

THE Freethinker

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Sabbatarian Cant.

To see a Christian minister solicitous for the success of social reforms would be a pleasing sight were it not that experience has taught us to look for some ulterior motive at work. One can generally rest assured that it is not the proposed reform that bulks largest in his mind, but the business uses to which it may be turned. This is only the normal outcome of professional interest. One cannot say too often that the churches and chapels of this country are trading corporations and little else, and that its accredited agents will view everything from the standpoint of their order rather than from that of the community at large. In one sense this is inevitable. Place any body of men in a similar position, let them feel that their whole social status is bound up with the perpetuation of certain institutions, customs, or beliefs, and, although one may find instances to the contrary, yet let anything threaten the interests of their class, and at once a closed front is presented to all reform.

This feature is brought out very clearly in the question of Sunday observance. Practically, the only question upon which all the churches and chapels have been united during recent years has been that of resisting the publication of Sunday papers. For once the hatchet of internecine warfare was buried. The danger threatened all alike, and the union of church and chapel was singularly successful in defeating the common enemy of all. The sanctity of Sunday was at stake, and its destruction meant the disappearance of one of the instruments by means of which the religious feelings are kept alive, now that the intellectual conditions that gave them birth are rapidly dying out.

There was a time when the clergy based their opposition to the secularisation of Sunday on the plain, honest grounds that it was contrary to the Christian religion. Indeed, the first legislative act concerning Sunday amusements that I am acquainted with dates from the time of Constantine, and then the clergy were honest enough to raise as their principal objection the plea that they kept people away from church. This was the ground upon which legislation was first resorted to; and, in spite of various excuses, it remains the ground reason for the activity of the Churches now. Only they are not honest enough to say so. Instead, we are assured that they are all concerned lest the workman should be robbed of his day of rest. Hypocrisy is added to cupidity, and the religious parties, finding that the old cry, "Desecration of the Sabbath," fails to appeal to modern minds, change their tactics, and seek to gain their end by the profession of a belated regard for the welfare of the working man.

I have written the above *apropos* of reading a sermon by the Rev. R. F. Horton on "Sunday Observance." Mr. Horton is a gentleman who, while fully comprehending the interests of his profession, and able to see that the Sabbatarian pill needs some sort of a social coating if it is to be swallowed, is yet not quite

smart enough to disguise the real object he has in view. He informs us, to begin with, that his plea for a day of rest is based primarily upon an economic necessity. "The only way of getting good work out of human beings is by keeping the human beings, not only healthy, but happy—happy and buoyant with all the freshness of their manhood and womanhood upon them." Consequently, "on purely utilitarian grounds," Government should "prohibit trading; it should prohibit even travelling; it should prohibit the publication of newspapers one day in the week; because upon that turns the health and well-being of the community."

As so much is to be prohibited, one wonders why the ringing of church bells, the opening and closing of churches, the preaching of sermons, and the taking up of collections is not also placed on the proscribed list. All of these things involve labor, and, if it is argued that the labor is for the benefit of others, the same plea might also be urged on behalf of other forms of work, and with much greater justice. For it is plain that, for obvious reasons, Mr. Horton confuses the issue between a day of rest and the day of rest. That a day of rest is necessary for all no Secularist questions for a moment. Secularism would extend rather than limit our opportunities in that direction. But it is downright stupidity or knavery to confuse inactivity with rest. Rest, real beneficial rest, is not inactivity, but change of occupation. The rest for a student is to ride, walk, row, or indulge in some form of physical exercise. And the rest for a man whose daily occupation involves physical labor is to take up those occupations the student lays down with a sigh of relief. It is not rest to sit "doin' o' nothink"; it is the most demoralising of occupations. And what the clergy will not see—I have given up saying they cannot see—is that, if one section of the community is to enjoy a real day of rest, the labor of another section is indispensable. Insist upon each section having a rest by all means; but for all to cease labor at the same moment and resume labor at the same moment is to empty our leisure time of all the good it may contain.

But, of course, Mr. Horton does not mean that *all* labor should cease on the Sunday, but only such labor as is not connected with church or chapel. And this religious use of Sunday, in spite of all that has been said concerning the economic necessity of the day, "is much the more important." He quotes Isaiah as to the penalties that will follow our ignoring the Sabbath, calmly ignoring the fact that the threat applies to the Saturday and not to the Sunday, and then, with unconscious sarcasm, asserts that the distinctive feature of the Christian Sabbath is that it requires you to do something that is unpleasant. "Men say frequently to-day that they find they can worship better in their own homes, and still more in the open country. . . . Now, the danger I see in that position is that, by the very necessity of the case, it violates the first requirement of the Sabbath. . . . You stay at home in your own house, or you go out into the country on Sunday. In doing that you are going your own way, you are seeking your own pleasure—that is to say, you are violating the very principle upon which the Sabbath rests."

If this means anything at all, it means that the only legitimate manner of spending Sunday is to be miserable. You must not go into the country, the seaside, to a museum or art gallery or library; you may not even spend Sunday at home with your family, because you may find pleasure in all these things. The only proper way of spending Sunday, according to Mr. Horton, is to come to church; "one of the great reasons

for coming to church," says this preacher of the pleasures of sorrow, "is that you do not like it." Mr. Horton evidently has a fellow feeling with the clergyman who, speaking at a P. S. A. conference, denounced the whole movement, and wound up with a fervent "Thank God, there has never been a pleasant Sunday afternoon in my church."

But Mr. Horton has another reason why people should attend church on Sundays. With the mournful air of a speculator lamenting a fall in stock, he plaintively complains that "the worship in God's house is becoming rarer even amongst good people, and is not even thought of by the great bulk of the community." This has happened because people have fallen into the pernicious habit of believing that they could get on without the parson. "Many persons have honestly stayed at home from service this morning thinking they will worship God in their rooms. I undertake to say that ninety-ninths of them are asleep at the present moment, and that the others are not worshipping; they have forgotten it." In this instance I should be inclined to agree with the preacher, and should also be inclined to agree with his statement that, if you "take one hundred people who have kept away from the house of worship for six months, and ask them to tell you candidly whether they have not lost the sense of the divine presence in worship, whether they have not lost the aspiration after heavenly things," you would find the answer to be in the affirmative. I agree with this, and it is conclusive proof that all the talk one hears concerning the innate craving of human nature after God and religious worship is so much empty twaddle. It is the force of social example that keeps the religious feelings alive, not the religious feelings that hasten social development. Mr. Horton is only saying, in a roundabout manner, that, left to themselves, the whole circle of religious ideas would gradually disappear.

