

THE

Freethinker

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Talmage on "Infidels."

MR. GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE has always had a tremendous objection to the word "infidel" as applied to Freethinkers. The very sound of the word appears to spoli his usually good temper. He protests that "infidelity" means unfaithfulness, and that "infidel" means an unfaithful person—one who disowns every moral obligation, has no respect for his own promises, and is always ready to be treacherous when it suits his interests or inclinations. Mr. Holyoake even objected to the title of a little work of ours—*Infidel Death-Beds*. He called it the endorsement of a Christian insult. But it was really nothing of the kind. "Infidel Death-Beds" was a classic expression amongst Christians before we were born. We simply adopted it as a passport for our exposure of the fables and falsehoods (we should say "lies," only Mr. Holyoake cannot stand that word when *we* use it) which are generally included under that orthodox heading. For our part, we are so accustomed to Christian insults that we are not particularly sensitive to this one. After being accused, either openly or by insinuation, of all the crimes in the Newgate Calendar, with the single exception of murder, we cannot go mad with anger when the Christians cry "infidel!" After all, hard words break no bones, and we don't so much mind their language, if they only keep their hands off our person and property (what we have!), and leave us the enjoyment of our liberty.

It is worth remarking, by the way, that the word "infidel" did not originally convey any moral (or immoral) significance. Etymologically it means a non-believer. It was first used by the Crusaders in regard to the Saracens, who returned the compliment for all it was worth. At that time, indeed, it was held to be a supreme crime to disbelieve in Jesus Christ. It did not occur to the Christians to accuse the Mohammedans of common wickedness, any more than we should trouble ourselves to accuse an assassin of petty theft. On the whole, indeed, the Christians pretty frankly admitted that, with respect to mere carnal morality, the Mohammedans were just as good as themselves, and sometimes a great deal better. Later on, when the Christians tired of crusading, and settled down in Europe, leaving the Mohammedans in undisputed possession of the empire carved out by their swords, they took to quarrelling with each other in general, and with Freethinkers in particular. It was then that the word "infidel" assumed its sinister meaning. It was suggested that the unbeliever was a wicked person, who rejected or disputed the orthodox faith in order to gratify his evil passions. That was so much easier than answering his objections. Just in the same way the Atheist is still reminded of the silly old text, "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God"—so as to have a fine time of it in this world, and fatten himself for the everlasting bonfire in the next.

Now let us come to Talmage—the Talmage, the great

Talmage, the transcendent Talmage; the prince of pulpit mountebanks, the lord of religious charlatans. We had occasion to deal with his address at Manchester the other day—the first after his landing upon our hospitable shores. We have now to deal with his first appearance (during this visit) in London. Inspiration or instinct, if not something more tangible, led him to St. James's Hall, the Sunday home of the Wesleyan West London Mission, and the well-known haunt of the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, who has so much in common with this American soul-saver. Once more there was a great crush. Christians thronged the doors for hours before they were opened. They knew what to expect. Talmage is not a philosopher, a poet, or a wit; but he is a master of grandiose language, and knows how to tickle the ears of an orthodox audience, without any strain upon the organ that lies between those appendages. The subject of his discourse was "Armageddon"—the great battle referred to in the mad book of Revelation, at which the Lord Jesus Christ (some day, some day!) is to overcome all his enemies with prodigious slaughter, and *thus* inaugurate the millennium. Talmage did not know when or where it was to be fought, but he knew it *was* to be fought, and that was enough for anyone but a carping unbeliever. Angels would be soldiers on the Lord's side, and if one of these winged warriors slew 195,000 (one newspaper gives it as 195,000,000) of the hosts of Sennacherib, how many could 500,000,000 angels slay in one day? It was enough to stagger imagination, to say nothing of arithmetic; and Talmage seems to have licked his lips at the bloody prospect.

Among the hosts of evil, Talmage reckons 150,000,000 idolaters, 250,000,000 Brahmins, 450,000,000 Buddhists, and God knows how many Mohammedans; in spite of the fact that most of these people are quite as moral as Christians, and some of them quite as moral as Talmage can be, even in his own estimation. But the first ranks of the wicked army are to be the drunkards. Then will come "the regiments agnostic and infidel," with Voltaire at their head. "Oh, their desperation!" cried Talmage. He cannot make them feel that way himself, but the Lord will do it—at Armageddon. And the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians (no Catholics!) will look on and laugh with glee. They will see the great Voltaire overthrown at last. Yes, but it will take God Almighty to settle him; and that is a poor compliment to the dialectical powers of Christian apologists.

Unless the newspaper reports misrepresent him, Talmage announced Armageddon for five o'clock in the morning. We congratulate him on his precision; and perhaps, as he knows the hour, he will tell us the day. Next time he preaches on Armageddon will do. We are in no hurry. Meanwhile we thank him for informing us how "an agnostic" will look later on in that great day. "In his eye a stare of incipient lunacy," said Talmage. No doubt he has seen Agnostics staring at him. But they were probably only wondering why such a prize fool was left at large.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Future of Religion.

A GREAT deal of writing and speaking, wise and otherwise, is given to the world on "The Religion of the Future"; and if definiteness of statement were a guarantee of accuracy of forecast, prophecy of this kind might rank as one of the exact sciences. Usually these lucubrations take the shape of the writer or speaker discussing everybody's religious opinions but his own, and finally establishing his own particular "doxy" on the ruins of those he has demolished. Fortunately for all such prophets, the realisation of their predictions concerns a season beyond the span of their own lives. They can neither sorrow over the falsity of their prophecies nor triumph in their verification. The "future" is gloriously indefinite; it is always a long way ahead, and when it does arrive it has an awkward knack of turning up in a quite unexpected character.

If the human mind worked on strictly logical lines, and if the amount of truth or knowledge gained by each generation were a determinate quantity, one might calculate the condition of existing religious beliefs a few centuries hence, as an astronomer now predicts the position of a planet. We should simply have to estimate the tenacity of religious convictions in terms of the progressive and uninterrupted intellectual development of mankind, and the problem would at once be solved. But, unfortunately, the matter is not so simple. We have no means of accurately determining the vitality of religious ideas, nor can we be certain that what the best intellects believe to be true will be accepted as such by the bulk of the people. Experience is a sad destroyer of enthusiastic delusions concerning the all-conquering power of truth, and experience demonstrates only too clearly that superstitions sometimes revive in the most unexpected manner, and that many people continue to accept a belief as true long after its falsity has been made clear to others.

We do not, indeed, destroy the religious type of mind by destroying the forms under which it expresses itself. If we could destroy *all* the forms of its manifestation, the principle of atrophy from disuse would operate, and this is doubtless what does, to some extent, occur; but, nevertheless, the disappearance of one set of beliefs often secures little but their reappearance in another shape. The Protestant who sneers at the infallibility of Church or Pope eagerly accepts that of the Bible. The Christian who rejects with scorn the miracles and the pretensions of other creeds is found advancing precisely the same claims for his own religion, and subscribing to exactly the same set of beliefs; even the Theist, who can perceive the strength of every argument brought against the God of a revealed religion, is generally blindly obtuse to the fact that the arguments apply with equal strength to his own conception of deity. It is the type of mind upon which religion lives that needs to be destroyed, and this can only be done by so modifying the general social and intellectual conditions that religious beliefs shall represent a clear case of non-adaptation or reversion to a more primitive mental type.

To a very considerable extent this is now being done. The mere extension of a knowledge of physical science has made many of the grosser religious beliefs impossible to a civilised community. These are not only rejected as false, they are laughed at as ridiculous; and although a belief may withstand being called unreasonable, it seldom survives being ridiculed. The attempt to translate Christian dogmas into a purely ethical and social teaching, the various movements towards a "more rational religion," ridiculous as they are, are still evidences of the uncomfortable manner in which ancient religious beliefs sit on modern shoulders. It is all part of the historic process of criticism, denunciation, attempted reconstruction, and final rejection.

But is the rejection so certain? There's the rub. Mr. Leslie Stephen has argued—and in this he is only one of many—that there exists no certain guarantee that superstition may not again survive and rule us as of yore. He asks if it is not an unjustifiable optimism to assume that superstition is dead beyond the possibility of a resurrection. In what way are we the superiors of our ancestors? Is the brain of the

average man to-day superior to that of the contemporary of Julius Cæsar? Can we say that the average citizen, reading his daily or weekly batch of police news, luxuriating in the wife-beating of Bill Scroggins or the burglarious enterprise of Bill Sykes, is able to see through the fallacies that imposed on St. Augustine and Aquinas.

Well, if individual intelligence is the *only* factor that determines the acceptance or rejection of religious beliefs, the answer would be that such optimism is unjustifiable. The average citizen of to-day may not be more intelligent—that is, may not be the possessor of greater brain power—than the citizen of Rome in the days of Julius Cæsar; but it is unquestionable that he is the possessor of far greater *knowledge*, and it is this latter fact that constitutes the chief warranty for whatever optimistic hopes for the future we may indulge in. The seamen of to-day may not be a whit more intelligent, more daring, or more resourceful than the seamen of the days of the Pharaohs, but they have at their disposal an accumulated mass of knowledge concerning their craft that would have caused their predecessors to have hailed them as demi-gods, and in warfare a single gunboat may control and direct forces that would have shattered the combined navies of the ancient world.

It is the same in intellectual or religious matters. If it were possible to resuscitate an ancient Athenian, and place before him and an Englishman a problem of a character hitherto unknown to both, I see no reason for believing that the modern would display any marked mental superiority in dealing with it. But place before them the problem, say, of accounting for the geologic strata, and one would answer with ease questions that would thoroughly confuse the other, not because he was more *intelligent*, but because he had a whole store of inherited information to fall back upon. It is the accumulated and widespread knowledge of to-day that is the surest guarantee we have against a recrudescence of superstition. One cannot conceive of a re-personification of natural forces, such as forms the raw material of religion, nor can we conceive, except by positing some tremendous cataclysm that would hurl the race back into barbarism, that educated people should ever again regard the visitation of a plague, a pestilence, or the appearance of a comet, with feelings that are even approximately religious. This, again, is due, not to our being more *intelligent* than our predecessors, but simply to the fact that the ages have given us fuller and more complete information on such subjects than was possessed by them.

In brief, it cannot be maintained that the estimation in which religious beliefs are held is determined by the intellectual ability or strength of those who hold them. The most absurd beliefs may be, and have been, held by men of far more than the average mental strength; and, on the other hand, individuals of far weaker intellect are found rejecting them. The vitality of any belief is dependent upon its own inherent strength, but perhaps to a still greater degree on the nature of the environment in which it exists. Ideas to gain support must fit in somehow with the existing stock of knowledge, and must harmonise with our current scheme of things as a whole. The old lady in the story could easily believe there were rivers of rum and mountains of sugar, but flying fish!—well, that was too much even for her. We all know the difficulty of picturing the mental condition of a savage concerning the most ordinary matters, and the savage must have as great a difficulty in picturing our own mental operations. In the same manner, when the social environment is such as favors the growth of superstition, when there exists an ignorance of natural forces, with a number of intellectual and moral notions characteristic of a low state of society, religious conceptions not only find ready acceptance—it is almost impossible to crush them out. Suppress them in one form, they reappear in another. And, on the contrary, when we have scientific knowledge assuming larger and larger proportions; when this knowledge is shared in by all to some extent, and promises to become still more popular; when, moreover, the social feelings are being broadened and transformed, then even, though superstition may linger on, it steadily loses ground with the passing of each generation.

