody else has a right to complain." Mr. George Macdonald, of the *New York Truthseeker*, gives an amusing account of the debate that followed Mr. Dixon's discourse. Altogether it seems that the man of God had a baddish time among the Brooklyn Philosophers. According to our contemporary's report of Mr. Dixon's replies—and it seems verbatim—he wound up by saying that "hell is an expression of God's love," and telling his audience, "You are the most Pharisical set I ever saw together." But the Brooklyn Philosophers didn't throw things at him. They only laughed. And perhaps that hurt more.

Missionaries in foreign lands cost the United States government a million dollars a year, nearly all of which is spent in investigating baseless claims for indemnity made by the missionaries against the countries in which they are introducing the gospel. A man-of-war is kept in Chinese waters the year round for no other purpose than to give the scared missionaries the necessary courage to stay there. These missionaries go out, we are told, with their lives in their hands and their trust in the Lord, and yet they have more faith in the protection of the old wooden warship

Monocacy, with a few Jack Tars aboard of her, than they have in the sparrow-watching deity in whose interests they profess to be working. When the devil shaved the pig, there was great cry and little wool—which describes the missionary business with considerable accuracy.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Mr. John D. Rockefeller, the Yankee multi-millionaire, whose beastly low-flash oils have caused so many gratuitous deaths in this country, lives in the strong and constant odor of piety, although his enemies call him a robber and a murderer. This fact was referred to by the Rev. H. C. Applegarth, pastor of the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church, Cleveland, Ohio, where the great Rockefeller sometimes condescends to worship his Maker. But the reverend gentleman was not very happy in his language. "While some people," he said, "have charged Mr. Rockefeller with stealing the money he has given to the Church, he has laid it on the altar, and has thus sanctified it." This clumsy apology raised the dander of its object, and Pastor Applegarth has been "fired out" of his job. Next time he wants to praise a rich boss he will probably take pains to correct the awkwardness of his eulogy.

Cowper said—

And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.

And a little girl asked her mother what any saint wanted to sit on Satan's lap for.

Fair fighting in a priest is quite out of the question. Brute force in its worst forms, treachery, torture, and murder, are their modes of attack. They are always flying the white flag in non-Popish lands, and yet they are always firing their deadliest shots just when waving the white flag most ostentatiously. Where the Boers offend in this respect for a few moments, the priests are always at it. Many thousands are deceived by their white flag, and find it hard to believe that it is the flag of the assassin, of the worse than Thug. Well, what we want is an army of good men and women to wage honest warfare upon the priests continually. The best weapons will always be found in their own writings, which are full of absolutely incriminating matter. The wildest imagination, combined with the most absolute malignity, can never invent or picture anything more deadly to the priests than their own records and publications. And what I wish to see is a league or society formed for the publication and wholesale distribution of the worst the priests have said of themselves and of each other. This must be done, for it is either Popery or civilisation. These two cannot live at peace; one must conquer the other. Which shall it be?—*Joseph Symes, the "Liberator"* (Melbourne).

Certain collections realising £3,496 11s. 4d. will, by order of the Roman Catholic Bishops of the Province of Westminster, be devoted to the High Altar of the new Westminster Cathedral. No end of money is being spent upon this edifice. It is to be hoped that Freethinkers will remember the duty devolving upon them of being liberal in providing funds for the war against the Roman Catholic and all other forms of Christian superstition.

The Bishop of Bristol addressed the last contingent of the Reservists of the Gloucestershire Regiment on their leaving for South Africa. In the name of their country, he gave them the blessing of God Almighty. But how did he obtain it? We should like to hear God Almighty on the point.

John Walsh, residing in the neighborhood of Warrington, is believed by all the men on the farm where Michael Fox works to be able to bless, curse, or cure with a cross. Now the said Michael Fox, having been ill for some days, asked the said John Walsh to cure him; and on being refused this favor, the said Michael Fox assaulted the said John Walsh; for which breach of the peace the said Michael Fox has been fined the sum of ten shillings and costs, which he no doubt considers a fairly high price for his little outbreak of resentment. We understand that Warrington is in England, and that this is the nineteenth century.

As it is Told.

"Fighting Bob" Evans dressed in citizen's clothes and went to church one Sunday not long ago. Upon entering the house of worship he seated himself in a vacant pew, about midway up the aisle. Soon after a gentleman and lady walked in, and seated themselves in the same party. The gentleman looked ugly at Bob, and the lady partly turned her back on him. The gentleman stood it as long as he could, and then passed a card over to him, which read as follows: "I pay 2,500 dollars annually for this pew." Bob glanced at the card, and then passed it back with this written on the other side: "You pay too d—d much."

N.B.

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Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, May 20, The Athenæum Hall, London, W.C. ; 7.30.
"The Doom of All the Creeds."
May 27, Manchester.

To Correspondents.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—May 19 and 20, Failsforth ; 22, Public Hall, Canning Town, E. ; 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.

J. OSCAR.—A contents-sheet of the *Freethinker* shall be sent to you weekly. Thanks for your offer to display it. We hope it will do you no damage in your business. If it does, drop it, and don't go on courting ruin. Mr. Foote is very rarely in your neighborhood, but he will bear your suggestion in mind.

C. J. PEACOCK.—Miss Vance is sending the weekly contents-sheet to your newsagent as desired. We thank you for getting him to take copies of the *Freethinker* for chance sale, and for guaranteeing him against loss on unsold copies.