But here, at all events, is the real reason for Mr. Horton's anxiety that the day of rest may be preserved. It is not that the men and women who spend the week cooped up in unhealthy factories, engaged in monotonous labor, breathing poisonous air, may escape for a few hours into the fields, on the river, or to the seaside; not that those whose time is fully taken up struggling to earn a living may spend a few hours in enjoyment of the treasures contained in the museums, art galleries, and libraries that they are taxed to support. All these things may give them pleasure, and, therefore, amount to a desecration of the day of rest. No; his anxiety is that they shall come to church, and, as they are not likely to come to church if there are opportunities for them going elsewhere, therefore Government must be called upon to close all other places, prohibit all means of recreation, until, from sheer weariness and lack of anywhere else to go, people will go to the only man who is allowed to do business on the "Sabbath."

But Mr. Horton assures us that he does not want Government to regulate Sunday labor on religious, but on political, grounds. "I would say that we want no State interference to preserve the Lord's Day; on the contrary, we wish the State to kindly keep its hands off the whole question." The delicious hypocrisy of it all! For what other reason than to preserve the "Lord's Day" do Mr. Horton and others fight against the opening of museums on Sunday? Is there more labor involved in opening the National Gallery on Sunday than in opening Lyndhurst-road Chapel? For what reason does the *Methodist Times* rejoice that "a dangerous proposal," such as opening the park gymnasiums on Sunday, was defeated, or the Bishop of Carlisle lament that the number of people leaving Paddington Station on Sunday to go "up the river" is enough to "make angels weep"? Of all the cant connected with the advocacy of religion this of the clergy concerning Sunday is the most detestable. To find a body of men willing to prohibit the healthful recreation of boys on Sunday, to shut people off from the life-giving sea or country air, or from the intellectual enjoyment of our national institutions, and all in the interests of a class or of a senseless creed, is enough to make one despair of human nature. There are many mean ways of getting a living, but amongst them that of a clergyman must surely occupy a prominent position.

C. COHEN.

The Freethought Twentieth Century Fund.

My absence from London, and the postal delay consequent on Bank Holiday, which caused my letters to reach me too late to be dealt with in this week's *Freethinker*, prevent me doing justice at present to the subject of the Freethought Twentieth Century Fund. But I shall have ample opportunity to deal with it more effectually next week.

First of all, let me call the attention of Freethinkers to an account in the *Methodist Times* of how the thousands rolled in at a recent Conference for the Wesleyan Twentieth Century Fund. One donor who had already given 7,000 guineas stood up and, "in most modest and affecting terms," offered to give 20,000 guineas more, and "the neck of the difficulty"—meaning, we suppose, the completion of the projected million pounds—was broken. Then came Messrs. Henry and Thomas Holloway, who had already given "700 guineas out of income," and were "moved by the Holy Spirit" to give "5,000 guineas more out of capital." Two other donors gave an additional 5,000 guineas. This was followed by two additional gifts of 1,000 guineas each from other donors. And so the race continued.

Now, we are quite aware that Freethinkers have not as many wealthy men amongst them as the Wesleyan Methodists, and we cannot expect gifts of thousands of guineas. But there are some Freethinkers who might, by a special effort, do something fairly handsome for their own Twentieth Century Fund. It must also be pointed out that the great Wesleyan Methodist Fund has not depended altogether upon the rich or even the well-to-do. It has been subscribed to by the general body of members in every circuit throughout the kingdom. And the Freethought Fund should be subscribed to in the same manner. Unfortunately (in one way) we cannot appeal to all the motives by which Christian subscribers are animated. We cannot appeal to the hope of heaven or the fear of hell. We cannot promise that those who give will be considered to have lent to the Lord, and will be certain to receive their own back (somehow) with liberal interest. We cannot appeal to vanity and the desire of cheap reputation. No one will gain in any way, here or hereafter, by giving to the Freethought Fund. The appearance of his name in the list will do him no particular good in business. It will not make his way easier in the world. It might conceivably make his way somewhat harder. No, all the motives we can appeal to are purely disinterested. Those who give can only give for the sheer love of Freethought. The only advantage they will ever derive is the satisfaction of knowing that the battle of reason against faith, of science against superstition, of fact against fable, of solid human welfare in this world against supposititious human welfare in another world, is being waged more vigorously, more consistently, and more effectually. And, after all, it is only the higher natures that can be moved very deeply by such considerations.

One reader of the *Freethinker*, whose generosity has often been of assistance to the cause in past years, has sent me a most encouraging letter. Its contents are mainly "private," but I am free to say that he regards this Fund as "a happy thought," and that he is prepared to contribute to it the sum of £200. He wishes his contribution to appear in print as follows:—"John Downing. 'Liberty' as unfolded in Milton's *Areopagitica*." That is how it will be printed in the list of acknowledgments. And it is really a most excellent celebration of perhaps the very sublimest treatise ever penned in favor of liberty of thought, conscience, and speech. For my own part, I am delighted to see the glorious name of Milton coupled with this handsome donation. And it would be no less delightful to see the name of Shakespeare coupled with another donation no less generous. For if Milton was, as Shelley said, a bold reformer, Shakespeare was, beyond any reasonable doubt, a thorough Freethinker.

I have asked this practical admirer of Milton's magnificent plea for liberty to let me give further extracts from his letter. But his reply has not had

time to reach me as I write. Perhaps I may be able to give them next week.

Mr. George Anderson, writing on this Twentieth Century Fund, says:—

"If the above be put to the purchasing or building of a Secular Hall in a populous part of London, I will subscribe £10 to every £100 subscribed up to £8,000; or, if only for the leasing of a Hall, a smaller percentage according to the term of the lease. Probably other gentlemen will do similarly. I wish to see a place where the youth of both sexes will be taught secular science, without their young minds being dosed with superstitious dogma."

If I were to make a suggestion to Mr. Anderson it would be that he should give *something* to this Fund in any case, and let his honored name appear in the list. No one is more sensible than I am of the necessity for such an institution as he indicates in London. We want good headquarters for our movement in the metropolis, and I have more than once hinted that if I live, and keep my health and strength, I intend to tackle that great enterprise. But it does not seem possible just at present to say precisely what will be done with this Fund. So much depends upon the amount realised. And if we cannot do all that we desire, that is no reason why we should not do what can be done. The disposition of the Fund, as already stated, lies in the hands of two thoroughly representative bodies—the Executive of the National Secular Society and the Board of Directors of the Secular Society, Limited. Moreover, it would be easy, as it would be useful, to take the opinion of subscribers on the matter.