We are, I think, apt to greatly over-estimate the part that pure reason plays in determining belief, much more

so the part it plays in determining conduct. At most, reason does but discover the causes that have led to action, or invent excuses for our having acted. The most powerful impulses to action and the strongest predispositions to believe or doubt are framed in the region of the unconscious, to which the conscious life of man is only as a bubble compared to the stream that bears it along. If one could calculate the precise nature of the forces that have undermined religious beliefs, it would probably be found that in the majority of cases they had operated quite unconsciously. The man who takes up with the study of positive science may not intend to test his religious beliefs by his scientific acquirements, and may never actually do so, but he nevertheless finds that certain of his earlier conceptions are no longer so agreeable to him as they were. He sometimes retains them in name; he invariably changes them in meaning. Thousands whose sabbatarianism would have been proof against the most cogent reasoning find it weakening before the omnipresent "bike." Here, as elsewhere, the individual is moulded far more by his social surroundings than appears at first sight. It is the social structure, physical and intellectual, that determines whether a belief shall live or die, or decides the length of its career. The individual is, broadly speaking, only a visible registration of its decrees. C. COHEN.

(To be continued.)

Christianity and the Masses.

In our article, "Christianity a Failure," which appeared in these columns last week, ample evidence was given to show that the Christian faith had little or no hold upon the general community. Since producing that evidence, we have read a striking article in the *Church Gazette*, under the title of "The Religious Alienation of the Masses," which thoroughly confirms what we have said upon this subject. The apathy to church-going is no novelty to us, for again and again we have furnished statistics (taken from professed Christian authorities) which show that the vast majority of the population in this country never attend any church. But now we have the frank admission of our religious contemporary that "the masses are becoming alienated from religion as a whole, and are gradually, but steadily, inclining to leave it more and more alone." The writer supports his indictment with some hard facts, which must be very disquieting to religious enthusiasts. He cites figures which show that in the metropolis, with its population of five to six millions, the ratio of worshippers is about four to every fifty-five of population. Then he asks:—

"But, meanwhile, what becomes of the remaining five millions of folk in London who are hardly represented among church-goers at all? Of these, who form the main bulk of the people at large, it may be too safely affirmed that they all—old and young, rich and poor—strike anyone who is familiar with London as entirely unconcerned and out of touch either with church or chapel, and hardly know what the inside of one of these structures is like. They make it quite plain, in their millions, that they care not a fig about the whole matter of religion, and that they are living their lives without any relation to it whatever. On Sundays there is a ringing of church bells. The average Londoner is accustomed to this, and he pursues his own objects without being disturbed by it in the least, whether those objects take the form of gardening, or of 'rabbit hutches,' of a trip to some neighboring park, or of things less innocent, among which the public-house takes a prominent place.....In fact, these people look upon religionists in general as men talking in the air about something quite unpractical, men who might as well be using a dead language, as the set of completely 'polarized' phrases that come so glibly. That is what is going on in urban and suburban districts both in London and, more or less, in all other large and populous centres."

This is a severe, but, we think, strictly accurate, indictment of religious propoganda in the capital of "Christian England." What, however, of the attendance at "divine worship" among our rural population? Is that more encouraging from a religious point of view? The *Church Gazette* says that it is not, "besides presenting the nearly hopeless obstacle of a dense,

lumpish, and hopeless stupidity—such stupidity as 'the gods themselves are powerless against.'" The pertinent question here arises, To whom are we indebted for this "dense, lumpish, and hopeless stupidity"? We answer, without the slightest hesitation, that the blame is to be attached to the clergy, who have had Hodge under their absolute control. In the rural districts true education has been neglected, free inquiry has been discouraged, and scepticism vehemently condemned. For ages, among the rural population, the parson and the squire "ruled the roost," with what result we, alas, know too well. Thanks, however, to the circulation of liberal literature, the operation of an improved educational method, and the development of Secular ideas, the clergymen of the villages are losing their former power over their victims. The *Church Gazette* recognises this, hence it writes:—

"In a village of, let us say, five hundred souls there is generally a church, and also a chapel. If the church attracts a score besides its officials, and the chapel another score, neither body is dissatisfied. Forty persons have attended divine service; of these, just as before, some thirty or more have done so from the sheer force of habit, or else because it is correct to do so, and a few, besides, from interested motives which have to do with the squire, or the parson, or something else. Here, then, we ask, how much is left to show the genuine vitality of religion among these villagers?"

Now, does not this show, as we have frequently contended, that the Christian faith is a hollow profession as a mundane reforming agency? Wherever its influence has not been counteracted by superior forces, its effects have been terribly disastrous, both upon individuals and the community.

It is, indeed, time that something better than the Church can offer should be found whereby the present wretched condition of the poor could be radically altered. How sad and deplorable that condition is may be imagined from the following facts related in the House of Commons by Mr. Steadman during the recent debate on the second reading of the Housing of the Working Classes Act (1890) Amendment Bill. He said that "in London alone the report of Dr. Shirley Murphy, medical officer of the London County Council, showed that 400,000 persons were living in one-roomed homes, 30,000 were living six in a room, 9,000 seven in a room, and 3,000 eight in a room. The medical officer even for the aristocratic district of Kensington reported a case where five adult women slept in one room—three in one bed and two under it. In Camberwell seventeen were found living and sleeping in a single room. In some cases two families lived in a room with a partition of sacking. In the East-end things were worse, and beds were let out on the eight-hours' system, to night and day workers in turn." Nothing can be more lamentably unjust than the existence of such wrongs and sufferings in the midst of luxury and untold wealth. Is it surprising, when it is admitted by the professors of Christianity that the Church has failed to grapple with such appalling evils, that the masses should manifest an utter indifference towards the Christian faith? In our opinion, it is a credit to the intellectual discernment of those people who refuse to be misled any longer by their so-called "spiritual guides." We hope that, having given up the worse than foolish habit of church-going, the dwellers in our rural districts will direct their attention to the study and application of those material means whereby their proper social status can alone be secured. Let them no longer be deluded by priestly misrepresentations and theological teachings. These Church agencies have been a curse to all who were weak enough to believe in them. Experience has fully testified that the redemption of the masses from the low condition to which the Church has reduced them can only be obtained by their reliance upon self-endeavor, prudential conduct, and persistent efforts. The Church cannot provide any real salvation for the masses, who, as time goes on, will, doubtless, more than ever discover that they must be their own saviors. Their regenerating force must come from man, not from God, and it will be found on earth, not in heaven.

In his recent work, *A History of Scotland*, Mr. Andrew Lang attributes the saving of the freedom of that country to the clergy. This is a palpable fallacy. As the reviewer of the book in the *Literary World* writes: "Scotland's

freedom was won by fighting, not by preaching or praying. The weapons of her defenders were lances, axes, and spears, not pastoral staves or croziers. There is about as much ground for the statement that 'the clergy saved Scotland's freedom' as there would be for giving the credit of Bruce's victory at Bannockburn to the Abbot of Inchafray, because he carried a crucifix along the Scottish lines on the morning of the battle." So it is with the up-to-date emancipation of the masses of the British nation. They owe their deliverance, so far as it has been achieved, not to any religious teaching, nor to any attempt at reform by the Christian Church, but rather to their personal determination to work out their own regeneration, and to the invaluable assistance rendered them by those who worked apart altogether from the Churches.

The *Church Gazette* acknowledges the failure of Christianity hitherto to win the masses to its fold. But in pointing out the bane it does not supply the antidote. The Christian editor suggests five remedies, which, if they were practical, would, in our opinion, prove as bad as the disease, and this we will endeavor to prove in our article next week, when the submitted remedies shall be carefully considered.

CHARLES WATTS.

Religious Instruction.

SIGNS are not wanting that the priestly party—always anxious to capture the children of the nation—contemplate a strenuous effort, not only to maintain, but to extend, the system of religious instruction in the public schools. The recent proposals made at various School Boards in the country to introduce the "Apostles' Creed" is one indication of this desire. The preparations made by the Church party for ensuing School Board elections afford other evidence of the danger ahead.

Some determined resistance must certainly be made to these efforts of the clerical class to take possession of, and imbue with superstitious error, the budding minds of those who will be the men and women of the immediate future. Whatever the clerics may say to the contrary, religious instruction has always been the most distasteful part of the curriculum to the poor little mites or the growing juveniles who have to endure it. When St. Paul was a child he spake as a child, he understood as a child, he thought as a child; and though we may feel disposed to qualify the accompanying declaration that when he became a man he put away childish things, there is no reason to doubt that while young in years his intellect was proportionately feeble in capacity. Speaking for himself, Paul spoke for many others; and some day the Christian Church—never very remarkable for quickness of perception—will discover a new and striking application of the Apostle's saying.

Occasionally the Church is spoken of as "Mother Church"; but where, Oh! where, are the maternal feelings? Surely to the little folks she acts not as a mother—not even as a step-mother—but as a harsh creature without any real tenderness, sympathy, consideration, or love. Why is it that many men have an unconquerable dislike to theology, and a determined indifference to its claims and teachings? Why do they shun it, and resolutely resist its charming—charm it never so wisely? Because in most cases it has utterly wearied and sickened them when young; it has persecuted and tortured them when resistance, remonstrance, or escape was impossible. That has been the experience of many adults of the present generation, whether these adults are venerable or merely of mature age. Is the same kind of thing to be repeated with the children who are now springing up? Christ, it is true, said: "Suffer little children to come unto me"; but he did not ask that they should be dragged to him by the ear.

Though religious discipline in the household is hardly so stern and inflexible nowadays as it was within the memory of perhaps many present readers, there is still sufficient of it to make the lot of the little ones anything but happy. Fortunately, there is a buoyancy of spirit about juvenility which usually preserves it from the depression that reflective adults would find it almost

intolerable to endure. Those who have had the misfortune to be brought up in a strictly religious family will know what a burden is, in this respect, imposed on the young. What with morning and evening prayers, grace before and after meat, scripture reading during the winter evenings, Biblical home-lessons, collect and catechism learning, church or chapel-going on Sundays, and sometimes during the week—what with all this, and very much more from pious and solicitous maiden aunts, and other kind relatives, children are simply stuffed and stifled by religion; they are bored, badgered, bewildered by it, and if at manhood they hastily throw off the restraints of both religion and morality, their early Christian tormentors are, in a large degree, responsible for it. The Sunday-school "treats" and the prizes for Scriptural knowledge are but poor compensation for the wearisome infliction of this elementary religious training.

Who but those who have gone through it can conceive of the utter weariness of the flesh and vexation of spirit endured Sunday after Sunday by the little people who are dragged off to church or chapel, and have to sit looking at some drone of a preacher who is talking about nobody knows or cares what, and who feel themselves under the eyes of stern-minded guardians who will reprove them if they shuffle, cough, laugh, sleep, wink, or whisper, or do anything but stare vacantly before them during the long mortal hours of their confinement. On the rare occasions when I have visited a church or chapel I have looked upon the children present with the sympathy of one who can understand their wretchedness because he has suffered in like manner himself. I have sometimes thought that, if my will were supreme in that place, I would let those children out to frolic and play as they pleased, while the solemn-visaged, grown-up people who seem to appreciate the discourse so very keenly should have their enjoyment prolonged by being kept within hearing of the preacher for an extra hour and a-half. The special services and addresses to children in the Sunday-school are open to very much the same kind of condemnation. Either all that is talked about is above the comprehension of the children—which is an almost certain thing in so far as theology is the subject—or some grey-beard, trying to get down to the level of his juvenile hearers, makes himself, with his heavy jocularity, ridiculous even in *their* eyes, for though the assimilation of religious teaching is a difficulty, often an impossibility, with youngsters, they usually have a keen perception of the absurd.