JAMES NEATE.—Thanks. See paragraphs and acknowledgment. We note your hope that the Coming Conference Fund will be thoroughly successful.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for your very useful batches of cuttings. Your letter on the "Religion" controversy is inserted, of course ; anything from your pen is always welcome. We should like to see your handwriting more frequently.

J. YOUNG.—Freethought verses are more in our way. The illusions of hope are a very hackneyed theme of versifiers. It is hardly worth writing on that subject at this time of day unless one has something fresh and original to say, or a fresh and original way of saying it.

LOUIS LEVINE.—Thanks for the American papers. Always much pleased to hear from you, even in this indirect (but useful) way.

W. J. HARLING.—We are obliged to you for the handsome photograph of the Paine Memorial at New Rochelle, which you have kindly presented to us through Mr. Wilmot. Mr. Watts thanks you also for his copy of same.

F. J. VOISEY.—Glad to hear from you. See paragraph. Mr. Foote will be very happy to look you up at Dartmouth if he can find time when he next visits dear old Devonshire, the land of cream, and of cream-and-rose-faced maidens. Brave men have come from it too. Richard Carlile was a Devonshire man. So was George Odger, perhaps the most remarkable working-class leader of the nineteenth century.

R. SIMONS.—Lord Kitchener was born in Ireland, but he is not in any real sense of the word an Irishman. His father happened to be quartered there at the time. Lord Kitchener belongs to an East Anglian family. Ireland has produced great soldiers enough without needing to claim what does not properly belong to her.

R. AXELLY.—A contents-sheet shall be sent to the newsagent, whose address you give, Mr. Jacque. You refer to another, but give no name or address. It is good of you to say, "I wish the new enterprise every success, which it certainly deserves, if ability and hard work count for anything."

J. G. SLEIGH.—Thanks. Always glad to receive cuttings on which we can find a paragraph.

A. MITCHELL.—Your second letter to hand. Orders sent direct to the Freethought Publishing Company will always have prompt attention.

DR. R. PARK.—It was duly received, but we have been too busy to deal with it, owing to the illness of our assistant. We will read it carefully in a day or two. No doubt it will be very acceptable. Meanwhile we are obliged to you for your "congratulations" on the progress of our work and, as you put it, "the high quality of the literary material supplied to the readers" of this journal.

E. SIMS.—We appreciate your letter of thanks on behalf of the West Ham Branch. Perhaps when the course of lectures is ended you will send us a brief report of the whole effort in your own words.

E. VETTERLEIN.—Your lecture notice last week did not reach us till Wednesday morning. The delay may have been in the post.

FRANK HALL.—Only delayed. There has been a great pressure of other matter.

LECTURE NOTICES must reach 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Two Worlds—Science Siftings—Der Arme Teufel—Reading Observer—Truthseeker (New York)—Brann's Iconoclast—Newcastle Weekly Chronicle—El Libre Pensamiento—Boston Investigator—Ethical World—Freidenker—Free Society—Progressive Thinker—New York Sun—Newcastle Morning Mail—Dartmouth Chronicle—East Anglian Daily Times—Secular Thought—Crescent—Liberator—Isle of Man Times—Sydney Bulletin.

THE National Secular Society's office is at 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C., where all letters should be addressed to Miss Vance.

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

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

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.

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C.

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, 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.

THE National Secular Society's Annual Conference will soon be sitting in London. It is a regular Whit-Sunday fixture. For many years running it has been held in the provinces. This year it will be held in London. The business sessions are arranged to take place in the comfortable Athenæum Hall. The evening public meeting is to assemble in the handsome Queen's (Minor) Hall farther West. By turning to the Conference Agenda on another page of this week's *Freethinker*, our readers will see that several important matters are down for discussion. We hope the N. S. S. Branches all over the country are making arrangements to be represented at this Conference. We also hope that many individual Freethinkers will come up and make or renew acquaintance with their metropolitan comrades. This year ends the nineteenth century, and the Freethought party should be preparing its policy of work for the twentieth century. Let us all do our utmost in unison and harmony, and we shall witness a gratifying progress. Let us meet together at this coming Conference, and take counsel for the mighty future. Friends who come up from the provinces will find a cordial, an enthusiastic welcome. London friends will do their utmost to make their visit as enjoyable as useful. Come, we say; come for certain. If you miss this great opportunity, you will regret it in the days to be. When the bugle sounds the soldiers of the army of Freethought should march to the front, to fight in a holier war than any that ever stained the earth with blood.

G. W. FOOTE
(President, N. S. S.)

Sugar Plums.

MR. FOOTE had a first-rate audience at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday evening, when he lectured on President Kruger's question, "Is there a God?" Mr. Thurlow, who acted as chairman, referred to the Secular Society, Limited, which he described as "the President's successful outflanking movement against the Christian bigots and their Blasphemy Laws." The lecture was highly appreciated by the meeting, which included a good many strangers. Two gentlemen availed themselves of the opportunity for discussion. One of them was a Manchester doctor, who confessed that he had given up praying himself as useless, and therefore hypocrisy, but still thought it a good thing for his sisters. Mr. Foote pointed out that the practice clearly depended upon their ignorance, in which this gentleman seemed quite satisfied to leave them. The other opponent said that the lecturer had dismissed Ghosts too peremptorily, and complained of his indulging in humor on so serious a subject—

which is a very old and very useless objection, for nobody minds humor unless it tells against him.

Mr. Foote lectures at the Athenaeum Hall again this evening (May 20), taking for his subject "The Doom of All the Creeds." This is the subject that drew such a capital audience recently at Canning Town, when Mr. Foote lectured for the West Ham Branch. No doubt it will attract a good audience on this occasion also.