I must now leave the subject until next week, when I daresay I shall have a good list of promises to acknowledge. Meanwhile I beg all who mean to contribute to this Fund to communicate with me at their earliest convenience.

G. W. FOOTE.

What is a Miracle?

In my recent article, under the heading "Christian Miracles a Delusion," I pointed out the utter fallacy of supposing that the miraculous incidents recorded in the New Testament proved Christianity to be "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." I now purpose showing how difficult it is to understand what a so-called miracle really is. To my mind, the inability that obtains to perceive what constitutes a "miracle" is in itself a damaging argument against its evidential value. Judging from a human standpoint, a God who was all good would not perform his greatest and, from his point of view, most important works by means so different from those he usually employed that his children would be compelled to reject them as not being of any special import. Besides, it is only reasonable to suppose that if God is what Christians assert him to be, he would have arranged that the evidence for the truth of his "unique scheme for human regeneration" should have been so clear that honest scepticism towards it would be impossible. But it is not so. Even at the time and place where and when Christ is said to have performed his miracles, many of the people were not convinced of their genuineness. (See Matt. xiii. 58; John xii. 37.) And in almost every succeeding age many of the greatest intellects have rejected the miraculous features of Christianity. At the present day not only do some of the great thinkers outside the Church avow their disbelief in miracles, but many of the more intelligent professors of Christianity do the same.

It is a significant fact that those who still cling to the belief in the miraculous portions of Christianity entertain very confused notions of what a miracle is. In fact, this perplexity has always obtained amongst Christian exponents, as will be seen from the following various answers given to the question, "What constitutes a miracle?" Priault says: "By a miracle I mean, first, an extraordinary fact brought about by insufficient means. Secondly, a natural event supernaturally produced." Here the fallacy must be at once apparent, for the obvious reason that the means must be sufficient to produce the event, or it would not take place. If it is meant that the *natural* means were

insufficient, then it may be asked, What knowledge have we of anything besides the natural? Is it reasonable to ascribe an effect to something of which we know nothing? Moreover, even if we admit the existence of a supernatural power, are we logically justified in attributing anything to that power until we know where the natural ends and the alleged supernatural begins? Because we are not able to explain the why and the wherefore of certain events is no adequate reason for saying that they were supernaturally originated. Many extraordinary circumstances which occur to-day would doubtless have been regarded by our forefathers as being caused by a supernatural power. We now know that a man, apparently drowned, may be resuscitated; a man who is dumb may be enabled to articulate; a man who is blind may have his sight restored; but who would assert that nature is incapable of achieving such results? Until we know all that nature can do, let us not presume to say what it cannot do.

According to Dr. Wardlaw, a miracle is "doing those works which no man can do, except God be with him." The question here arises, How are we to know when God is with any particular person? If God's presence is necessary to the performance of wonderful works, then, according to the Bible, he at times kept very questionable company. If, on the other hand, extraordinary events can take place without the co-operation of God, the Doctor's definition of a miracle falls to the ground. Besides, it should be remembered that superhuman power is not necessarily "divine" power. All forces in nature that are more potent than those possessed by man are superhuman; but they are not, therefore, supernatural. How, then, are we to recognise the one from the other? The Bible informs us that some miracles were performed through an agency which was antagonistic to God. Dean Alford writes: "Miracles, as such, are no test of truth, but have been permitted to, and prophesied of, false religions and teachers." Keil observes: "Working lying wonders after the working of Satan cannot be absolutely denied." And Haley admits: "As to Deuteronomy xiii., we have seen that the miracle *per se*, apart from the message, is not conclusive proof of the divine mission of the thaumaturgist. Hence the 'miracle' would, in such case, be simply the work of Satan."

Dr. Wardlaw also defines a miracle to be "a temporary suspension of the known laws of nature." If this be true, it proves one of two things: either that God arranged that temporary suspension of the laws of nature, in which case God's laws are not fixed and immutable; or that the suspension was a subsequent arrangement upon the part of God; which would reduce his wisdom or his omnipotence. In the words of Voltaire:—

"For what purpose would God perform a miracle? To accomplish some particular designs upon living beings? He would then in reality be supposed to say:— I have not been able to effect by my construction of the universe, by my divine decrees, by my eternal laws, a particular object; I am now going to change my eternal ideas and immutable laws; to endeavor to accomplish what I have not been able to do by means of them. This would be an avowal of his weakness, not of his power; it would appear in such a being an inconceivable contradiction."

Dr. Thomas Brown asserts: "A miracle is *not* a violation of any law of nature. It involves, therefore, primarily, no contradiction nor physical absurdity." Noticing this argument, J. S. Mill writes:—

If it "means that a miracle may be the fulfilment of a law in the same sense in which the ordinary events of nature are fulfilments of laws, it seems to indicate an imperfect conception of what is meant by a law, and of what constitutes a miracle. To make it [an event] a miracle it must be produced by a direct volition, without the use of means; or, at least, of any means which, if simply repeated, would produce it. To constitute a miracle a phenomenon must take place without having been preceded by any antecedent phenomenal conditions sufficient again to reproduce it; or a phenomenon for the production of which the antecedent conditions existed must be arrested or prevented without the intervention of any phenomenal antecedents which would arrest or prevent it in a future case. The test of a miracle is: Were there present in the case such external conditions, such second causes we may call them, that whenever these conditions or causes re-appear the event will be

reproduced? If there were, it is not a miracle; if there were not, it is a miracle, but it is not according to law." (Essay on *Theism*, pp. 224-5.)

Bishop Butler urges "that it might be part of the original plan of things that there should be miraculous interposition." If so, the marvels related of Christ were not in opposition to, but in accordance with, those laws of nature which formed a "part of the original plan," and was, therefore, no special interference on the part of Divinity. It was the opinion of Archbishop Tillotson that "It is not the essence of a miracle that it be an immediate effect of the Divine power; it is sufficient that it exceeds any natural power that we know of to produce it." If this were so, it would deprive miracles entirely of any supernatural force, inasmuch as it places their productive power in nature. Hence the more knowledge we have of nature the less reason will there be for professed faith in the supposed supernatural. The theory of the Churches is that a miracle involves a special act upon the part of God, and his interference with natural sequences. The objection to this theory is, that if God be what Christians say he is, all his acts must be for the general good. If, therefore, it were wise for him to perform particular acts two thousand years ago, it would have been also wise for him to have done so before that time. So long, therefore, as he abstained from performing those acts, so long did he withhold supposed advantages from the world. To urge that an act of God's may be good and necessary at one time, and not at another, is to reduce the government of God to a level with that of man, and to admit that the "divine" economy is neither uniform nor perfect.