Religious, or any other sort of class, instruction for children on Sundays seems to me an unnecessary imposition. In the vast majority of cases children have quite as much class instruction as is good for them during the week. As for the introduction of religious teaching in rate-aided schools, that, of course, is an iniquity always to be protested against, though, with the present subsidy to voluntary schools and the clerical element on most of the School Boards, the prospect of a realisation of the rational ideal seems somewhat remote.

FRANCIS NEALE.

Christian Science.

A NEW kind of cant and humbug is prevalent as an outcome of the Christian Science delusion. The cant consists in words and phrases without meaning, like "vibrations," "spirit of truth," "conscious divinity," "cellular correspondence," "polarity," "divine plan," and so on. As might be expected, the little understood words "telepathy," "magnetism," and "electricity" frequently occur. Paine said that a pious fraud always has its lingo and its legerdmain. The legerdmain or humbug of Christian Science is "absent treatment" for disease or trouble, effected by the communication of "healing thoughts" to the patient, and mental cure for poverty or business unsuccess administered in the same way. This saves travelling expenses and the cost of drugs.

The fakirs of the faith all have the same method and the same vocabulary. Their method is to start a little monthly sheet and circulate it free to all except those who object to getting something for nothing and send

fifty cents or a dollar for a year's subscription. The vocabulary of the fakirs contains the words "god," "soul," "I am," etc., besides those mentioned above and others that mean nothing. They advertise that they can dispense Health, Happiness, and Prosperity by vibration of spirit, said spirit having annihilated space and taken its job, and being a medium for telepathic communication. For fifty cents they think of you for a month; for a dollar a month they send healing thoughts by vibration; for ten dollars they will write you some of the stuff they print in their papers. Subscribers are given a place in the thoughts of the editor, who professes to be God Almighty and to have come to this earth from a planet. One fellow pretends that he came from Venus, another that he originated in the sun. All of them declare that they have money to burn, and are not out for the dust; but if you want to get roasted send a letter to one of them and omit the enclosure. Likely as not, in addition to blackguarding you he will threaten to set hostile vibrations at work on your system. I think they get this notion from George Francis Train's "Psycho," which he used some years ago for annihilating adverse influences.

A Christian Science fakir who issues his paper from Denver gives the reader this notice:—
"Remember that your first month's treatment and your first year's subscription is one dollar. I haven't time to explain it, but each copy of my paper contains a treatment to the one who reads it. I could give you hundreds of cases where men accidentally picked up this paper and received the vibrations of Health, Happiness, and Prosperity."

As men do not long continue to print papers that bring no returns, the evidence is that this humbug finds people to believe him, and to pay for imagining he is treating them. He claims a circulation of thirty thousand copies per month. The matter he prints is all editorial, being mostly answers to critics and correspondents. He enjoys gambling with women about their vibrations, and has got hold of Miss Craddock's idea of the sustained thrill, which he calls "regeneration"—a flame that burns continually without consuming anything. Hundreds of women, he says, write to him that they are ready for regeneration, while "many people are going insane over it."

Some rational persons, observing the prevalence of this cult and its acceptance by so many people, conclude that there is work cut out for the fool-killer, which he will perform in his own good time. I maintain, however, that the large number of surviving idiots who swallow the cant and humbug of Christian Science furnish conclusive proof that the fool-killer is a myth.

—*Truthseeker* (New York). GEORGE MACDONALD.

For the Souls in Hell.

THERE is always a hope for the dying wretches,
Kenneled and cursed though their bodies are,
That the merciful dim hereafter stretches
A hand of help o'er the bitter bar
To still the throb of their lives' old scar.
Hope for them in their dens and ditches,
Dreams of a future where all is well,
Where the saints lean down from their holy niches
To join the joy that their hymns foretell;
But there is no hope for the souls in hell.

Now up to the brazen heavens, pleading,
There rises the wail of the under world,
And down from the throne of a God unheeding
Is the pitiful cry of the pleaders hurled,
Caught and choked, in the hell-foam swirled.
And the saints above in the holy city
Their rapturous anthems of triumph swell,
While God looks down, without pardon or pity,
On these, His children—before they fell!
There is no hope for the souls in hell.

—*Brann's Iconoclast*. CLARENCE STANLEY.

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

A Ballad of Jonah.

OLD Jonah was a prophet who
Small profit thereby got:
His calling brought him coppers few,
Although of change a lot.

"Go," said the Lord, "and rouse the fears
Of sinful Ninevey;
Although I gave those folks their ears,
They won't give ear to me."

Thought Jonah: "Down at Ninevey
Great danger is in store;
I may of wrath a vessel be,
But I'm not a man of war."

"Therefore in Tarshish town, I wis,
From God I'll hide my face
For everyone avers it is
A god-forsaken place."

He paid his fare and sailed from land,
But on the way across
The vessel met the storm-fiend, and
They played at pitch and toss.

"It's all up now—we're going down!"
Cried passengers and crew;
And some exclaimed, "We're all done brown!"
Though everyone looked blue.

The noise woke Jonah, and he ran
To gaze upon the wave.
"Great Scott!" cried he; "no craft of man
This blessed craft can save."

"Alas! He trips who tripping goes
To give his God the slip;
Why did I seek to cure my woes,
O Lord, by taking ship?"

The skipper mused: "In God's bad books
Someone must be, ecod!
Yon devil-dodger guilty looks—
I bet he's dodging God!"

"God, therefore, seeks to damn his hide.
Yet stay—I'm making shots:
To be quite sure, let chance decide."
So all the lot cast lots.

Poor Jonah drew the fatal sign;
Said he: "My end is near;
Yet, stout of heart, I will not whine,
Nor growl about my bier."

"Of no avail are sighs and groans:
Ye tars must pitch me in.
Old Davy Jones demands these bones;
Come, make no bones, begin."

They tightly gripped his slacks, and swore
His sentiments were fine;
Then he soon was in a pickle, for
They cast him into brine.

The prophet did a big fish mark:
Cried he, in great affright,
"O Lord, did I vacate the bark
To perish from a bite?"

But though between those jaws he rolled,
They were not jaws of death;
Three days within that monster's hold
Poor Jonah held his breath.

"Gadzooks!" thought he, "things fishy look—
Though 'tis too dark to see;
No sportsman, fish, am I—my hook
I'd gladly take from thee."

"Methinks a prayer or two I'll shout;
I yet may save my skin:
Lord, take me from this live cave out—
I've long ago caved in."

"O King of trumps, relax thy gripe
On this repentant knave.
Thy slave hath oft digested tripe—
Shall tripe digest thy slave?"

"Enough!" laughed Jahveh; "I repent.
Your debt that jest hath paid."
Then the fish unto the bank he went,
And a deposit made.

The prophet lay with broken crown,
Yet joy o'erflowed his cup.
Said he, "I cannot feel cast down—
I'm glad to be 'thrown up.'"

"Arise, and do my will," said Jah,
 "Or else prepare your own.
 Get up! Your king is apt—ha! ha!
 To sit upon the thrown."

"I see," said Jonah, with a wink,
 "It's no use going back.
 You're sure to nail me, so I think
 I'll try another tack."

"Though not," thought he, "inclined to go,
 To Ninevy I'll slope.
 I would not smoke with Satan, so
 With Satan I will cope."

In Ninevy he stood anon,
 And yelled: "Ye sinful folk,
 Beezlebub hath egged you on
 To put away God's yoke."

"You bruise with blows his Holy Joes,
 His laws you kick against;
 No incense titillates his nose,
 And, therefore, he's incensed."

"His spirit is a fiery Jinn;
 With vengeful ire he's crammed;
 If you don't dam this tide of sin,
 You'll tidy soon be damned!"

The Ninevites arose, and flew
 To put on sack attire;
 And sought the aid of ashes, to
 Preserve themselves from fire.

"Put up the brimstone. Hip-hurrah!
 I'm crazy with delight!
 I will not touch 'em," shouted Jah;
 "'Tis such a touching sight."

But Jonah said: "I cannot live!
 I of chagrin shall die!
 This fry of Satan you forgive—
 I hoped to see them fry."

He went and sat beneath a gourd
 Until a worm accurst
 His raging thirst for vengeance cured
 By causing him to thirst.

He rose, half dead, and mopped his brow;
 Growled he: "This is no fun.
 The Father badly plagued me—now
 I'm tortured by the sun."

He left the spot in grief and shame,
 Bemoaning his sad lot.
 Some say a potman he became—
 Some say he went to pot.

Now every gentle in the land
 Beware of gods and gales,
 Of fish with Christian swallows, and
 Of books with fishy tales.

C. D. STEPHENS.

Peter's Enlightenment.

SAINT PETER stood lazily flapping his wings, gazing meditatively the while from behind the gates of heaven; and the strait and narrow path inclining downward from his view presented a melancholy and deserted appearance. He mused as he listlessly jangled his keys upon the great slump in the desire for harps and crowns, and sought in his mind to supply a reason. But he had lived a long time, and perhaps the bliss of long-continued ignorance was more to him than wisdom's folly. Flapping one's motor appendages does not create much of a diversion when one has an eternity of time at his disposal. Neither does the rattling of keys. More to relieve the monotony of things than otherwise, Peter opened the gates and leisurely proceeded adown the steepness of the path. High walls towered upon either side, staying each searching wind defying the sunlight; and in this journey Peter, all unconsciously, was to find the reason that he sought. For as he went on he perceived in the distance the clear rays of the sun, shining right across the path. This, he found, was due to the walls having crumbled away and fallen, showing the green fields of science, the trees and flowers of knowledge behind. At this point Peter noticed the divergence, he saw how people forsook the narrow path to wander in the meadows of Rationalism, and he turned back to the gates, a sadder but a wiser saint.

FRANK HALL.

Acid Drops.

PRESIDENT KRUGER keeps up his touching faith in "Providence." By his order, May 27, 28, and 29 were observed throughout the whole country as special days of humiliation, and for the confession of sins, and of prayer for relief from oppression, and for the preservation of Transvaal independence. Probably he knew very well that this pious farce would no more keep General Roberts out of Pretoria than it kept him out of Bloemfontein. Indeed, it is reported that President Kruger has a special train in readiness for bolting if "Providence" turns out to be with the other side. For our part, we have never thought Oom Paul to be as pious as he is represented. He is a great politician, one of the greatest of the century; and such men generally use the piety of their countrymen, without really sharing it to any considerable degree. President Kruger might be called the Parnell of South Africa; only the famous Irish chieftain did not pander to the religious prejudices of his people. He did not utter the cant of religion, and he disliked and distrusted the men of God of all denominations.

According to the newspapers, Commandant Snyman, the Boer general who was besieging Mafeking, had a superstitious belief that General Baden-Powell visited his laager every night, and had some supernatural power of making himself invisible. It is probable, however, that Commandant Snyman was not quite such a fool. "The wolf that never sleeps"—as the natives called General Baden-Powell—was no doubt dreaded on quite natural grounds.

"This is Commandant Eloff, sir," said Captain Singleton, bringing forward President Kruger's nephew as a prisoner in Mafeking. "Good evening, Commandant," said Colonel Baden-Powell; "won't you come in and have some dinner?" This is how really brave men treat each other even when they fight on opposite sides, and such amenities soften the rigors of war. Do they not also prepare the way for the ending of war altogether?