Owing to the Labor Demonstration at Manchester being postponed, in consequence of the weather, until May 20, Mr. Foote's lectures in that city, which were fixed for that date, have been postponed until next Sunday (May 27). This alteration will prevent his attending the opening ceremony at the Failsworth Secular Sunday-school. He would have felt much pleasure in being present, but circumstances now render this impossible. He hopes that Mr. Watts, Mr. Gimson, Mr. Gould, and all the local friends will have a good time, and that the function will be in every way successful.

To-day, Sunday, May 20, Mr. Charles Watts will give two special lectures at the reopening of the Secular Hall at Failsworth, which has been enlarged and partly rebuilt. We shall be glad to hear that the friends from surrounding districts rallied in good force on this occasion, as the laudable work being done by the Failsworth Secular Society deserves hearty support. Mr. Watts will also be present, and deliver an address, at the tea and social gathering on the previous evening, Saturday, May 19.

On Tuesday evening, May 22, at 8 o'clock, Mr. Charles Watts will lecture in the Public Hall, Canning Town, E., taking for his subject "The Defeat of the Cross."

Intending delegates and visitors to the N. S. S. Conference on Whit-Sunday should lose no time in communicating with Miss Vance, the secretary, at 1 Stationers' Hall Court, London, E.C., and informing her what sort of accommodation they will require, and for how long. Some may be staying for a week, and may desire apartments. All should recollect that London, owing to its very vastness, is an awkward place to be seeking proper accommodation in, if it be left till the last minute. Be in good time, ladies and gentlemen.

Miss Vance, the N. S. S. secretary, acknowledges the following fresh contributions to the Conference Fund:—Mrs. Mensier £5, S. Hartmann £2, Dr. R. T. Nichols 10s., C. Mascall 10s., W. Davey 10s., W. Hardaker £1, Mr. and Mrs. J. Neate (per Mr. Foote) 5s., R. Axelby 1s. This makes a total of £21 11s., received up to date. But as it is a good way yet from the £50 we ventured to mention as requisite to show a generous hospitality to the provincial delegates and visitors, we hope there will be many further subscriptions coming in during the next week or so.

A luncheon (really a dinner), consisting of soup, fish, joints, sweets, and cheese, has been arranged for at the Bedford Head Hotel at 1 o'clock on Whit-Sunday. This will be an agreeable episode between the morning and afternoon chapters of the day's proceedings. Mr. Foote intends to be at the top of the table—not as carver, oh dear no! but to do justice to his own share of the repast, and to see that the delegates eat enough to put them in a thoroughly good temper with themselves and everybody else. By this means all the business that stands over from the morning session—generally the biggest part of the Agenda—will be dispatched with reasonable comfort and celerity in the afternoon.

Mr. Joseph Symes is fighting for Freethought as bravely as ever at Melbourne, but does not appear to meet with anything like proper support. In the last number of the *Liberator* to hand, dated April 7, we note under a "Personal" heading that for several weeks he had been unable to get money to carry on the paper, and "hundreds of copies were not posted till late on Saturday for want of stamps." "I sincerely hope," Mr. Symes writes, "that this state of things is not going to last." So do we. Our far-off friend is getting older, and he says his wife is wearing herself out in the Freethought cause. In these circumstances there is a special appropriateness in the resolution which Mr. Foote intends to move at the approaching N. S. S. Conference. It would do Mr. Symes a world of good to take a trip to the old country, and many of his friends will be very glad to see him again.

Mr. Heaford lectured in Victoria Park on Sunday afternoon to a very large and noisy audience. Five persons came forward to offer opposition, but the regular practice was adhered to, and only two of them were allowed to speak. Mr. Heaford had an easy task to dispose of their criticisms, although he was hampered all the time by orthodox rowdiness. Mr. Cohen lectures there to-day (May 20)—Mr. Cohen, the Atheist, are asked to say, though somewhat superfluously in the *Freethinker*; for the Christians have got a Mr. Cohen now, a converted Jew—anyhow a Jew.

Mr. Waldron seems to be turning up again in London.

We understood that he had gone to Oxford in order to qualify himself for a Church pulpit. But he was in Victoria Park lately, and we are informed that he was saying "very unkind things" about us. "He seems awfully bitter against you," our informant says, "for not debating with him." But we have debated with him, once at New Brompton, and once at Camberwell. We really don't know why we should debate with him again. There are more important matters occupying our attention.

Mr. F. J. Voisey, a veteran and well-known Freethinker, has been elected to fill the vacancy on the Dartmouth Town Council. Mr. G. N. Philip was his opponent, and the contest was a very lively one. Mr. Philip had the advantage of being a big and rather popular employer of labor, and the *odium theologicum* was worked against Mr. Voisey for all it was worth. But at the close of the poll the figures were—Voisey 277, Philip 263. There were only three spoiled papers, which couldn't have affected the election; curiously enough, each of the three wasted votes was recorded (illegally) for both candidates. It was a close shave, but Mr. Voisey is in, and we congratulate him on his well-won victory.

Mr. J. G. Bartram, secretary of the Newcastle N. S. S. Branch, asks in the local *Weekly Chronicle* "Why Won't Parsons Debate?" Mr. Bartram hopes other correspondents will give their opinions on this question. For his own part, he says he has generally found parsons declaring "That they do not see that any good can accrue from such discussions," and as far as their cause is concerned he believes they are more than right. Very unkind, Mr. Bartram, very unkind! Telling the truth in this way is almost cruel.