The orthodox notion of miracles is that they are "violations of the ordinary course of nature." But would not such violations be contrary to the experience of the general operation of nature, whose forces, so far as we have discovered them, are regular in their order? As a believer in the "stability of natural law," I attach no credence to any of the so-called miracles, as they would be opposed to the laws—sequences—of cause and effect. As we can only know of nature as it is, we judge accordingly of its order and capabilities. We know that heat at certain degrees will burn, that water will drown, and that poison in given quantities will destroy life; and to believe otherwise is to ignore facts and reason, and to revel in fancy and credulity.

CHARLES WATTS.

Religion and Evolution.

It is sometimes an interesting task to compare and contrast the views of prominent Christian teachers. In a recent number of the *Christian Herald* was printed a sermon by the Rev. Dr. Talmage on "Divine Evolution," and it is quite amusing to compare the statements of the American divine on this subject with those of the Rev. J. Scott Lidgett in his lectures. For example, Mr. Lidgett declared that "evolution was the greatest discovery of the present century." Dr. Talmage, on the other hand, says "that it is a heathenism thousands of years old." The Rev. Scott Lidgett says it does not interfere with his belief in God; that, as a matter of fact, it gives him a higher and nobler conception. Dr. Talmage says "that evolution is not only infidel and atheistic and absurd, but it is brutalising in its tendencies." The Rev. Scott Lidgett says that with regard to man and the ape being derived from a common ancestor, from which the existing anthropoid (man-like) ape as well as man have diverged, "there is abundant and well nigh irresistible evidence." Dr. Talmage declares that there is no evidence at all, and says, further, that "between the physical construction of the highest animal and the physical construction of the lowest man there is a chasm as wide as the Atlantic Ocean." Indeed, a more complete antagonism of opinion between two prominent Christian teachers could not well be imagined. And yet, in regard to his acceptance of the doctrine of evolution, I have no doubt that the Rev. J. Scott Lidgett is right. He at least, with his knowledge, cannot resist the overwhelming force of facts, and he is honest and courageous enough to say so. Dr. Talmage, on the

other hand, is in a primitive condition of ignorance in regard to the teachings of modern science, and refuses to listen to anything which is opposed to the preconceived opinions of a lifetime. Yet in one thing we assuredly agree with Dr. Talmage. The doctrine of evolution is unquestionably opposed to the teachings of the Bible. Genesis undoubtedly says that "God created man in his own image," and the passage in no way suggests that God first made a protoplasmic germ—a monera—from which developed an organism called *Amœbæ*, consisting of a simple, naked cell; that this, in the third stage, developed into *Synamœbæ*, or colonies of *Amœbæ*, which developed by stages until, in the ninth stage, it reached what is called "*Acrania*"—vertebrata destitute of head, skull and brain, central heart, jaws, limbs allied to the lancelet or amphioxus of to-day; that it then developed into primitive fishes, then reptiles, then mammals, then men-apes or anthropoids, then to ape-men or commencing-men (*Atali*), allied to the lowest human races of the present time—Papuaans, Hottentots, etc.—and last to man, with human speech and simultaneous advance in human evolution connected therewith. (See Haeckel's *Pedigree of Man*, pp. 79, 80.)

The Bible says that "God formed man out of the dust of the earth," and women out of a rib taken from man. Now, science is dead against this rib story. Moreover, it is one of the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith that God placed Adam and Eve in a garden and forbade them to eat of a particular fruit, and said that in the day they ate thereof they would surely die; that under the temptation of a talking serpent they did eat of the fruit, and this disobedience brought about their condemnation. It is also part of the Christian faith that on account of Adam's sin the whole human race is liable to damnation. Well, we now know that this story is not true. At most it is only allegorical. But if the first Adam did not fall in the Garden of Eden, what becomes of the necessity of the Atonement?

The doctrine of evolution gives no warrant for either story. It is as much opposed to the story of Genesis as it is to the story of the Gospels. Moreover, if evolution teaches that the universe in all its parts "is the result of a gradual, orderly, self-continuing, and natural evolution or development," it is certainly opposed to all miracles, whether they take the form of God making man out of the dust of the earth, or of the alleged miraculous birth of Jesus, or, indeed, of any sort or kind of miracle whatever. Dr. Talmage instinctively grasps this truth, and affirms that all the evolutionists, scientists, and philosophers were pronounced "infidels," which is the American divine's offensive way of describing all persons who do not agree with him. Even Dr. Talmage, by this time, ought to know that he is himself an "infidel" to all the religions in the world, except his own.

This much it has been necessary to say by way of clearing the path for consideration of the third lecture of the Rev. J. Scott Lidgett on "Religion and Evolution."

In defining what he means by "religion," Mr. Lidgett sums up by affirming that "practically, then, religion covers the whole field of what is meant by men knowing, conceiving, worshipping, loving, and obeying God." In other words, religion is *Theism*. But there are various sorts of *Theism*. Voltaire was a firm believer in God; so also was Thomas Paine; yet both of them discarded the Bible as a revelation from Deity, and pronounced it to be a human production, full of absurdities, atrocities, and immoralities, and not the kind of book to be placed in the hands of children.

Would the Rev. J. Scott Lidgett regard Voltaire and Thomas Paine as religious men? If not, why not? He cannot deny that they were firm believers in Deity, and that both of them wrote books in which they endeavored to prove the existence of the God they worshipped. According to Professor Rhys Davids, Buddhism is a purely atheistic religion. Yet it has nearly 400 millions of adherents. If the definition of religion given by the Rev. Scott Lidgett be true, all these millions of Buddhists are without religious belief. Further on, however, Mr. Lidgett broadens his definition of religion to include everybody, for he says that "religion has been to such an extent a mark of humanity that for practical purposes we may assume that where man is, there is religion." There we agree with him,

for religion, after all, at bottom, is a purely human production, and, in its best sense, means the earnest striving of the individual after righteousness. "All the world is my country, mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion," are the noble words of Thomas Paine, and we know of no better description of what religion should be than that. But Mr. Lidgett knows perfectly well that religion has not always meant this. In the past it has meant belief in gods and devils, in ghosts and angels, in witchcraft and slavery, in miracles and prayers, in heaven and hell; and while these beliefs have prevailed men have often lost sight of morality, of those grand principles which promote human well-being and ennoble and glorify the human race. The history of most religions has, unhappily, been a history of ignorant superstition and cruel persecution. The dreadful religious wars that in various ages have deluged the earth in blood have done much to bring all religion into disgrace and hatred. From the third down to the sixteenth century Christians were constantly waging war, and some of the most fearful crimes, were perpetrated in the name of the Christian religion. Colonel Ingersoll well said:—

"The people also found that commerce made friends where religion made enemies, and that religious zeal was utterly incompatible with peace between nations or individuals. They discovered that those who loved the gods most were apt to love men least; that the arrogance of universal forgiveness was amazing; that the most malicious had the effrontery to pray for their enemies; and that humility and tyranny were the fruit of the same tree." (*Oration on the Gods*, page 37.)