Ascension Day was marked, celebrated, or what is the proper word? by the House of Commons, by not allowing its Committees to sit until two o'clock. But the division was a very close one, the majority being only six; and this looks like the beginning of the end. Lord Hugh Cecil defended the observance on two grounds: first, on the ground of ceremony; secondly, on the ground of the established religion. If the House was going to get rid of all ceremonies, why was the Speaker allowed to wear a wig? And while we had an Established Church we were more or less bound to follow its religious customs. Such was the argument of this scion of the great Salisbury family, and it certainly has some logical force. But the steps by which nations recede from old religious positions are never logical. We can be logical enough in the realm of thought, but the world of practice abounds in half-steps and compromises. Thus it always was, and thus in all probability it always will be.

The *Standard* sneered at "Mr. Labouchere and his Radical supporters" who voted against this Ascension Day observance, and declared that, "If their views prevailed, the House of Commons would be lowered in the estimation of a world which, after all, cherishes the belief that a peculiar sanctity still lingers round the historic precincts of Westminster." This expression is at once happy and unhappy. It is certainly a "peculiar sanctity" that attaches to the House of Commons. We wonder if it pervades the refreshment department and the smoke-rooms.

The Bible was written in the old wonder days, when people were easily alarmed at uncommon natural phenomena. Savages and barbarians always "sit up" at eclipses and red-faced moons. So the Hebrew prophet tried to frighten his stiff-necked auditors by telling them what Jehovah was going to do when he was fairly upon the war-path. Amongst other things, the sun was to be darkened, and the moon turned into blood. Well, eclipses happen now as they did then, but we are not alarmed. Scientific men set about investigating the matter, and schoolboys had bits of smoked glass to play the astronomer with in their own juvenile fashion, while elderly people, who are apt to see the past in a rosier light than the present, talk of the much finer eclipse they saw some forty years ago, when nature was apparently in a more vigorous and effective condition.

But if civilised people take eclipses cheerfully, it is still far otherwise with people in lower stages of culture. "Negroes gathered in churches and prayed," says the report of the recent eclipse arriving from America. Turning to the report from the north of Africa, we read that "A great wail went up from the native quarter of Algiers, after the mufti had exhorted them to go into the mosques and offer prayers for the dead."

Savages have a general belief that an eclipse means that a monstrous, terrible demon is trying to swallow the sun; and,

as they can't afford to lose the sun, they try to scare the demon and prevent him from succeeding. They make the most horrible noise they can, to frighten him from his fell purpose, and at the same time they make a pathetic appeal to any spark of generosity that may survive in his diabolical bosom. When the eclipse is over, and the sun has evidently had a happy escape, they congratulate themselves on the success of their efforts, and go and get drunk.

"Providence" does not seem to be giving proper consideration to the piety of the Czar and the mass of the Russian people. Blighting frost has been afflicting the grain-growing districts, many parts are irremediably injured, and the greater part of Bessarabia is still suffering acutely from famine. Oh, Providence! Providence! Call you that backing of your friends?

"Providence" has got into a lawsuit in America. It happened in this way. The Rev. E. Dixon, a prominent Methodist preacher, of Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, failing to prevent the erection of a big brewery there, publicly prayed for divine vengeance against it. A few days later it was partially wrecked in a thunderstorm, and the brewery company are now claiming 50,000 dollars compensation from the reverend gentleman for the damage. Mr. Dixon contends that he cannot be held responsible for an act of Providence, and promises to call eminent theologians to testify on his behalf. Now what he wants to know is this. Supposing the man of God wins, will the Court allow the Company to issue a writ against "Providence"? And who will serve it?

St. Eloi is the patron saint of clock and watch makers in France. A curious picture of him is being exhibited in a show at the Paris Exhibition. He is trying to convert an unbelieving master farrier, who has a horse to shoe. The saint gets off his horse, enters the shop, and takes the job out of the farrier's hands. He cuts the horse's leg off, puts the new shoe on the hoof, and then fixes the severed leg on again as good as ever. Of course the unbelieving farrier is converted on the spot.

Mr. Haies, the Australian correspondent of the *Daily News*, who was taken prisoner by the Boers, and is now with the British forces again, gives a lively description of his Kaffir servant. Here is an amusing extract:—"My nigger is no better and no worse than the rest of them. He looks like a chapter in Lamentations, and is about as much at home in a soddan camp as a bar of wet soap in a sand heap. Just now he is good for nothing except to sing doleful hymns in a key sad enough to frighten a transit mule away from a bag of mealies. When he is not singing sadly he is quoting scripture and thinking about his immortal soul. When the sun comes out to-morrow and the day after, he will be dancing a most unholy dance, or be making love to 'Dinah,' filling in the intervals by cursing stray horses that steal our fodder in three different languages. It is really astonishing what a difference the weather makes to the morals of the South African nigger. Give him plenty of sunshine, and he forgets he ever had a soul, and throws slabs of blasphemy, picked up from the Tommies around him, with painful liberality..... But take away the sunshine, give him a wet hide and a wet floor to camp on, and he straightway becomes all penitence and prayer. His face, peering out dismally between the upturned collar of his weather-stained coat and the down-drawn brim of his battered hat, looks like a soiled sermon."

A good variant to an old wheeze has now come to hand. We have all heard of the soldier's Bible stopping bullets. Now, in an immaculate religious weekly, we read that a gunner's life was saved in South Africa by the bullet lodging in a pack of cards that he had in the pocket of his khaki jacket. When it comes to a pack of cards miraculously preserving life in this way, it would surely be base ingratitude to assail the all-round impartiality of Providence.

According to Mr. Augustine Birrell, and he isn't a bad judge in such matters, a great number of men have now arrived at the stage when they simply consider the Church as a decent and civil handmaid to law and order and property, and the church building a very convenient place for their wives and daughters to potter about in on Sundays."

The vicar of All Saints', Holbeach, has found it necessary to censure his flock in a rather severe fashion. At evening service the other Sunday he complained to them that they used the hassocks not to kneel on, but as footstools. He objected particularly to "lolling on the seats during prayers, and looking round to see who is in church, and what they have on." He also admonished the choir "to show a little more reverence during prayers." All of which might seem to indicate that he had a specially inattentive and irreverent flock. But that would be a mistake. There are hundreds of churches wherein the same indifference is exhibited in the pews and by the choirs. The only novelty is that the vicar of All Saints', Holbeach, has so openly complained. Anyhow, we can be quite sure that he will be made to suffer for it by

some of the "dearly-beloved brethren" he has thus addressed.

"There's a great deal of Christianity about, but there's something the matter with it." This was the very frank confession of Mr. Gibbon, who spoke at the recent May meeting of the Sunday School Union. His illustrious namesake had pretty much the same idea in regard to the religion of the time he wrote about. The modern Gibbon, we learn, closed his address with a "passionate appeal for genuine Christianity." Of course, it's all very well to appeal, passionately or otherwise, for the genuine article, but how is it to be got in these modern times, when the conditions of its existence are so obviously adverse? The "passionate appeal" of the modern Gibbon sounds very much like a child crying for the moon.

There is a story by Bishop Walsham How in regard to a newspaper that, commenting severely on the supposed Ritualistic practices at Welsh Hampton, spoke of the vicar as "practising the most unblushing celibacy." According to the report of the New York Ecumenical Mission Conference, there is no particular liking for celibacy amongst their missionaries in China. One China missionary, speaking against a proposition that pioneers should follow Paul's example, thought it "unreasonable, irrational, and uncalled for" to ask unmarried men to work with unmarried women for five years.

One remarkable statement was made by the Rev. Hudson Taylor, of the China Inland Mission. He said: "I know of one missionary who has six wives lying in a cemetery in China, and one more in a cemetery in America." Evidently this man of God had gone on a real mission of love.

There is a little book on *Courtesy*, just issued by Macmillan's, copies of which might be usefully presented to certain out-door lecturers of the Christian Evidence Society. That is not, however, the reason why we mention it. Amongst some amusing illustrations of the ideas of courtesy which prevail, the author mentions the following: "A squire had a very great objection to anyone invading his pew in church. Upon one occasion, at the conclusion of a service, he went to the vicar and complained bitterly of a stranger who had unconsciously intruded. 'I could not think,' added the squire, 'of disturbing Divine service by putting him out violently; and the only thing I could do with courtesy was to sit on his hat!'"

We are now to have the New Testament translated into Scotch. Here is a rendering of the Lord's Prayer in the tongue of Bobbie Burns: "Faither o' us a', abidin Aboon! Thy name be holie! Lat Thy reign begin! Lat Thy will be done, baith in Yirth and Heeven. Gie us ilka day our needfu feudin. And forgie us a' oor ill-deeds, as we cen forgae thae wha did us ill: and lat us no be siftit; but save us frae the Ill-Ane! For the croon is Thine ain, and the nicht and the glorie, for evir and evir, Amen."

It has always been a subject of speculation with believers—What were the words contained in the writing on the ground by Christ mentioned in the New Testament? It has also been a point of inquiry with Freethinkers why, if Christ could write, he did not himself leave some record of his mission and will, instead of leaving it in a haphazard kind of way, to be done by the blundering writers of the Synoptical Gospels, whoever they may have been.

But as regards Jesus's caligraphy on the ground in the incident of the woman taken in adultery, we have a special interpretation by Professor Casper René Gregory, of Leipzig. He finds it upon three different manuscripts—one in Athens, one in Mount Athos, and a third in Dessau. According to the Professor, Christ changed the action of the Pharisees by writing on the sand some of the leading sins of the woman's accusers. As soon as they saw that he knew of their little tricks, and could give the game away, perhaps to their wives, the Pharisees thought it advisable to retire.

This opens up a new avenue of surmise. It suggests the possibilities of great trouble on the domestic hearth of the accusing Pharisees. Also of revelations, or hints at revelation, by the hand of Jesus—such as would be, in the words of the reporters, "unfit for publication." Perhaps Jesus only jotted down a few names. But they, if only breathed about in such a connection, would be quite sufficient to cause an immense scandal in Judea. No wonder the highly respectable *British Weekly* regards the interpretation as "somewhat coarse and blunt."

A nurse writes to the *Hospital Nursing Mirror* on the question whether patients ought to be told that they are dying. Well, usually when they have really reached the hopeless stage they are aware of it themselves, and don't require telling. But the main idea of the nurse who writes is to enforce the desirability, nay, the obligation, of sending for the chaplain to afford "spiritual consolation" to the patients who are on the point of dying.

This nurse asks: "Must the clergyman be excluded lest his utterances should excite the patient, and cause a rise of temperature, or lest the patient should guess that to be true which is true?"

In this question the nurse supplies her own answer. People who have any experience in connection with hospitals know that the main wish of dying patients is to see those of their kith and kin who are nearest and dearest to them. The clergyman may be sought by the fearful and the more or less indoctrinated, but even they are usually satisfied with a homeopathic dose of his attentions. Very often he hastens their decease just in the way indicated by the nurse in the sentence quoted above.

The other week we gave an example from the late Dr. Benson's Autobiography of a fairly long word—viz., antidis-establishmentarians. In the new Oxford Dictionary we find one of a theological character which may be fairly placed by its side. It is in a reference to Byfield's Exposition of the Colossians (1615), where that commentator says that "the immensity of Christ's divine nature hath.....incircumscribibility in respect of place." That's a fine word to throw at a caviller. The Christian Evidence Society's outdoor lecturers are quite welcome to it.