The *Boston Investigator* reproduces from our columns the "Biblical Museum" catalogue which we reprinted a few weeks ago from one of our old Special Numbers. We have been asked to publish it separately as a leaflet for general distribution, on the ground that its humor would be effective.

Mr. George Anderson suggests that we should reprint "Jack's Story" as a Tract for distribution by N. S. S. Branches and at open-air meetings. "Few working men," he says, "but will enjoy it, and it will set them thinking and talking o it in their workshops." Mr. Anderson had printed himself some years ago, and has often enclosed copies in his correspondence. He offers to take £1 worth of the new issue. The copy he sends us, however, is imperfect. Miss Vance learnt it for a reading a long time ago, and she has supplied us with three omitted verses, besides correcting several of those which were included. The poem first appeared, we believe, in one of the early numbers of the *Referee*, and its author was reputed to be Mr. G. R. Sims. That was in his unregenerate (or undegenerate) days, when he was a good deal of a Radical and something of a Freethinker; when, indeed, he did not disdain to lecture for the old North London Branch of the N. S. S. in Claremont Hall, Pentonville. The poem in question is racy and breezy, and makes a capital Tract. We shall therefore take Mr. Anderson's suggestion and have it reprinted with the new supply of Tracts which we are contemplating.

The completion of Professor Bury's edition of Gibbon inspired a laudatory article in the *Daily News*, probably by Mr. Andrew Lang. It would be impossible to praise Gibbon too highly, and the writer does not achieve the impossible; but he does not stint his eulogy, although he feels it discreet to express a reservation. "His Christian, or un-Christian, chapters," he says, "with all their learning and ingenuity, resemble a treatise on music by a man without an ear—stuff and nonsense! This is a very ancient wheeze. Christians are fond of saying that the Atheist is like a man who is color-blind, and it is only a slight change of the simile to liken the Deist to a man who talks of music without an ear for harmony or melody. Really it is a conceited way of begging the question. And perhaps, after all, when orthodox Christianity—that is, real Christianity—is as dead as any older superstition, those chapters and sections of Gibbon dealing with the rise and development of the Christian religion will be reckoned amongst his greatest achievements."

The *Sydney Bulletin*, a large and lively illustrated paper, from which we sometimes reproduce a poem or a paragraph, does not hesitate to print even "blasphemy." The last number to hand contains a cutting from one of Mr. Foote's articles; and as it is brief, we give it again, in order to show what the *Bulletin* is ready to place before its extensive public. Here is the extract: "All gods love flattery. No deity will look at you unless you grovel in the dust. Even the so-called Lord's Prayer, which is supposed to be the perfection of simplicity and efficiency, begins with flattery and ends with flattery. The practical petition is in the middle, like the meat between the slices of bread in a sandwich."

We had pleasure in receiving, and have pleasure in printing (by permission), the following letter from Major Warren, who is a shareholder in the Freethought Publishing Company.

Limited: "Dear Mr. Foote,—Pray accept my sincere congratulations on your long-delayed success in obtaining suitable headquarters for the Freethought movement. Your difficulties in this respect remind me of a very similar occurrence in Halifax, Nova Scotia, about eleven years ago. Mr. Charles Watts was then editor of *Secular Thought* (Toronto), and was coming to Halifax, N.S., to lecture on various subjects connected with Secularism. He engaged a small public hall in advance, but, on his advertisement appearing, strong pressure was brought to bear by the clerical party on the owners of the hall, and Mr. Watts was compelled to find a less suitable place at the last moment. I attended his opening lecture, and I remember that he began by mentioning the difficulties that had been made by the clergy in the way of preventing anybody from hearing the other side of their many interesting questions. 'The clergy,' said he, 'have to year's end; they have ample means subscribed for pushing their views into every household; they assert, moreover, that God Almighty himself is working with them, and yet they are afraid to allow me to address you during one short week! Stronger proof of their own disbelief in the truth of their own doctrines could hardly be adduced.' I agree with you that all shareholders in the Freethought Publishing Company should fully pay up their shares as early as possible, so I enclose cheque for £2 10s., being the balance due on my five shares. With best wishes and bright hopes for the success of the F.P.C., I am, yours faithfully, G. O. WARREN, Myton Vicarage, Helperry, York."

Friends continue to send us the names and addresses of newsagents who will display a *Freethinker* contents-sheet. We are much obliged to them, and we hope other friends will follow their example. This is an excellent way of helping us, and in an uphill fight like ours we need all the help we can obtain—often a good deal more. This paragraph ought to prompt fifty of our readers in various parts of the country to go straight away and get the names and addresses of fifty such newsagents. Hurry up, please. As the Bible says, now is the accepted time. Don't trust to that stupid old saying that it is better late than never. What truth there is in it is terribly overshadowed by the procrastination it has engendered.

Somewhat or other, newsagents still tell Freethought customers that they can't afford to take any more copies of this journal than they have orders for. Ever since the first number of the *Freethinker* was printed we have always supplied the trade on "sale or return." Of course, there is a limit to return, for we cannot afford to print twice as many copies as we sell. But a reasonable number has always been allowed. Will our friends kindly impress this fact upon careless or recalcitrant newsagents?

National Secular Society's Annual Conference.

LONDON: WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 1900.

AGENDA.

1. Minutes of last Conference.
2. Executive's Annual Report. By PRESIDENT.
3. Reception of Report.
4. Financial Report.
5. Election of President.

Motion by Finsbury and Birmingham Branches: "That Mr. G. W. Foote be re-elected President."