In the first century after the alleged death of Jesus the conduct of the Christians was at its best; they behaved with commendable heroism and self-restraint; but as soon as Christianity got power, and began to spread throughout the Roman empire, it commenced to display a tyrannical and persecuting spirit, which grew and grew until it culminated in what are now known as "the Dark Ages of Christianity"—one of the saddest and most terrible pages in the history of the world. It is sometimes said that the base and brutal men of these ages—the men who inspired all kinds of cruelty, who deluged the earth with human blood, who enslaved the minds and bodies of millions—that these men could not have been Christians.

But during the early centuries of the Christian Church the persecutors were representative men. They were the men in authority; and if it is said that they were not Christians, the obvious retort is, Where were the Christians during these ages? It is quite clear that belief in God and the Bible did not restrain them from committing some very horrible crimes. Mosheim, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, has drawn up a fearful indictment against the conduct of Christians in the early ages. It is true that there has been an evolutionary process going on, not only in regard to the teachings of Christianity, but in respect also of its morality, and its progress has been largely accelerated by the introduction of science and other civilising influences that have grown up side by side with it.

With a good deal of the Rev. Scott Lidgett's statement of the evolution of religious beliefs we entirely agree. But when he says, "It is when we grasp the meaning and application of the new law of evolution that the Bible is satisfactorily explained," we say, in reply, that we agree if the Bible is regarded as a human production, but not otherwise. If the Bible was an inspired book, a book that came straight from God, we have to ask the question, Was God ever in favor of slavery, or polygamy, or aggressive warfare, and has he changed his opinions with the growth of human opinion on these subjects? Mr. Lidgett says that most of the moral difficulties of the Old Testament are explained at once when we remember that the religion of each age is the best of which that age is capable. Does he mean that a good God sends an inspired book to teach savage races how to act as savages, and civilised peoples how to act up to the measure of their capacity? In other words, that God is never in advance, not even in one single idea, of the various peoples who believe in and worship him.

In the purely natural sense—the humanitarian sense—we admit that religion is subject to the same law of evolution as all other things in this world of change.

Religions are born; they have their childhood, they grow to maturity, and ultimately they decay, new religions taking their place. After all, Rationalists are as anxious as other people that all that is good in religion shall be preserved. No sensible man wishes to destroy anything that is good wherever it is found. Our great desire should be to hasten the happy day when men's minds shall be free from superstition, when they shall be able to think out the great problems of the universe without fear and without prejudice, desiring one thing above all—viz., to learn the truth, and uphold it in the interests, not only of themselves, but of generations yet unborn.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Public Libraries and Secular Works.

It is futile for us to deny that religionists do not seize every possible opportunity to place before the people, and especially those who are most inclined to doubt by reason of the cruel, agonising conditions under which they exist, the rosy, attractive sides of the various creeds. To teach the doctrine of Christ fair and square, without any allurements or menaces, is generally admitted by those who know, to be absurd and useless, if to gain converts is your aim. No matter in what form it is put, what tales are sprung, or whether you miss the fundamental points by having a glowing picture painted, giving the so-called necessary issues in any easily digestible manner, and leaving the hard matter-of-fact realities in the background, the ministers of religion to-day are happy if they have secured followers by such detestable methods.

To equalise these condemnable practices, Secularists must be on the alert to utilise every available agency for the spreading of their principles and aims. Our cause, by its justness and truthfulness, needs no underhand tactics for its propagators to adopt. Without any fear of the results, we can gain adherents by placing our contentions openly before all listeners; but it is essential to seize all possibilities of promulgating our claims, to make progress, and keep our system before the people. There is no better instrument for this purpose than the public library, but I am sorry to say Secularists do not seem to recognise fully this grand opportunity. The apathy we display in this matter is really inexcusable, and it behoves those who perceive its importance to rally together, and let themselves be felt by the authorities responsible for the municipal libraries. No branch of our work is so powerful for the spreading of our principles as a systematic circulation of our literature; why, then, remain so inactive as we now are in this direction? In the districts where public libraries are a reality, Secularists have only to band together and cause an outcry by holding meetings, writing letters to the press, etc. It can be taken for granted that where a parish is enlightened enough to have a public library, there will be some in charge of that building who will not turn a deaf ear to appeals made in a proper fashion, by men who are evidently conscientious and have the interests of the people at heart.

The pioneers of any good movement always deserve the most praise, because more courage and perseverance are requisite at its commencement, when so many enemies have to be opposed, than after it has grown and lived down the odium dishonestly heaped against it by vested interests and others. It is foolish to imagine that one or two men can work a change in the public libraries. In combination lies our strength. It stands to reason that a publicly-elected body will not favor Secularists when they rise up singly in parishes, demanding works in a municipal library which many of the inhabitants of that division strenuously object to. From personal experience, however, I am rather inclined to believe that effort with unity is all that is required on our part to secure the adoption of Freethought works in public libraries.

H. MARCUS WRIGHT.

Confucianism and Christianity.

In a letter to the *New York Journal*, the Chinese Minister to the United States, Wu Ling Fang, seems to praise Jesus for going "a little further" than Confucius in the matter of "loving one's enemies"; he really leaves it open to be inferred that Confucius stopped at the right point and Jesus went beyond it. With regard to the persecutions in Christian history, he says that they fill him with horror. "We have no such records," he observes, "in China." Jews, Mohammedans, and Buddhists have lived there peaceably side by side. "It is only," he adds, "when indiscreet Christian missionaries go to extremes and excite the people that they ever have any trouble." He concludes by scoring neatly for Confucianism. Confucius did not teach the doctrine of a future life. He said he did not know what was going to take place to-morrow, and how could he know anything about a more remote future? Besides, it was men's duty to do their best to-day, with no thought of reward. "That," says the Chinese Minister, "seems to me the higher view."