Here is some more Talmage, this time on the subject of a "converted infidel." Says Talmage: "He is so strong now in his faith in the Gospel, he says he can read anything. What are you reading? Bolingbroke? Andrew Jackson Davis's tracts? Tyndall's Glasgow University address? Drop them and run. You will be an infidel before you die, unless you quit that. These men of Ai will be too much for you. Turn your back on the rank and file of unbelief. Fly before they cut you with their swords and transfix you with their javelins. There are people who have been well-nigh ruined because they risked a foolhardy expedition in the presence of mighty and overwhelming temptations, and the men of Ai made a morning meal of them."

This isn't so bad for Talmage. It admits the power of what he always calls "infidelity." Also the weakness of Christians who are supposed—poor things—to be in deadly peril if they read anything contrary to their inherited views.

An Oxford correspondent of the *Church Gazette* writes: "At an hotel where I was in the summer ten men were on the lawn on Sunday morning, and there was a fair agreement that they would have gone to church had it not been for the sermon. Here, then, we have the clergy at great pains in concocting discourses which keep people away!.....Almost without exception, there is the same feeling as there was at the Reformation, that there is in religion an element of hocus-pocus, and the reason is not far off. I was taught, and children are still taught, that the Bible is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; but the clergy are, as a whole, either ignorant or else afraid to speak out—afraid that part of their hearers will be shocked, and so people are getting to despise them.....They are hiding their heads in the sand and screwing down the safety-valve all over the world; and were it not that the steam gets out, through the joints of their worn-out boilers, they would, by their folly and ignorance, produce an explosion. Our clergy, like the Bourbons, seem apt to learn nothing and to forget nothing."

Appealing on behalf of the Indian Famine Fund, Mr. W. R. Moody, son of the late missionary, says: "It is not always easy to determine 'What Jesus would do'; but in Matthew's Gospel we have a clear statement of what he did when surrounded by a hungry crowd. The evangelist tells us that he had compassion on the multitude because they had nothing to eat (Matthew xv. 32). The multitudes of starving India are hungry, and they are appealing to Christians in this hour of their dire necessity. It is our privilege to show that compassion which characterised the Divine Head of the Church."

Yes, but if Christ had compassion on the comparatively limited multitude spoken of in the text, why has he not compassion now on the hundreds of thousands of poor creatures who are starving and dying in India?

While a canonisation service was being held in St. Peter's, at Rome, there was such a crush that many people fainted and one pilgrim was killed. One dead person was turned into a saint, and one living person was turned into a corpse; and we suspect that both events were equally supernatural.

As might be expected, Sabbatarians are contemplating further interference with rational recreation on the Lord's Day. A religious weekly says: "The success of the clergy, ministers, and other Christian workers, in opposing the seven-day licence to the Crystal Palace, and thus stopping the Sunday concerts there, provides an object-lesson of what may be done in other districts." And some narrow-minded person writes to the *Globe* imploring the public to preserve the

"weekly memorial of the Lord's resurrection," and so afford opportunity to people to attend "God's house."

Well, with the exception of the very few who may be employed on Sunday, and to whom there are still opportunities of attending "God's house" on week-days, there is nothing to prevent anybody going to a place of worship on this seventh day, which is the "weekly memorial of the Lord's resurrection." Yet, while Sabbatarians strenuously claim this liberty for themselves, all their efforts are directed to depriving other people of their rights by putting a stop to the possibilities of the reasonable recreation they desire.

In connection with this subject, an amusingly naive story was told, apparently in all seriousness, by Mr. Stevenson, of the Scripture Readers' Association, at the May meeting of that body. It was about an "infidel" whom he succeeded in converting. After talking about the conversion, he goes on to say that the infidel came to him one day, and said: "I used to do my gardening on Sundays, but now I have given that up since I came to your mission. I am starting a fresh life." *He only lived six months after this*, immediately adds Mr. Stevenson, apparently not observing the anti-climax of his story. Perhaps it was the want of the Sunday gardening, and of its healthy out-door influence, that killed the poor misguided man.

The following is from the *Morning Leader* of May 25, 1900. "It is somewhat odd that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, of all bodies, should petition Parliament in favor of the Whipping Bill. We can understand the attitude of the man who thinks flogging a less cruel punishment for a lad than imprisonment. But surely there is a wider question involved than this. The return to whipping is part of a large reaction. It implies the sanction of a cruder form of brute force. It brutalises a society which employs it, even if it inflicts no irreparable injury on its victim."

We need scarcely remind our readers that it was the director of this Society, the Rev. Mr. Waugh, who, some time ago, stated at a public meeting that Atheists and Secularists were cruel to their children. Yet it will be found that it is the good Christian who is too liberal with the advice given by Solomon. Next to Colonel Robertson and the National Society for the Infliction of Cruelty on Children, Solomon was the greatest authority on this subject, and he advised masters to beat their servants till their sides bled.

Catholics and Protestants fell foul of each other on Sunday afternoon at Peckham. The Catholics had a religious procession, and the Protestants got one up too—in the opposite direction. When they met there was a shock. Sticks and fists were used freely, and for a brief time it was evident how these Christians love one another. But four hundred constables and sixteen mounted men were there to quell the tumult, so there was a little bloodshed, but no massacre.

Rev. J. B. Woffendale, of the Presbyterian Church, Ossulston-street, London, N.W., had a sort of pledge printed, for his congregation presumably, but perhaps also for outsiders. It runs as follows:—"I hereby promise, with God's help, to begin this New Year with Jesus Christ as my Lord, my Savior, and my Guide. I will also do my best to love, worship, and serve him faithfully, and may God's rich blessing rest upon me and mine." Then comes a place for the signature, and another for the address. Mr. Woffendale is supposed to receive these pledges, by post or otherwise; but we suppose he will have to wait until the day of judgement—whenever that is—before he can tell how many of them have been kept. Meanwhile the names and addresses are useful to an enterprising minister.

"God's rich blessing" is an excellent phrase. It is so suited to the genius of British piety. And what an expression that is about "doing my best to love God." We always thought that love was a spontaneous emotion. What would a woman think of a man if she asked him, "Do you love me, John?" and he replied, "Well, I'm trying to." "Trying to, indeed!" Clearly there is something wrong with Mr. Woffendale's psychology. But there! a Presbyterian congregation is not very exacting, especially in Somers Town.

Referring to this Woffendale pledge, a correspondent writes: "A slightly demented acquaintance of mine signed it. He immediately lost his berth, and has had neurasthenia ever since." A rich blessing, indeed!

The *Daily News* correspondent at Rome described the scene in St. Peter's the other day while the Pope added two new saints to the calendar. "The crowd," this writer said, "resembled a huge secular gathering, where laughter, jokes and grumbling were heard, but very few prayers." What was really magnificent was the illumination of the Basilica by means of undulating rows of candles, festoons of candle-labra, and globes of electric light. Nothing like it could be seen on earth. Though the daylight is much finer—only we are so used to it.

N.B.

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Mr. Foote's Engagements.

June 3, N. S. S. Conference; 10, 17, 24, Athenæum Hall, London.

To Correspondents.

Mr. CHARLES WATTS'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—June 3, Conference.—All communications for Mr. Charles Watts should be sent to him at 24 Carminia-road, Balham, S.W. If a reply is required, a stamped and addressed envelope must be enclosed.

A. H. writes to the Secretary of the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited: "I have much pleasure in enclosing cheque value £12 10s., being the balance of my subscription for twenty-five Shares in the Company. I wish every success to Mr. Foote's praiseworthy enterprise—dividend or no dividend." This is the sort of letter we like to read. We should like to see the same spirit animating all Freethinkers. The movement would then advance amazingly.

W. SMALLEY.—Thanks for the copy of "Jack's Story," though we had one already, with the omitted verses supplied by Miss Vance. We shall have it in circulation again soon.

W. CODY.—Glad to hear that you admire our article on "B.-P." We hope we shall never allow politics to blind our judgment, or prevent our due appreciation of ability and courage. "A man's a man for a' that," as Burns sang; and the line has a wider meaning than the one given to it in the song—as is often the case with very great poets. A man's a man, whether we agree with his views and opinions or not. It is one of the silliest of superstitions, and also one of the meanest, to imagine that all the virtues belong to one's own side. In this particular case, though, if what we hear is true, the hero is not exactly orthodox, either in politics or religion.

E. SIMS.—Thanks for the report, which is inserted. We hope the West Ham Branch will continue the experiment during the winter, when indoor meetings will again be necessary.

C. JACKSON.—We do not know that Freethinkers, as such, take any special attitude towards Freemasonry. It seems one of those matters best left to individual taste and judgment. Freemasonry on the Continent is in many ways a different thing from Freemasonry in England, being generally on the side of mental and political freedom, and therefore under the ban of the Papacy.

W. P. BALL.—Thanks for your always welcome cuttings.

H. JORDAN.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

F. J. GOULD writes: "Please allow me to say that Mr. W. P. Ball so ably and entirely represents my opinion that I cannot think of any further arguments."

A. B. MOSS.—Shall be very glad to see you at the Conference and at the Queen's Hall meeting.

T. WILMOT, secretary of the Camberwell Branch, desires us to announce that all the Branch lectures will be suspended to-day (Whit-Sunday) on account of the N. S. S. Conference, which a large number of the members wish to attend.

JAMES NEATE.—See "Sugar Plums." Pleased to hear the work is going on so well in Victoria Park.

A. G. LYE.—Contents-sheet shall be forwarded to the newsagent. Thanks for your trouble in the matter. We hope many other friends will take similar trouble, and send us the names and addresses of newsagents who will display a *Freethinker* contents-sheet if it is posted to them weekly.

J. G. THOMPSON.—We fear we could hardly act upon your suggestion to number the pages of the *Freethinker* so that the articles could be bound up separately and the rest discarded from the volume. An advertising cover may be arranged for in time, but it would involve a considerable expense, and would need the support of a good many paying advertisements. A table of contents and an index would, as you say, be an improvement. The former is comparatively simple, but the latter (if properly done) involves a good deal of labor and expense.

G. DAWSON BAKER.—Shall appear in our next. Always glad to hear from you.

T. PERKINS.—Contents sheet shall be posted to the newsagent you mention. Sorry to hear that business has been so slack with you, and that you will be unable to attend the Conference, as you had hoped to do. We hope your prospects will improve.

E. VETTERLEIN points out what we had overlooked, that the Limehouse meetings are conducted by the East London Branch, not by the West Ham Branch.

T. DUNBAR.—Much obliged. Contents-sheet shall be forwarded. We are making fair progress in this direction, but we want our friends to keep on helping us.

G. WILSON.—Stuff and nonsense! The Christians forget chronology. Mr. Foote lectured in Bristol many times after his debate with the Rev. J. Moffat Logan, and was not scared away for ever by that champion of the Lord. You will probably have the "pleasure" of hearing Mr. Foote again before Christmas, whether Mr. Logan is dead or alive. Thanks for your good wishes.

INQUIRER.—We cannot possibly tell you whether the supply of Gibbon will hold out for a month. We fancy not, but you can easily ascertain by means of a postcard when you are ready to purchase.

J. H. B.—In our next. The principal disputants have a good deal of space this week.

TOM B.—Pleased to have your "congratulations on the continual high standard" of this journal. We are preparing a neat *Freethinker* handbill for general distribution, and will announce when it is ready. Thanks for your offer to take some and "plant" them to advantage. It is, of course, the intention of the Directors of the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, to issue "scrip" or share certificates to the Shareholders, and this will be done within the next few weeks. The Shares are legally secured without such "scrip," only it is requisite in case of transfers. Glad to hear that you intend to increase your holding to ten Shares.