6. Election of Vice-Presidents.

(a) The following are nominated by the Executive for re-election: Dr. T. R. Allinson, George Anderson, E. Bater, Annie Brown, C. Cohen, W. W. Collins, J. F. Dewar, R. Forder, J. Grange, T. Gorniot, S. Hartmann, W. Heaford, A. B. Moss, James Neate, J. Partridge, S. M. Peacock, C. Pegg, W. Pratt, E. W. Quay, Victor Roger, J. H. Ridgway, T. Robertson, F. Schaller, W. H. Spivey, H. J. Stace, Joseph Symes, T. Thurlow, J. Umphey, E. M. Vance, G. J. Warren, Charles Watts.

(b) Nominated by the Birmingham Branch: Mr. W. H. Wood.

7. Election of Honorary Secretary.

Motion by Executive, supported by Manchester Branch: "That the Honorary Secretaryship be abolished."

8. Election of Honorary Treasurer.

Motion by Executive: "That Mr. S. Hartmann be re-elected Honorary Treasurer."

9. Election of Auditors.

10. Statement re Secular Society, Limited, by Mr. G. W. Foote.

(a) Motion by the Executive: "That the Secular Society, Limited, be strongly commended to the support of Freethinkers as a sound and secure instrument for realising legacies and bequests, as well as receiving and holding donations, for the propagation and maintenance of Secularism; and that Freethinkers be earnestly invited to become members of this Incorporation, and to remember its claims if possible in their wills."

11. Motion by the Executive:—

"That this Conference, being the first assembled since the death of Colonel Ingersoll, desires to place on record its intense admiration of his genius and character, and its recognition of the immense service his life and eloquence rendered to the Freethought cause throughout the civilised world; and that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to Mrs. Ingersoll and the Freethought press in America."

12. Motion by Derby Branch:—

"That, as a state of war unhappily exists between Great Britain and the South African Republics, this Conference deplors that the points of difference between the belligerents were not submitted to Arbitration."

13. Motion by Mr. C. Cohen:—

"That, in view of the forthcoming School Board Elections for London, this Conference urges upon all its members who are resident in the metropolis to do all that lies in their power to secure pledges in favor of purely Secular Education from such candidates as receive their support, and instructs the Executive to take all possible steps by means of the distribution of literature and otherwise to educate the electorate on this all-important question."

14. Motion by Mr. Charles Watts:—

"That in view of the fact that the objects of the Secular Society, Limited, are practically the same as those of the National Secular Society, it would be advisable to elicit the opinion of the party as to the advisability, or otherwise, of transferring the functions of the N. S. S. to the Incorporated Society, in order to secure greater simplicity and unity of operations."

15. Motion by Mr. G. W. Foote:—

"That this Conference regrets to learn that Mr. Joseph Symes has been obliged to postpone his intended visit to England indefinitely, and that the Executive be authorised to raise a Special Fund to facilitate his visit in case of his being able to surmount the non-financial difficulties in the way of his temporarily leaving Australia."

16. Motion by Manchester Branch:—

"That N. S. S. Branches be advised to purchase, as far as funds will allow, all the standard Freethought works as they are published, with a view to forming the nucleus of a good Library, or adding to the usefulness of existing Libraries."

17. Motion by Birmingham Branch:—

"That the Executive provide and pay the expenses of speakers for a Freethought Demonstration to be held in the Birmingham Town Hall on Sunday, October 21, 1900, the local Branch meeting the other expenses incurred; and that other Branches, where practicable, be given opportunities to organise similar Demonstrations on the same lines."

The Conference will sit in the Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, London, W.; the morning session lasting from 10.30 to 12.30, and the afternoon session from 2.30 to 4.30. A public meeting will be held in the evening at 7.30 in the Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham Place. The President of the N. S. S. will occupy the chair on each occasion. A luncheon for provincial delegates and visitors will be provided at 1 o'clock at the Bedford Head Hotel, Tottenham Court-road.

By order of the Executive,

G. W. FOOTE, *President*.
E. M. VANCE, *Secretary*.

Executive Meetings of N. S. S.

LIST OF ATTENDANCES FROM JUNE, 1899, TO MAY, 1900.

Number of Meetings summoned, 14.

President:—G. W. Foote, attended 14.

Vice-Presidents:—E. Bater, attended 14; C. Cohen, 10; R. Forder, 0; T. Gorniot, 7; S. Hartmann, 7; V. Roger, 5; F. Schaller, 7; H. J. Stace, 0; G. J. Warren, 5; C. Watts, 12; A. Brown, 1; W. Heaford, 13; J. Neate, 13; T. Thurlow, 13; A. B. Moss, 10; E. W. Quay, 9.

Branch Delegates:—Finsbury, attended 14; N.W. London, 4; West London, 9; Battersea, 5; East London, 5; Bethnal Green, 10; Camberwell, 10; West Ham, 9.

A Letter to a Theist.

MY DEAR SIR,—

Let me thank you for your courteous consideration, for your kind letters, and for your Theistic tracts. I find, however, that I cannot accept Theism. Absolute Agnosticism, with no intermediate Theistic steps, alone satisfies me. The Deity whom you depict in your attractive way is, to me, an unreal, imaginary being. Nor could I regard him as benevolent or good, were he real. According to your theories, he is the actual, responsible author of evil, pain, and suffering, permitting them to exist for beneficent ends; albeit, the means employed are execrable.