Acid Drops.

EMPEROR WILLIAM has been preaching another sermon, likening the Chinese to the Amalekites, and urging the Christian Germans to be at them in the name of the Lord. No doubt the Emperor fancies the new Amalekites will fall as easily and universally as the old ones, but we think he is mistaken. By the way, does he want the fate of King Agag to be meted out to the Dowager Empress? It would be a great sight to see Emperor William "hewing her in pieces before the Lord."

It was a curious freak of anarchism to attempt the assassination of the poor Shah. One would think, if he had to be murdered, the job might be left to his own disaffected subjects. But your modern Anarchist who believes in "deeds"—that is, in killing somebody, and preferably somebody of distinction—has no country. He assumes to represent the human race, and to deal out summary justice "on his own." He is like the Catholic Church in this, that he claims infallibility. It does not occur to him that he can ever be mistaken.

It is useless, however, to spend a lot of time in denouncing these "deed" Anarchists. What civilised nations have to do—what they *must* do—is to cleanse the city pollutions in which these abnormal beings are bred. Just as, in the physical sphere, the permitted filth which breeds fever by-and-bye slays beyond the area of its immediate ravage, so, in the moral sphere, the wretched conditions of life which are permitted to exist are the cause of disaster to other persons than those immediately affected.

There is another way in which violent Anarchism is bred. The inhumanity of Governments produces a corresponding inhumanity in political and social rebels. Most of these violent Anarchists are Italians. Well now, the Italian prisons are among the worst in the world, and ferocious sentences are dealt out to offenders who are not ordinary criminals. During the year 1897 no less than 124 persons were condemned to solitary confinement for life. Think of what that means! Killing the *man* by slow torture and starvation of his faculties, and leaving only the *animal* to survive. Why, hanging or guillotining is nothing to this. A quick pull of the rope, a quick descent of the great knife, and all is over. How much more humane it is than crushing out a prisoner's manhood day after day, until all that is left of him is a wretched *thing*.

This is how they sneer at the missionaries in China. And no wonder! One evening an English missionary in Peking took a friend who was visiting him to a regular Chinese theatre. It happened that the play for that evening was a burlesque on foreign preaching. A Chinaman, dressed up to represent a foreigner, came upon the stage with his arms full of books, attended by his Chinese servant. He began to preach a mock sermon, making the mistakes in speaking which a foreigner is likely to make. These mistakes were received with bursts of laughter from the audience, to whom the books were distributed. The fun came to a climax when the make-believe preacher, after delivering a sentence particularly full of laughable mistakes, turned to his servant and said: "How did I speak? Did I do pretty well?" and the servant replied with great gravity: "The foreign teacher, indeed, speaks the Chinese language exceedingly well. No mistakes at all were made by him."

The Emperor of China may, at any rate, be credited with a desire to know what the Christian religion is like. It is stated that when the ladies, both Chinese and foreign, presented the Empress Dowager with a magnificent copy of the New Testament, it interested the Emperor, to judge from his conduct, more than it did the Dowager herself. The day after the present reached the Palace an order came to the Bible Society in Peking which attracted the special attention of the agent of that society. The man who brought the order was an eunuch. He seemed very particular to retain the little slip of paper on which the order was written, and insisted upon its return to him after it had been copied. They then discovered that the order was from the Emperor, and that it was for Bibles—both Old and New Testaments—such as the society was selling to his people.

The Emperor and the Dowager, too, seem to have been so much impressed with the Scriptures that they have readily left all Christians in their territory to the mercy of the "Boxers."

Lord Salisbury's speech on missions seems to have occasioned a great deal of disquietude—especially amongst pious people, who would, if they could, explain it away. The *Church Times* devotes a column and a half to efforts made with the desire to remove the sting of that very important

utterance. Someone, whose opinion was solicited, writes that Lord Salisbury's speech has struck him in different ways at different times. When he listened to it, he heard the tones of kindliness to missionaries and reverence for religion. But when he read the speech next morning, it seemed "much abler and less kind." Again, when he heard it quoted in bits, it "roused" him a great deal; and he thinks it is "in this last state—cut up into bits by the unsympathetic—that the speech is really to be regretted."

In the first Christian newspaper published in China there is an "Essay on Heaven" for the instruction of China. It is the missionary's idea of Paradise arranged to tempt the Mongolian; and, indeed, it is very much on a plane with that of the negro, with its "golden stairs" to be ascended in "dem golden slippers." After quoting Revelations, the Christian appeal to the heathen Chinese reads as follows: "All the cities of the world are built of earth, or bricks, or stone, or wood. Has anyone ever heard of a city of silver and gold? Has anyone ever seen a pagoda that was roofed with golden tiles? Anyone who should see such a building would be surprised at its cost. But in the City of Heaven the houses themselves are not only made of gold, but even the roads are paved with it; the houses are roofed with it; the city is full of it. Everything is of the most precious gold." Nevertheless, the chosen consent to linger on in this brick and mortar and wooden world! And when they are hard-pressed with rebellious natives, they do not call in the All-powerful of whom they preach, but rely on soldiers with carnal weapons, and some of whom are not Christians at all. Is not this playing the great Mission rather low?

Christianity, like familiarity, must breed contempt in the heathen mind when its doctrines are expounded in the startling fashion adopted by Wilhelm II. of Germany, says the *Topical Times*. That "Christian" monarch's exhortation to the soldiers leaving for China, "to give no quarter and make no prisoners," is sufficient to characterise him as a raving maniac, quite unfit to govern a civilised people, or as a ruler whose intemperance, violence, and inhuman wrath place him on a level with the most bloodthirsty tyrant of ancient history. To quote his words again, "to give no quarter and make no prisoners," means that women, children, and feeble old men are to be ruthlessly massacred! Truly can this potentate say:—

The king-becoming graces—
As justice, verity, temperance, stableness,
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, loveliness,
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude—
I have no relish for them.

Dr. Maurice Busch, in his *Memoirs of Bismarck*, states that the Iron Chancellor, during the Franco-German war, strongly objected to the soldiers taking prisoners: he had a tigerish thirst for blood. Wilhelm II. has shown himself a very apt pupil of Prince Bismarck, even though he did not demonstrate himself a grateful one.