H. LEES SUMNER is heartily thanked for sending us the names and addresses of eight Birmingham newsagents who will display a *Freethinker* contents sheet. We should esteem it as a favor if he would look round and see if they are displayed.

CONFERENCE FUND.—Miss Vance acknowledges:—F. Schaller, 5s.; W. S. Dean, 2s. 6d.; G. Langridge, 5s.; A Friend, £3; W. Gregory, 2s.; J. W. Gott, 10s.; C. Handley, 3s.; F. Deane, 5s.; A. G. Hooper, 1s.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss Vance acknowledges:—Huddersfield Branch, 15s.; Glasgow, 13s.

A. J. HOOPER.—Thanks. See the secretary's acknowledgments.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Two Worlds—Boston Investigator—Daily Chronicle—Glasgow Herald—Manchester Daily Dispatch—Programme—Newcastle Weekly Chronicle—Sunday Reader—Isle of Man Times—Ethical World—Birkenhead News—Torch of Reason—Southwark Recorder—Truthseeker (New York)—Crescent—Der Arme Teufel—De Vrije Gedachte—Progressive Thinker—The People's Journal—The Sydney Bulletin—Secular Thought.

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

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

Sugar Plums.

CONSIDERING the lateness of the season, and the general war excitement, Mr. Foote had remarkably good audiences at Manchester on Sunday, the evening meeting being a particularly good one, and suggestive of the busiest of bygone times. Secular friends came in from various places, such as Oldham, Wigan, Rawtenstall, Bacup, and Failsworth. But the most gratifying feature of the meetings was the presence of a large number of strangers. Most of them were quite sympathetic, but at least two were otherwise; for a couple of elderly ladies were overheard talking, and one of them said the lecturer ought to be locked up, and the other that he ought to be choked. It would be rather a rough fate for him if both punishments were united. This happened in the evening, when the audience was extremely alive and enthusiastic, and the lecturer was in his best form. A good many questions were asked and answered after the lecture. During the day collections were taken up on behalf of the Branch's open-air propaganda while the hall is closed. Mr. Foote made an appeal for this object in the evening, with gratifying results. Altogether, the Branch was highly satisfied, and indeed delighted, with the day's work.

One pleasant thing in connection with these Manchester

meetings was the number of queries put to Mr. Foote as to the possibility of doing something in the other towns in South Lancashire. There seemed to be a wide and earnest desire to see the Freethought movement take a new turn in the district. Mr. Foote replied that he would try to organise some Freethought missions there during the winter, beginning the effort himself for a week or ten days, and arranging to be followed by Mr. Watts and Mr. Cohen, and, if possible, by other lecturers.

The Manchester friends were just a little despondent before Sunday. Like all intellectual and advanced causes, theirs had suffered during the South African war—that is to say, during the whole of the past lecture season. But that was, of course, inevitable. To hold on at all at such a time is an excellent sign. The Manchester friends must not be dejected. Sunday's proceedings were a good augury of the coming success when the war excitement is over and done with.

Last Sunday Mr. Charles Watts lectured twice in Bradford to good and enthusiastic audiences. His evening lecture on Colonel Ingersoll was highly appreciated. Friends from the surrounding districts, including Leeds, were present, and Mr. Watts expressed his pleasure at meeting many old friends.

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference takes place to-day (June 3) in the Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, London, W. The morning session opens at 10.30, and the afternoon session at 2.30. Between the sessions, at one o'clock, a luncheon will be set at the Bedford Head Hotel for provincial delegates and visitors. Brakes have also been engaged to give the country friends a drive around London on Whit-Monday. Tickets (free) for the luncheon and the drive can be obtained on application to the Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.

The Conference itself is purely a N. S. S. Conference. Delegates will occupy the front seats in the Athenæum Hall, individual members will sit behind them, and whatever room is left at the back will be available to outside friends of Freethought, who must obtain tickets of admission from the secretary.

The public evening meeting in connection with the Conference will be held further west, in the handsome Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place. Doors will be open at 6.30, and a musical program will occupy the time from 7 till 7.30, when the President of the N. S. S. will take the chair and the speech-making will begin. London Secularists should turn up in good strength on this occasion. They will be able to spend a pleasant evening, and to give a cordial greeting to their provincial brethren.

The list of speakers at the Queen's Hall evening meeting will include Messrs. G. W. Foote, C. Watts, C. Cohen, A. B. Moss, and W. Heaford. We are not at present in a position to announce the name of any particular speaker from the provinces.

Friends from the country who come up to the N. S. S. Conference are invited to call at the Freethought Publishing Company's new quarters at 1 Stationer's Hall Court. It is at the top of Ludgate Hill, very near St. Paul's Cathedral. Visitors can see the shop by opening the door and walking in. They will find Miss Vance there. If they wish to see Mr. Foote, they will kindly tell her so, and she will ascertain if he is in his office.

Mr. Cohen addressed a large audience in Victoria Park on Sunday afternoon, his subject being "Atheism." An opponent calling himself a "Christian Freethinker" made a little noise, but was not to be seen when the opportunity came for discussion. He wanted a collection taken up for the Indian Famine Fund, and then withdrew the request, as "he would have nothing to do with Atheists, who were the wickedest people it was possible to conceive." It would appear that some asylum has lost an inmate.

The French Government is still able to withstand its enemies, and the Premier was loudly cheered by the majority of Deputies when he promised a Bill against religious associations and the increase of their mortmain estates. The clergy are getting too wealthy again, and will have to be sweated down into poorer proportions. Not the parish clergy, but the brotherhoods of monks.

At the Secular open-air lecture-stand in Victoria Park on Sunday afternoon a gentleman of anti-Romanist fame bought a copy of the *Freethinker*, and informed all whom it might concern that he was going to write to the London County Council about it. We hope a thousand Christians will go and do likewise. The gentleman's name is Job Williams, with special emphasis on the "Job."

Mr. S. Holman, of Porth, secretary of the Rhondda Branch of the N. S. S., held a debate on Saturday, May 26, with the

Rev. S. Rees on "Is it Reasonable to Believe there is a God?" About 300 persons were present. Mr. Holman acquitted himself well, and, at any rate, Mr. Rees bore himself like a gentleman.

The Home Secretary has had to explain in the House of Commons, in answer to Mr. Alfred Thomas—who deserves thanks for raising the question—that the coroner who refused to allow Mr. John Jones to affirm as a jurymen at Pontypridd, on March 28, acted under the impression that the Oaths Act only applied to witnesses. We hope this exposure will damp the bigotry of a good many Jacks-in-Office.

Freethinkers who received the new Prospectus of the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, which was enclosed in last week's issue of this journal, are requested not to throw it aside and forget it, but to fill in the Application Form for Shares attached to it, and forward the same to the secretary with their remittance. This is not the best time of the year for financial appeals, but there are a number of Freethinkers who can easily take up Shares even at this season, and we beg them to do so if they have any sort of interest in the success of really constructive work for their own movement.

Mr. Richard Johnson, of Manchester, a Shareholder in the Freethought Publishing Company, intended to be present at the N. S. S. Conference, but is unfortunately prevented from doing so by bodily indisposition. "I hope," he writes, "that the Company is now in full swing and on the high road to success. If every Freethinker, after reading the new Prospectus, would only make an effort to assist, the whole of the Share Capital would be subscribed immediately. There are hundreds of Freethinkers who could easily spare one pound; and hundreds more who could scrape up a pound at a pinch, so the trick is quickly done. Let every Freethinker be up and doing this week, and finish the job at once, without any further begging."

Freethought in West Ham.

EARLY in May the West Ham Branch of the N. S. S., whose work has been mainly confined to the northern, determined to break ground in the southern half of the borough. Accordingly we organised a course of three lectures, which were delivered in the fine Public Hall, Canning Town, on May 8, 15, and 22. Mr. G. W. Foote, although much harassed by work at the time, generously opened the course for us with a very fine address on the subject, "The Doom of all the Creeds." A splendid audience assembled, and, judging by the frequent hearty outbursts of applause, the wit and eloquence of our President gave the greatest delight. Mr. Foote had two opponents. One was a local minister, who, apart from the weakness of his opposition, proved himself a gentleman as well as a Christian; the other being the usual type of C. E. S. blackguard. Mr. Martin Judge, late West Ham Board of Guardians, kindly occupied the chair, and ably controlled the meeting.

The second lecture was given by Mr. C. Cohen, and, needless to say, his subject, "Man: Whence and Whither?" was greatly appreciated by the capital audience present. Two opponents again came forward, Mr. Cohen's replies to their combined efforts being cheered to the echo.

The concluding lecture was delivered by Mr. Charles Watts, and, in spite of the inclemency of the weather, a large audience assembled to welcome the veteran Secularist. Mr. Watts's subject was "The Defeat of the Cross," and he dealt with it in a most eloquent and lucid manner. At the conclusion of the address a gentleman rose in the body of the hall to put a question to the lecturer, and Mr. Watts, recognising in him an old opponent, the Rev. Mr. Woffendale, promptly invited him to the platform to speak in opposition. This invitation the rev. gentleman accepted, after ten minutes had been occupied by a local C. E. S. man, who, as Mr. Watts told him, "is young and has got a deal to learn." In the course of his spirited reply to Mr. Woffendale the lecturer challenged that gentleman to a public debate—a challenge which was, however, declined.

The sale of literature and the collections made were very satisfactory. Short but accurate reports appeared in the local press, and altogether we are exceedingly pleased with our little effort.

E. E. S.

Freethinkers who come to the Queen's (Minor) Hall meeting, in connection with the N. S. S. Conference, on Whit-Sunday, should prepare themselves to contribute to a liberal collection, which should not only cover the expenses of the meeting, but leave a good balance for the Society's work during the ensuing year. The veteran Mr. J. Umpleby, of Blackburn, who called upon us on Tuesday, and is wonderfully bright and active in spite of his eighty-six years, tells us that he is going to put a £10 cheque into the collection, and says it will be a great shame if a handsome sum is not made up by the many "saints" of this mighty metropolis, with its six millions of inhabitants.

Chemico-Physical Theories of Life.