You speak of his heart and fatherly compassion; of his longing to bring us all "nearer to himself," though the approach lie through misery, grief, and bitter pain; that all this is, presumably, for our final spiritual good and advancement. You think that, if he could exercise his sovereignty and control human action, it would abolish human liberty and free will. You extol the valuable experience gained through disasters. To me, "Via Crucis, via lucis" is not a truth. Your reasoning, pardon me for saying, appears specious; for, if any power by divine feat can annihilate evils, it is bound to do so. Why should humanity plunge on to ruin and misery for the sake of a lesson, or not to thwart man's free will? Truly, the work of your Deity, your *Theos*, is indeed imperfect and incomplete, as you aver. To me his existence is a myth. I cannot revere a Deity that does not stop a famine in India, or floods in China, or wars, calamities, cyclones, cruelties, oppressions, etc., etc., elsewhere. "He sitteth above the waterflood; he remaineth a King forever." Would it not be well for him to come down from over the waterflood and exercise his marvellous kingliness in behalf of suffering humanity? To me, divine glory would manifest itself in human good and happiness, in means of blessing, help, and power extended to all. Is not this the right conception of a "good God"?

Alas! the facts of life contradict belief in such a deity. Multitudes live wretchedly and perish miserably; indescribable calamities, afflictions, and misfortunes occur, and there is no intervention by any supernal being. There seems to be no care and no concern. This is a poor way of drawing us "nearer to himself." You say that we do not always know what is for our good, or what is for the best. But we do know what is to our harm and unhappiness, and what is for the worst. If there is any power that can prevent this and does not, what shall we call this apathy but criminal indifference?

But I prefer not to make any accusations against such a Power or being, believing it to be a fiction. I regard it as the creation of human minds which originally sought an object of worship above them, and out of their superstitions, fancies, aspirations, and a credulity fostered by more cunning minds, invented and constructed an imaginary divinity. A class of ambitious persons arose which took the cultus of this religion and its ceremonies as their special trade or profession. And so all religion has developed, in each of its varying forms, throughout the whole world.

We have no communication with your Theistic deity. We hold no tangible communion or converse with him. He does not approach or influence us. "Self-consecration" to this nonentity seems absurd. Hoping to live and dwell forever with it, or being "inspired" by it here, appears to me preposterous. It has no more consistency or consciousness than a cloud. It is vague, vapory, and unreal. So it seems to me.

That there is an eternal energy in nature, a primal impersonal force in the universe, "without body, parts, or passions," as saith the first Article of the Prayer Book, I am not inclined to deny. But we know, certainly, nothing whatever about it. We have no certitude of information. We see results from causes; we witness the operations of laws. What is behind it all we know not. "This is the door to which I found no key." It is a vast, impenetrable, unfathomable mystery. No true light has ever yet been shed on it by any one, for it is the unknowable.

"Sin," therefore, can have no relation with this unknown force, since no positive moral law has ever

proceeded from it. Moral law is a purely human product founded on necessity or experience. Nor is it infallible, nor unchangeable. Being a thing of human definitions, and determined by human regulations or social requirements, it is not absolutely immutable. Sin, according to theologians, is an offence against God. Would it not be better to say that it was the infraction of positive right, the commission of undoubted harm and injury; manifest, undeniable wrong? But yet again it may be an infringement of social economies, arbitrarily declared to be moral, and which may or may not be absolutely right and true. "Immutable moral principles" of to-day may not always be so regarded, and are subject to modification and change.

And the future existence you refer to I am unable to accept. Death seems the natural, inevitable termination to all lives, and their appropriate conclusion, their "finis." Therefore I do not look for any resuscitation, or resurrection, or further continuance. "The flower that once has blown, forever dies." Sometimes it falls prematurely, as death is often apparently premature and unwelcome; but, like other facts, has to be accepted. But death, at the end of a long life, is both natural and welcome. The individuality of that life is laid aside for ever, for the period of that life has run. New leaves may appear on the Tree of Existence, but they are not the old ones, which are fallen and withered and dead evermore.

If there are those who are comforted and helped by a belief in a future life, I would not wish to take away that hope or that comfort, though to me it does not seem credible.

Thanks for your gracious, kindly interest and well-meant efforts. But I feel secure on the "impregnable rock" of Reason; I am happy in clear, undoubted intelligence, and I am, as I believe, thoroughly emancipated in mind.—Very respectfully yours,

A SEEKER AFTER TRUTH.

A Hopeless Case.

HE was just a common sinner,
But he'd buy a tramp a dinner,
An' he'd sort o' try to put him on his feet!
An' a feller might be needy,
An' his raiment worn and seedy,
Yet he'd stop an' visit with him in the street.

He made no ado about it—
Wouldn't brag around ner shout it,
Yet he did a heap to help his fellow men;
When he'd find a fallen brother,
In some easy way er other,
He would made him organise himself again.

He had money, an' he spent it,
Er he give away er lent it;
Seemed ez if the more he lost the more he got;
Made all sorts o' big donations,
Helped support his poor relations,
An' he bought a orphan school, a house, an' lot.

Never heard o' him a-shoutin',
Ner a-settin' 'round a-sputin'
'Bout the everlastin' wickedness o' things;
But he just went on a findin'
Deeds to do an' never mindin'
Much about a crown er harp with golden strings.

Yet the deacon's folks—it's very
Hard to say it—they was merry
When at last death came an' caught him in the lurch
Fer they knowd the devil got 'im,
An' it served him right, dod rot 'im!
Fer he never had united with the church.

[The above verses were written by David S. Brown, of Peoria, and refer to the late Colonel Ingersoll. They are reproduced from the New York *Truthseeker*.]