The Kaiser's address to the first contingent of the German brigade starting for China has surpassed, says the *Christian World*, in indiscretion, bad taste, and brutality of expression, all previous oratorical efforts of this impulsive monarch. Out of the multitude of official, semi-official, and private reports of the speech it is difficult to settle on the exact words used. The first private reports rendered the speech probably as it was delivered; the official editors who came afterwards have sought to modify the truculent and barbarous phraseology so as to bring it into harmony with one's ideas of imperial dignity and with the dictates of ordinary humanity.

On Sunday last a certain seaside resort was given over to the usual Sabbath inanity. All the ordinary week-day amusements were stopped, the bathing had to cease at ten o'clock, and thousands of people walked about aimlessly, with absolutely nothing to do except stare at each other, or crack jokes (not always too clean) as they passed, or rush off for drinks when the hour arrived for the public-houses to open. That form of competition is the only one the churches and chapels allow on the Lord's Day. Perhaps they think—at any rate, *we* do—that there is a basic relation between the spirit of the parson and the spirit of the publican; and that both these caterers are at bottom very much in the same line of business.

Stop a minute. We were in too great a hurry. There is one other form of competition allowed, if it can be called a competition. We refer to the religious services on the sands. There was a variety of these entertainments. First of all, there was the inevitable Salvation Army. We came upon this group just as the captain was thanking the audience for a collection of 7s. 6½d., and mildly reproaching them for not making it 10s. "for Christ's sake." The principal speaker in the Salvation Army meeting was an unmistakable Englishman dressed in Hindu fashion. He told the meeting that he had been saving native souls in India, and that he and his colleagues got on amazingly well with the inhabitants of the

village they labored in. Apparently they converted the whole lot. Anyhow, the natives gave the village temple up to them, and they used it for the worship of Christ, after carrying out the Hindu god and goddess "on a stretcher." The Salvation Army called these images as the objects of their worship.

But that only shows his inability to understand their religion. Indeed, it is peculiar how Christians are blind and deaf to the true nature of other religions than their own. The Hindus do not worship images as gods, but as symbols or suggestions of gods. And the thought occurred to us that, if General Booth wants to cast idols out of temples, he need not go all the way to India for a sphere of operations. He might go to work at once in the temples of the Roman Catholic Church throughout Christendom. He might even make a beginning with the "High" churches of England. There is quite as much "idolatry" in these temples of Christ as there is in any Hindu temple. Of course, we know what the Roman Catholic would reply. He would say that he did not worship the figure of Christ on the cross, or the figure of the Virgin Mary, or the figures of Peter, Paul, Joseph, or any other saint, but merely bowed himself before them as intermediate symbols between himself and God. Well, that is precisely what the Hindu would say of his seeming worship of idols. Altogether, it is pretty evident that General Booth's "stretcher" for temple-images might easily be worn out in this country. Charity may not always begin at home, but reformation does; and India could very well wait until the "god and goddess removal" business is completed in England.

By the way, the Salvation Army band played one or two dance tunes "all for the glory of God," and some profane lads and lasses, who probably found Sunday tedious, began to jig and waltz in a somewhat subdued Sabbatarian manner.

Another religious entertainment on the sands was of a quieter order. The music, led by a harmonium, was soft. And the speeches were rather soft too. It was nearly all of the "dear, dear friends" variety. One speaker, a man with a pleasant, intelligent face—who incidentally trotted out a most venerable chestnut as quite a newcomer on this planet—explained the difficulty he had somewhere abroad in getting the "poor heathen" to understand "redemption" and the "new birth." We believe he was talking sincerely, but we felt that his knowledge was limited. Most of the "heathen" are familiar with the idea of redemption—if not by Christ; and what the Christian calls the "new birth" is only his peculiar form of the world-wide idea and practice of "initiation." But you can hardly expect accurate ethnology at a religious meeting on the sands.

A third of these pious entertainments was of a more robust type. The singing was loud and vigorous, and the speeches were quite aggressive. There was much denunciation of sin, which was invariably treated as synonymous with drinking. Not one of the soul-savers remembered (or mentioned) that Jesus Christ had a good share of that "sin," and sometimes helped others to a good share of it too. More than one of them dwelt on the truth that Christianity is good business; or, as the Bible puts it, that godliness is great gain. A very energetic, vulgar man, who was introduced as the "happy shoemaker," though he didn't look happy, told the meeting that people often wondered how it was they couldn't get on. "Look at me," he cried, "I found the Lord first, and I found money afterwards. That's the way. You try it." Such is "spiritual" piety at a seaside revival meeting!

One of the speakers at that third meeting took the name of the editor of the *Freethinker* in vain. We did not hear it, for it was before our arrival, but we were informed of it by a friend. The speaker was a bit of a bouncer, with a large display of shirt cuff. Gazing round on the assembly, he said that he did not know whether Mr. G. W. Foote was present or not (it was doubtless a little trick often played at hazard), but he "ventured" to say that he was "happier than Mr. G. W. Foote with all his philosophy." Well, we doubt it. Anyhow, the "philosophy" was admitted. And nobody was ever likely to accuse the speaker of having too large a stock of that commodity.

Reynolds' appears to have taken a tip from the *Freethinker*. "The true believers," it said last week, must rejoice at the killing of the missionaries in China. To be sacrificed in such a way for the faith must, of course, mean a reward of eternal happiness; and, therefore, all good, pious, and religious people must be delighted to hear that these martyrs are 'safe in the arms of Jesus.'"

How much longer will the English public tolerate the inroads made upon their liberties by the canting Sabbatarian bigots who avail themselves of the Act passed in the reign of Charles II. of pious memory. Some retaliatory steps have been taken at Yarmouth, where the Corporation was

summoned for Sunday trading, an attendant who takes admission money at the Corporation Pier being also named in the summons, which sets forth that the man was "pursuing his ordinary worldly calling on a day commonly called Sunday, such not being a work of necessity or charity." The prosecuting solicitor objected to three of the four Justices present adjudicating, as they were members of the Corporation or Watch Committee which set the ancient Act of Charles II. in motion. The magistrates having refused to withdraw, the solicitor declined to proceed, stating that a writ would be issued against the Corporation for giving and advertising Sunday performances.

Sunday music on Cromer pier has been threatened by the pious, as everything is which contributes to rational pleasure on the Lord's Day. Since the opening of Cromer Pier the season band has played thereon every Sunday evening from eight to ten o'clock. This has led to the Protection Commissioners, the local authority, being presented with a memorial against the performances. The petition, which was signed by local owners of property, deprecated the innovation, both on religious and financial grounds. They held that it would be detrimental to the best interests of the town were Sunday performances allowed.