THE general acceptance of the theory of evolution as a true account of the mode of origin, and the manner of morphological differentiation of things, leaves the mind free to speculate as to the probable mode of origin of life itself, or whether there is any justification for the belief that life is any specific energy, imposed upon the inherent energies of matter at some critical epoch in time, or merely a higher mode of these requiring prolonged evolutionary epochs to develop the conditions apt for its manifestation. It is quite proper that those who find it possible to accept evolution, and, at the same time, maintain their belief in what they persist in calling a "revelation," should have every opportunity of showing how they do it, and of formulating biological theories which they think may fit in with their preconceptions. Such exploits signify a curious, but not abnormal, intellectual possession. But, if they are to have a free hand in the press, or platform, or from the vantage ground of societies, especially those calling themselves philosophical, and presided over by ornamental figure-heads, more or less, then the implication follows that the other aspect of the question should have an equal opportunity of being presented. The almighty dollar, however, is at the present moment such a dominating factor in every phase of sociological life that not only the press, but the platform and the philosophical society, are shut to the man who would venture to expiscate the opposite view. I recently listened in wonder and amazement to a lecture wherein it was contended that phenomena were an inheritance from "Eternity"—with a capital "E," of course—and that that was all that was necessary to satisfy the most exacting mind. One had only to ask the lecturer to define "inheritance" and "eternity," and obtain his reply, in order effectually to upset the labored argument (if it was worthy that title) which he had built up. It was evidently, the "thing" or "things" of eternity from which he wished to suggest inheritance proceeded; and not from that which, at best, is only a word representing, in the mind, an indefinite extension backwards, and forwards, of Time. Just as it is admitted that neither matter nor energy can be obtained from nothing, so, it must be obvious, neither can you obtain an inheritance of things from an idea. Ideas, such as that of evolution, are only fruitful *in their own sphere, and of their own kind*. Moreover, such are ideas representing wide generalizations capable of harmonic unification with other conceptions, and not self-contradictory as used. In the case in question we were calmly and solemnly asked to believe that an "inheritance" of THINGS can accrue from that which is ideationally still existing, and must, by the definition of the term, endure for ever. Some minds get entirely muddled by the fetichism of words and ideas. The fetichism, or, in other words, the hypnotic obsession, of these two words, "eternity" and "infinity," are carefully maintained by the vested interests involved; but I think it is high time they were discharged by philosophical societies, whose chief aim ought to be the clarification of the intellectual atmosphere by the substitution of precise and clear conceptions for those which are dimly perceived. If theology will persist in urging its claim to be a science, and, therefore, to shelter under the umbrella of philosophy, then let the conditions of exact definition, and careful differentiation, and still more careful generalisation, which other sciences impose upon themselves, be a fundamental condition. If it is a science, then it will be able to demonstrate the fact on the same terms as the other sciences. There should be no difficulty about this whatever. Indeed, if the "immanent presence," which everyone admits to be pervasive of all nature, is personal and responsive to emotional appeals, nothing can be easier than to demonstrate the fact, and so establish its claim to worship—nay, not its claim, but its *indefeasible right*. Theologians must not expect, at this time of day, sane people, who have discharged their minds of all hypnotic ideas, to accept their unsupported assertions for facts. If this "immanent presence" is really and truly identical with the Hebrew conception, let the evidence be forthcoming. Meantime the thinker

sees that this has not been done; that theological implications are dogmatic, not theoretic; that many of them are utterly preposterous and repellent; that, when regarded as possible theories, they have been found utterly imbecile, totally unworkable, plainly contradicted by every fact of experience; and clearly foreseen, by those who have any capacity to use imagination scientifically, to be doomed eventually to complete extinction and ridicule.

A study of the teachings of the great thinkers, and especially of their erroneous teachings, clearly reveals the importance of awareness and alertness in respect of obsessory ideas. It is given to few, as it was given to R. L. Stevenson, to have a natural repugnance to take anything for granted, bearing along with it an aptitude for questioning the groundwork of all beliefs, and especially those master or fundamental beliefs which give color, complexion, and tone to all intellectual and emotional life; and, therefore, upon which character and the integrity of society depend. If churches, states, universities, or societies, think that these are to be maintained on a *higher plane by the impudent maintenance of the thing which is not true, but plainly false*, or by the implantation of hypnotic ideas sophistically explanatory of these, then I think they are making a mistake. The case of Stevenson is to the point, and is only an overt and salient illustration of an every-day, but cryptic, experience. It is not to be supposed for a moment that men in all walks of life, as highly educated and more broadly than the clergy, are blind to the game that is being played, or are unwilling to take a hand in it themselves, when it suits their social or business ends.*

A dominant belief is that which rests upon the dogma of special creation. The acceptance of the theory of evolution has only pushed the incidence of the dogma further back—so it is pled. Needless to say, this is special pleading, for it remains to be proven that the "immanent presence" of the latter-day theologian is identical with the natural energy inherent in matter, and, on the other hand, with the dogmatic postulate of the canon. Granted, however, that the problem is only pushed back, how is the problem solved on the theory of an immanent *personal* presence? So far no solution has been offered.†

There is no theory, therefore, no working hypothesis even, claiming to account for the origin and maintenance of life, other than the chemico-physical. But it falls to be remembered that that term has undergone very important enlargement of meaning of late years. The duplex idea has become unified, being blended, and that one has been much altered. Chemical process is now seen to be likewise physical process, and physical process is now seen to be largely also chemical. But, further, chemical process is recognised to be very much more all pervasive, and to possess many qualities previously denied to it. Its highly-discriminative faculty has arrested attention; and the great evolution of electrical aptitudes has led to the wide generalisation (first indicated, I think, by Faraday) that every chemical atom is, in reality, an electrically-charged "ion." A chemico-physical process, therefore, now means, as nearly as may be, a vital process. The intellectual differentiation betwixt the two lies almost entirely upon the planes of personality and consciousness; and these two, again, are now well known to be absolutely relative to *degrees of vitality*. The whole cosmos can thus, by the simple realisation of demonstrable facts, be conceived as an orderly and harmonious unity holding eternally within itself potentially all that comes within the purview of philosophy phenomenally; not an atom of matter, or a volt of energy, has ever been created in the proper sense of that word; and neither has one atom of matter or one volt of force ever been destroyed. These two have always been, and are, ceaselessly undergoing transformation and modification; they are, and have been, ceaselessly taken the loan of, but never appropriated, by men and animals generally. Whilst the true nature of this matter-force that vivifies has been, and

* I think it is quite pertinent here and in this connection to cite the case of Colquhoun, late Treasurer of Glasgow City, now serving five years' penal servitude at Peterhead—a church elder who robbed the widow, and the friend.

† Since the foregoing was penned an attempt has been made by J. E. McTaggart in *Mind* for April, 1900.

may continue to be, an intellectual puzzle, an enigma, that is no reason why we should accept unwarranted solutions, altogether out of harmony with the sum of solid knowledge of the objective; or repugnant to the clear testimony of the subjective, as, very fortunately for us, it has been set in relief in the biography of Stevenson. Nor is there any reason why we should regard a metaphor as a philosophical proposition, nor a word as an explanation.

ROBERT PARK, M.D.

(To be continued.)

Progress or Retrogression?

It is extremely gratifying to us sometimes to note the signs of liberal progress that often manifest themselves. Certainly, on the whole, one cannot but admit that the world of thought and rational inquiry has wonderfully enlarged since the Modern Savior, the Printing Press, has brought down to the level of the masses the means of acquiring knowledge that formerly were only within the reach of the wealthy classes. But the question confronts us to-day, in the field of Rationalism, just as it does the missionary in the field of Religion, have not the forces opposed to us made even greater progress than have those that are in our favor? The great cities of the world show some striking facts in this line of thought. The churches of the British metropolis can show substantial gains since, early in the century, the population of London numbered but a million and a half; but to-day its population amounts to nearly six millions, and comparatively the churches have gone back nearly fifty per cent. The same thing is true of New York, Chicago, and nearly every large city in Christendom. We may say with truth that three-fourths of the people of these cities are practically pagans, who never see the inside of a church, and know nothing whatever of the theological subtleties that give mental pabulum and spiritual excitement to so many of their fellows. The question forces itself on us, Are these practical pagans any nearer true Rationalism than the more active-minded religionists? We are inclined to think that the mental indolence that leads them to leave all active work to men with more brain-energy than themselves is a worse factor to deal with than the activity of the religious bigot. We may imagine that, because people do not go to church, they are mentally free, but this is only an assumption; the real fact being, we believe, that the vast mass of the people are so densely ignorant that they not only have no opinions of their own, either on religious or political subjects, but they are liable to have their passions excited at a moment's notice by the loud-mouthed sectarians in either field. The schoolmaster, indeed, has hardly yet got his sword sharpened for attacking the giant Ignorance that stands in his path; and until he is able to deal some effective blows, the masses must necessarily be victimised by the false ideas that have hitherto enslaved them. They probably have heard a few rumbling sounds from the distant battle-field, but to us it is evident that the only men who are likely to understand the meaning of the struggle, or to reap the full advantage of it, are those who take an active share in it. The rest are dummies, who certainly in the long run may accept the benefits conferred upon them by the work and sacrifice of others, but who in the meantime neither appreciate that work and sacrifice, nor are willing to help it by even the slightest effort.

—*Secular Thought* (Toronto).

Correspondence.

"OBJECTIONABLE RELIGION."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—It is a common theological trick to allege that "religion" is a compendium of all the virtues; and when Freethinkers repeat this fallacy their "assertions play into the hands of the enemy by supporting the slanders with which he assails our party." For theologians are continually insinuating that no one can be moral, just, or charitable unless he possesses religion. Some go as far as to deny virtue to everybody who does not embrace their particular religion—i.e., Christianity; and as it is indisputable that there have been good men who were opposed to religion in general, and Christianity in particular, the clergy impudently claim these men as being "really Christians," or "animated by the Christian spirit." Very appositely, in your issue of April 29, side by side with the letter in which Mr. Gould defends what he calls his "Objectionable Religion," there is a communication from Mr. Elderkin relating to a clergyman who claimed Voltaire as a Christian, and delivered a lecture upon Voltaire's services to religion. The clergy also sedulously inculcate the view that any person who opposes

religion is opposing the good, the beautiful, and the true; and is therefore actuated by the meanest and vilest passions of human nature. So widespread are these libels that one finds them repeated in perfect good faith by people who do not concern themselves about religion, but who have been brought up in an atmosphere of clerical prejudice against unbelievers. Some years ago one such individual was speaking to me of a local politician, and naively remarked: "Mr. — used to be a strong Bradlaughite, but he has recently changed his views and come round to philanthropic ideas." It is a little strange, therefore, to have it suggested that the alleged "improved and developed sense" of the word "religion" is only the amiable eccentricity of some modern ethicists, when all the while it is a very ancient and well-known theological falsehood, which it is our duty to oppose.

Mr. Ball is shocked at the idea of a respected and cultured gentleman being deprived of the benefits of "faith and worship"; and he labors to prove that, if you only take the words in a Pickwickian sense, you thereby remove the stigma. Considering Mr. Ball's well-known anti-religious views, it is strange that he attaches such importance to faith and worship; and it is clear that this affection for theological terminology is merely the survival of previous religious associations. In his inner mind faith and worship are still bound up with the notion of respectability; and he would delude himself with the idea that it is sufficient to have them metaphorically if he cannot claim them actually. One may understand and respect these little weaknesses, for we are none perfect, no, not one; but it should not be imputed to us for unrighteousness if we express ourselves differently.

Our learned and valued friend further objects that "faith and worship" is only one of the meanings which dictionaries attach to the word "religion." That is perfectly correct, and it is the one meaning that they are all unanimous about. The other definitions are merely extensions of some thing; for they resolve themselves into expositions of some of the ideas involved in faith and worship, such as religious piety, reverence, devotion, adoration, sanctity, etc., whereas the question at issue is whether the word "religion" really conveys any ethical idea. As to the sense of obligation, or conscientiousness, that is merely a metaphorical use of the word which already existed in the Latin *religio*, conveying the notion of performing an action with the same scrupulous care and attention to details that one ought to employ in carrying out a religious rite or ceremony; and it is equally applicable to moral and immoral acts—thus, "Richard III religiously murdered every one of his relations who stood between him and the throne."

I stated that religion and theology were merely different aspects of the same thing, citing Dr. Webster's classification of the two as subjective and objective. The questions of systematic religion, and religion considered as a subjective state, are hardly germane to the present discussion. We can only request those who maintain that religion and theology are totally distinct from one another to favor us with the grounds for the divorce.