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Correspondence.

THE WORD "RELIGION."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—“Chilperic” is not quite fair to Mr. Gould. The latter did not put forward “the novel doctrine that justice and morality are quite different now-a-days.” The statement was not that justice itself changed, but that the words “morality” and “justice” changed their significance—an obvious fact which no student of moral evolution would care to deny. It is easy to turn the laugh against anyone by a little misrepresentation such as that which “Chilperic” has unwittingly allowed himself to employ, but we ought not to forget that the ethical quality of a criticism—that is, its fairness, truthfulness, usefulness, etc.—is usually of much more importance than an intellectual brilliancy which will not bear investigation.

As to the inconsistency in Mr. Gould's use of the word “religion” in two different senses, it is by no means of an inexcusable or fraudulent nature, since he never leaves a reader in doubt as to which sense he intends. In some cases he cannot easily avoid using the word in its commonly-received sense, which implies supernaturalism as a basis of ethics; while in other cases he uses the word in an improved or developed sense, which includes ethics only. Convenience, rather than strict consistency, usually prompts and decides the evolution of language. Words continually change their meaning, or add new meanings to the old one, and we are all guilty of innumerable inconsistencies like Mr. Gould's. Nineteenth-century Englishmen employ the word “liberal” in two distinct senses, while America develops a third meaning. We do not, however, trouble to expose and condemn the inconsistency of people who use the word in these different senses. So with the word “secular,” which we are appropriating to ourselves. Using the word in its primary and proper meaning derived from *seculum*, an age, a geologist speaks of the “secular” degradation of the rocks, meaning thereby the wearing away of rocks during prolonged ages. But we should not ridicule his inconsistency if presently he should speak of “secular garb” as opposed to the clerical costume, nor even if he proceeded still further, as we do, and spoke of “secular” literature, the “secular” movement, “secular” propaganda, “secular” societies, etc., as the equivalent of active warfare against theological doctrines and against superstition in general. We should not proceed to tell him that he thereby taught that unclerical or anti-theological wearing away of the rocks was the source of the strata which form the more superficial portion of the earth's crust. Neither should we say that his secular garb must be as old as the fossils he lectures on, or that it was freethought clothing, or that it was the garb of an ecclesiastic not bound by monastic vows, or of a certain church officer who superintended the choir—Mr. Gould follows the example of many others, who, for due reasons assigned, deliberately and intentionally use the word “religion” in the best sense which has yet evolved itself from the old one. If we twit him with inconsistency, we ought also to ridicule ourselves for affixing a new meaning to the word “secular.”

Different types of thought and disposition would benefit greatly by mutual understanding and sympathy. Many of the more constructive and less argumentative members of the non-theological and anti-theological party feel almost compelled to retain a word which to them has become a synonym for moral emotion and earnestness—for all that is good and right and noble and true. They commonly desire to imitate the “religious” work (or the social and moral work, as we of the strictest sect of Secularistic orthodoxy would prefer to call it) by which religious organisations endeavor to benefit the people, and thereby to win them to particular creeds. These atheistic religionists diligently carry on Sunday-schools and other social work of a kind for which we often find ourselves not adapted. Their constructive work is highly valuable, and I believe that in time it will capture ten times as many adherents to our party as our own more polemical and pugnacious methods, which are “offensive” in both senses of the word to many who constitutionally dislike disputes of all kinds as mere jangling, bitterness, and unprofitable strife.

I think we should widen our party and our portals as far as possible, and not narrow them by insistence on our own particular views. We should heartily welcome and willingly excuse rather than deride and dishearten and alienate the many hard-working Secularists who are endeavoring to construct a “religion” of humanity to take the place of the religious systems of the past. The means of uniting and extending the party are much more worthy of our attention than means of dividing it. Rejection of the term “religion” is not an essential point in Secularism, so far as I can see. Practical considerations and the tendencies of human nature will influence the evolution of the meanings of words far more powerfully than a logical accuracy and mathematical exactness and consistency for which average human nature is but poorly fitted, though it may be far more richly equipped in other directions, as in the feelings and

affections which are most essential to human happiness and social welfare. The word “religion” may possibly triumph in the end, so that Secularism may be ranked as a religion (just as atheistic Buddhism already is, though some protest that it is only a philosophic system of morals); and it may also rule mankind from the pulpit in the guise of religion, for the Churches will draw nearer and nearer to Secularism without discarding all their old banners. The path of social evolution is usually along the line of least resistance; and there will be less resistance in proportion as the powerful spell of the old time-honored names and phrases can be retained.

If we do our best to appreciate each other's views and needs, it seems to me that the present dispute would be settled by allowing the use of the word “religion” in both senses, just as we allow ourselves the use of the word “secular” in several senses. Harmony and co-operation would thus be promoted, and equal rights would be enjoyed by both sections of our party; for the Secularistic religionists would of course perfectly understand and tolerate our use of the word in its more widely-established meaning, and would, as Chilperic has shown, often use the word in this sense as well as in the reformed sense which they also desire to express by the same word.

W. P. BALL.

P.S.—Concerning Mr. Ryan's letter, which has appeared since the above was written, I may observe that the fact that “nine out of ten” attach a theological as well as a moral significance to the word “religion” is not so decisive as it seems at first sight. “Nine out of ten” attach an immoral and degrading sense as well as an anti-theological significance to the words “atheist,” “freethinker,” “irreligion,” etc., but somehow we of the minority do not feel in the slightest degree bound by their opinion. Nine out of ten call mere doggerel “poetry,” but the one out of ten is quite justified in disregarding their verdict. Mr. Gould, of course, holds that he is right, although his party is at present in a minority. Even the majority who are against him often support his view to a certain extent, for when they say that a person is “truly religious” they mostly mean that he is truly benevolent in his actions and thoroughly upright in all his dealings. So far as I can see, the majority welcome the view put forth by St. James in the Bible itself, that “true religion” consists in alleviating human suffering.—W. P. B.