Mr. Ball takes exception to the statement that 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. But, curiously enough, he immediately goes on to cite a very pious religionist who composed a work entitled *Literature and Dogma* for the express purpose of showing the "truth and necessity of Christianity." We are further favored with a statement by "Johnson, who was a sincere Christian"; and the still more Christian Bishop Latimer. All these gentlemen were fully convinced that morality was bound up with the recognition of a deity; and if they ever said the reverse, I should be glad of the quotation. Bishop Latimer is an especially unfortunate illustration, for he was cruelly put to death for religious reasons; and if *religion*, in his days, really meant "rightness, justice, and well-doing," we are left to infer that the worthy bishop met his death through his deficiency in these qualities. Our respected friend, Mr. Ball, seems to have missed the point of my remark, no doubt owing to my not having expressed it with sufficient lucidity; I meant to refer to the use or employment of the word "religion," not to what pietistic persons may have said about it in their rhetorical moments. For instance, if Matthew Arnold, in his enthusiastic proclaimed religion to be "morality touched with emotion," employed the word in a totally different sense when he used it in composition. I have not *Literature and Dogma* at hand at the moment, but may quote the following, taken at random from the first chapter of his *God and the Bible*, written as a sequel to it: "So deeply unground is the mass of traditions and imaginations of which popular religion consists, so gross a distortion and caricature of the true religion does it present that future times will hardly comprehend its audacity calling those who abjure it Atheists." It is unnecessary to add that, in this passage, religion can not have the sense of morality, whether touched with emotion or anything else.

To state that the so-called higher religions have triumphed because they were moral religions is indeed a hard saying, and is a gratuitous stigma cast upon those religions who did not have emperors and armies to back them up. One of the pagan objections to early Christianity was that it was

immoral superstition. All the religions of civilised and semi-civilised peoples had to patronise moral doctrines. Ancient Egypt had teachers of an exalted moral quality at an early period of its history; and when the Spaniards reached Mexico they found that the cannibalistic priests were great exhorters to morality. Religions have also made great use of architecture and of music, yet one seldom hears that music and architecture are essential parts of religion. As to our erudite friend's statement that the etymology of the word "religion" suggests that it arose to signify the utilisation of superstition for moral purposes, I regret to say that I do not understand it, and am unable to guess which of the rival etymologies can convey this idea.

The Latin word *religio* was in existence over two thousand years ago. It has come down through the French into the English language with its significance unchanged, and must continue to bear this significance if we are to preserve the study of history. No one now believes in the existence of a unicorn, but if we have occasion to speak of a unicorn we are obliged to use the name. In the same way the word "religion" will have to be preserved as a term for one of the most important historical factors; and it is difficult to comprehend how a person of Mr. Ball's information and intellectual attainments can argue otherwise.

The objections to "objectionable" religion may be summed up under the following three heads:—

1. The forcing of an ethical sense upon the word "religion" is merely a gross theological misrepresentation.
2. Morality is not an essential factor in religion, because all religious disputes and quarrels have been upon matters of faith and worship, not upon matters of morals.
3. To assert that religion and ethics are the same thing is to imply that those who are opposed to religion are thereby opposed to ethics.

This "dark terrestrial ball" has been so often the scene of religious crimes that it is astonishing to be told that religion is the synonym of virtue.

CHILPERIC.

"OBJECTIONABLE RELIGION."
TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I am unable to plead guilty with regard to the "misconceptions" attributed to me by "Chilperic." I did not represent him as being "animated by unfairness," but as having "unwittingly" been "not quite fair." There was no misconception on my part. I did not for an instant suppose that he was "animated" by any spirit of unfairness. What "Chilperic" calls merely a "broad hint," which was "lost upon" me, attributed to Mr. Gould a "novel doctrine" which Mr. Gould did not teach—the doctrine, namely, that justice and morality themselves had changed. "Chilperic" says that I "reiterate more emphatically than Mr. Gould that 'justice' and 'morality' have changed their meanings." By placing "justice" and "morality" in inverted commas, without other distinction, he confuses and avoids the point at issue. His present statement is vitiated by being capable of either of the two senses in dispute. I have maintained that the words "justice" and "morality" have changed their significance. I also pointed out that this was not the same thing as saying that justice and morality themselves are quite different nowadays. There is, or should be, a clear distinction between the word and the thing signified. If I affirm that the word "coal" has changed its meaning, I do not thereby affirm that transmutation of substance has occurred, and I ought not to be held responsible for the novel doctrine that burnt wood has been changed into a heavy mineral.

I agree that under Roman civilisation *justitia* meant much the same as our word "justice" does under modern English civilisation. But this does not prove that there was no change for the worse during intervening times, when heretics were "delivered to justice"—the said "justice" being diabolical injustice, which was the exact opposite of justice according to the secular ideals of ancient Romans and modern Englishmen. That "justice" was thus perverted into meaning the execution of the supposed will of a supernatural being had far-reaching consequences. The word "morality" has also suffered from superstitious bondage and conventional prejudice. Independently of Christian dogma, it illustrates the evolution of thought and language. The word "*mores*," the Latin for our word "morals," meant manners and customs. I notice that, while Chilperic strongly denies that the words "justice" and "morality" have changed their signification, he after a while finds himself compelled to qualify his too emphatic assertion by indirectly acknowledging that they have changed their signification, so far as "minor matters" are concerned. The difference between us is, therefore, merely as to degree of change, and this is not susceptible of accurate measurement by foot-rule. For my part, I do not regard it as a "minor matter" that such words and ideals as "justice" and "morality" have formerly covered polygamy, slavery, witch-burning, religious murder, infanticide, torture, and almost all imaginable crimes.

That the inconsistency attributed to Mr. Gould and myself is not confined to us may be seen in this practical withdrawal of a previously-unqualified assertion; just as it was in Chilperic's emphatic contention that the word "religion"

never did have any ethical meaning, and his subsequent admission of its use to signify ethics bound up with belief in deity. We also find that we have nothing to worship, yet we bow down to printed words as the heathen bow down to wooden idols—which reminds me of the way in which the enemy of old used to taunt us with having nothing to worship, and with worshipping Mr. Bradlaugh. The enemy, I doubt not, will be quite ready to tell Chilperic that he worships the printed words, Science, Reason, Secularism, etc.

I do not justify arbitrary alterations of meanings of words to suit each man's "particular fancy." I only plead for liberty for those who revolve new meanings (or revive old meanings, as the case may be) in a natural and reasonable way. Such alterations will fail of their purpose, and will speedily perish, unless adopted by other people.

As to Chilperic's "inherent Philistinism" concerning the "Religion of Humanity," etc., I should warmly defend his right to hold such a position if he were attacked, just as I seek to defend the right of other Secularists to take the contrary view. I wish to promote the union, the extension, and the usefulness of our party by keeping it equally open to both sections, which, broadly speaking, are the destructive and constructive sections.

Chilperic says that, "as a matter of fact," the word "religion" "conveys no such idea" as that of alleviating human suffering. I most distinctly affirm, as a matter of fact, that to a number of people the word "religion" does convey some such idea, though usually in combination with other ideas besides. According to a not uncommon Christian view, Jesus set the pattern of true religion by "going about doing good"—that is, by alleviating human suffering and promoting human happiness.

As to different accounts of non-theological religion put forward by Mr. Gould and myself, they do not conflict in the least, so far as I can see. Loyalty and moral emotion are not irreconcilable; high purpose and gentleness are perfectly consistent with earnestness and benevolence; ethical straightforwardness is not the opposite of being upright in one's dealings. That Mr. Gould and I have not miraculously or slavishly employed the same words in our rough-and-ready selection of overlapping virtues or qualities that enter into our moral ideal (or our ethical religion, if we accept that term) is no logical proof, so far as I can see, that neither of us "has any clear or definite idea in the matter." And even if both of us failed in some degree in this respect, I do not see that it is absolutely necessary that the moral ideal which is being evolved by mankind should already be as clearly defined as our mathematical conceptions of points, lines, and figures, whose definitions can be far more easily agreed upon and fixed once for all.

The paragraph concerning religious crimes is either irrelevant or unfair. Neither Mr. Gould nor myself has ever dreamt of suggesting that all religious murders, etc., "were undertaken in a spirit of pure and disinterested benevolence." The substitution of an unintended meaning of a word for the intended meaning is no more a legitimate weapon against Mr. Gould than if he were to retaliate by identifying all secular crime with Secularism.

I object to the question-begging statement in Chilperic's last paragraph, which asserts that "the question now at issue is whether it is allowable to use a word in an unusual and false sense." When an alleged offender is tried, the question at issue is not whether the offence is allowable, but whether the accused has been guilty of it. Whether the word "religion" is used in a "false" sense when divorced from a theological basis is highly debatable. Some eminent men have supported the purely secular use of the word "religion." My own verdict is that so much good argument can be brought forward by both parties that each side is fairly entitled to do as it likes, and should freely allow the other side to do likewise—the outcome of which will be a natural evolution of language and ideals by the "survival of the fittest." W. P. BALL.

The Deacon's Interruption.

"W'en Moses tell de sun ter stan still"—began the old deacon.

"Dat warn't Moses," interjected a brother in the amen corner; "dat wuz Joshua!"

"Ez I said," continued the deacon, "w'en Joshua tell the sun —"

"You didn't say dat at all!" said the brother who had corrected him. "Hit wuz me dat said it. Hit wuz me dat tuck you up on it."

The deacon's patience was exhausted. He folded his brass-rimmed spectacles, laid them carefully on the table before him, walked over to amen corner, took the objecting brother by both arms, from behind, and with the swish of a cyclone swept him forward to the door, landing him precipitately in outer darkness.

"Ez I wuz sayin', 'fo' dis little incident occurred," he continued; "w'en Moses tol' Joshua ter tell de sun ter stan' still —"

Some of the other learned brethren moved uneasily in their seats. They looked as if they wanted to correct him, but they did not. They let it go at that.—*Atlanta Constitution.*

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.): 10.30 and 2.30, N. S. S. Conference.
SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, Herbert Burrows, "No. 5 John-street."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

S. L. E. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.13, Mr. Pinhorne.
VICTORIA PARK (near the Fountain): No lecture.
CLERKENWELL GREEN: 11.30, A lecture.
FINSBURY PARK: 3.30, A lecture.
MILE END WASTE: June 6, at 8.15, A lecture.
KINGSLAND (corner of Ridley-road): 11.30, S. E. Easton.

COUNTRY.

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton) will be closed during the months of June, July, and August.
FAILSWORTH SECULAR SUNDAY SCHOOL: June 8, Annual Procession. Meet at Sunday-school at 9.45, headed by Friendly Brass Band, Sowerby Bridge. Dancing and play in field. Tea party, evening.
GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): Annual Excursion of members and friends to Ballageich Hill.
SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Pleasant Sunday evening—Musical and other Recitals, etc.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—June 3, Conference. 10, m., Clerkenwell Green; a., Finsbury Park; e., West Ham.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, London, S.E.—June 3, Conference. 10, m., Mile End. 17, m., Limehouse; e., Stratford. 24, m., Camberwell; a., Peckham Rye. July 1, N.S.S. Excursion. 15, m., Camberwell; a., Brockwell Park. 22, Northampton.

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

F. A. DAVIES, 65 Lion-street, S.E.—June 10, m., Hyde Park; e., Hammersmith. 17, m., Station-road; a., Brockwell Park. 24, e., Stratford. July 1, m., Hyde Park; e., Kilburn. 8, e., Hammersmith. 15, m., Battersea; e., Stratford. 29, m., Station-road; a., Peckham Rye.

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