OBJECTIONABLE RELIGION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Mr. Gould's reply only makes matters worse. He has defined “religion” as being a certain thing, and yet directly the word is used in composition he says he understands it as meaning something else. The obvious inference is that his definition is wrong.

To us, the distinction between religion and theology is of as little importance as the difference between wood and timber, or between tweedledum and tweedledee. “Religion” is a recognised label for a certain thing; and this hankering after other people's labels savors of a direct infraction of the Tenth Commandment.

“Theology,” as its etymology clearly indicates, deals with what is surmised about a deity, or deities. “Religion,” on the other hand, is a system of faith and worship. Webster very aptly shows that theology is the objective state, and religion the subjective. As Mr. Gould does not recognise any deities, he has nothing to have faith in, and nothing to worship; consequently, he can have no religion.

I am not prepared to admit that “religion” has, or ever did have, any ethical sense or meaning. No standard English writer has used the word “religion” ethically, except with the implied assumption that ethics are bound up with the recognition of a deity; and I am sure Mr. Gould will repudiate any such implication.

We all have the greatest admiration for Mr. Gould's learning, and his work for Freethought; and this makes one the more surprised at his championing such a confusion of thought as this about the word “religion.” We are continually meeting with persons who profess to have abandoned theology, but to have preserved religion; but directly they begin to define what they have preserved it is evident that it is not religion, but something entirely different. The English language is copious enough to express any reasonable sentiment; and there is not the slightest necessity to depart from the good old rule of calling a spade a spade, or an egg an egg.

CHILPERIC.

This is how a Methodist preacher in a Canadian pulpit reached the end of his brimstone appeal: “Hades, my friends, is a horrible place which has been chosen by an all-powerful providence for the punishment of sin. Imagination cannot conceive its dismal, gruesome, smoky horrors. Fiends of various shapes assail unhappy victims; the torture of heat prevails in all its awful intensity; volumes of smoke, as heavy as mighty mountains, hang over the writhing multitudes and shut out every ray of light, every glimpse of heaven. In short, this awful place, in many respects, resembles South Africa.” After which there were 352 conversions.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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

LONDON.

THE ATHENÆUM HALL. (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The Doom of All the Creeds."
EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (78 Libra-road, Old Ford, E.): 7, Mr. Newcombe, "Marcus Aurelius."
NORTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Leighton Hall, Leighton-crescent, Kentish Town): 7, Harry Snell, "Town Life and Civic Duties."
SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, Dr. Washington Sullivan, "Goethe's *Faust*."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

STATION-ROAD (Camberwell): 11.30, W. J. Ramsey.
BROCKWELL PARK: 3.15, W. J. Ramsey; 6.30, F. A. Davies.
PECKHAM RYE: 3.15, F. A. Davies.
BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, A lecture.
WEST HAM BRANCH (Stratford Grove): 7.30, C. Cohen.
HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, A lecture.
KILBURN (corner of Glengal-road): 7.15, A lecture.
HAMMERSMITH (back of Lyric Theatre): 7.15, A lecture.
VICTORIA PARK (near the Fountain): 3.15, C. Cohen.
EDMONTON (corner of Angel-road): 7, E. Pack.
S. L. E. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.13, Mr. Newland.
CLERKENWELL GREEN: 11.30, R. P. Edwards.
FINSBURY PARK: 3.30, R. P. Edwards.
MILE END WASTE: 11.30, C. Cohen; 7, R. P. Edwards. May 23, at 8.15, R. P. Edwards.
LIMBHOUSE (corner of Salmon's-lane): 11.30, Arthur B. Moss. May 22, at 8.15, A lecture.
KINGSLAND (corner of Ridley-road): 11.30, W. Heaford.

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): 7, Debate between G. Tooth and H. Percy Ward on "Can Socialism Benefit the People?" Open-air, at 11, in the Bull Ring, and every Wednesday and Friday, H. Percy Ward.
CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday School; 7, S. E. Easton, "Is the Bible Man's Highest Guide to Morality?"
GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): 12, Discussion Class—Business Meeting; 6.30, A lecture.
LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, A lecture.
MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): 7, A lecture.
SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, A lecture on "Progress."
SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, A reading.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—May 20, a., Victoria Park; e., West Ham. 27, m., Kingsland; a., Victoria Park; e., Mile End. 30, Mile End. June 3, Conference. 10, m., Clerkenwell Green; a., Finsbury Park; e., West Ham.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, London, S.E.—June 17, e., Stratford. 24, m., Camberwell; a., Peckham Rye.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham.—May 20, Birmingham. 27, Northampton. June 10, Birmingham. 17, Northampton. July 1, Birmingham. 15, Northampton. 22, Birmingham.

F. A. DAVIES, 65 Lion-street, S.E.—May 20, a., Peckham Rye; e., Brockwell Park. 27, m., Westminster.

R. P. EDWARDS, 48 Woodstock-road, Shepherd's Bush.—May 20, Clerkenwell Green; a., Finsbury Park; e., Mile End. 27, m., Hyde Park; a., Peckham Rye; e., Brockwell Park.

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