Mr. Sydney Buxton, M.P., is a Liberal, but he is not liberal enough to refrain from joining the bigots in their outcry. The upshot is a compromise on the part of the Commissioners. The Sunday band is to be continued, but it is to play only sacred music. Well, what is sacred music? That question has never been answered.

A farmer's wife at Teignmouth, having armed herself with a paste-pot and some handbill Scriptural texts, proceeded to post up on railings, and other available spots, announcements relating to the Gospel and its message of "glad tidings and great joy." Unfortunately for her, she was observed in this evangelistic work, and has since been fined £5 and costs. A local newspaper observes: "The well-intentioned people who put up texts in all sorts of suitable and unsuitable places do not reflect that they are far more likely to cause irreverence and irritation than to do any real good."

The Rev. John Wakeford, of Liverpool, has been talking a little loosely to the Deeside Branch of the English Church Union. Amongst other reckless statements, he is credited with saying: "Attacks were sometimes made on the Church by journalists, but he did not think much of them. They had all come to the conclusion that what they saw in the public prints was for the main part falsehood. None of them paid much attention to what the newspapers said, although it was always assumed that people did. They constantly heard it said that journalists had a very great influence; they might have, but it was altogether in the opposite direction to what they wished. People read what the journalists said, and took it as an indication of what a fool might think." Poor journalists! It is not impossible, however, that, in common parlance, they may "get their own back" in regard to the Rev. John Wakeford, though, after all, he is but "small fry."

A German Catholic newspaper states that the Pope has resolved to enforce celibacy amongst the South African priests. Out of 15,000 there are 3,000 reported to be married and 4,000 keeping concubines.

In the bacteriological section of the Royal Institute of Public Health, meeting at Aberdeen, the medical officer of Weymouth called attention to the dangers to laymen of receiving sacramental wine in the cup. He urged that the clergy should be asked to make some modification in ritual. This suggests the query: If you can't drink out of the sacred chalice in the most solemn ordinance of the Church with impunity from infection, where, in the name of goodness and common sense, does Providence come in?

A "converted" Jew at Blyth is remanded on a charge of stealing money belonging to a gentleman with whom he lodged. "Spoiling the Egyptians" nowadays means a visit to the police-court unless it is done neatly and in accordance with law. As a "converted" Jew, Herman Rosenthal ought not to have been in want of any money. Unlimited funds are found by some of the silly home missionary societies, not only to buy a Jew up if he makes the least pretence of forsaking the faith of his forefathers, but for keeping him afterwards. Rosenthal has not availed himself of his resources.

Dr. Parker, we learn, has said good-bye to the City Temple, and gone for a holiday. But he returns to town to preach to the Institute of Journalists on September 9. To preach to pressmen is not an enviable task. But the Institute of Journalists is mainly composed of juniors who are not at all likely to be over-critical. Journalists of standing have

nothing to do with the Institute, and they have been so sickened in the course of their careers with prelatial and minor pulpit discourses that they would willingly go miles away to escape them.

If Dr. Parker is wise, he will frame his remarks to suit the intelligence of young students of Pitman and hopeful geniuses who are just entering upon press life with dim notions of grammar and a sublime indifference to orthography, and with possibly a lavish paucity of ideas. A newspaper friend informs us that before a big oration by Gladstone a young reporter—such as these of the Journalists' Institute—went down on his knees and prayed to the Lord that he would get through his "three-minute" turns all right. In the result he was the most unsatisfactory member of the whole "ring," and but for the "check note" the verbatim would have gone wrong.

Just now there is one of those silly and perennial exclamations which are supposed to be witty, though no one can find out where the wit comes in, and in the present instance it is, "There's 'air." A poor barber shot himself in Highgate Cemetery. He had belonged to a sect called the Latter House of Israel, the members of which were supposed to wear their hair long and never cut their whiskers. He had hidden his long hair by piling it up under his hat for many years; but, owing to the excessive heat of last week, he got his assistant to cut it off, and had subsequently become insane with remorse.

The Lord—to whom people appeal on their knees whenever they are in trouble—might at least take care of his own tabernacles. It is an incidental object-lesson to these pious supplicants to inform them that the Lord is so indifferent about mundane matters that he has allowed the fine church of St. Gabriel, Willesden, to be practically destroyed by fire. The church was so reduced by flames that it became in the end roofless and gutted.

We learn from the *British Weekly* that Dr. Lorimer has recently delivered a discourse on modern thought. It is said that in dealing with the subject he "dismissed in turn Freethought, Agnosticism, Positivism, and Pessimism." This is rather a large undertaking, even for a preacher from Boston, U.S.A. But, though Freethought and Agnosticism are thus dismissed, it is quite possible they will survive and flourish. The charitable conclusion is that Dr. Lorimer did not know what he was talking about.

There was, however, a glimmer of sense in Dr. Lorimer's sermon when he said it was "no wonder that the learned and the cultured were often dissatisfied with Christianity when they saw what childish and feeble literature was circulated amongst Christians, and how extremely narrow were the views of some Christians."

Mr. Swinburne is superior, of course, to a great deal of criticism which may be attempted by small and vulgar people. Somebody who writes the "Literary Letter" in the *Rock* says the quality of Mr. Swinburne's earlier lyrics "makes us wish them to be even less read than they are." And there seems to be a suggestion of impiety. But that is really a recommendation of Swinburne's poems—which will probably survive any criticism in journals like the *Rock*.

A little girl about eight years of age, witnessing the ceremony of ordination at one of our recent Conference sessions, was much impressed, and, after the service, asked her mother what it meant. "What do you think it meant?" the mother inquired. "I don't know," was the answer, "unless the bishop was feeling of their heads to see if they had any brains before he sent them off to preach."

An Anglican Bishop the other day quoted a remark made to him by a competent observer in one of the universities within the last decade. "I said to him: 'How do you think things are going about belief among the young men?' 'Oh,' he said, 'I think that a very great number of the younger graduates hold the Christian faith. They are Christians, but I do not think that they hold it with such intensity as to be willing to sacrifice very much for it.'"

One must really feel sorry for the Chinese who have been "converted" to Christianity. They have had a frightfully rough time of it, and many of them now cease to exist. They might be regarded as martyrs if it were at all certain that they really understood the principles of the religion for which they have been put to death.

More Providence! A fatal volcanic eruption has taken place in Japan. Advices *via* Vancouver state that twenty-five people were killed by the eruption, which took place at Mount Adsuma.

With fawn-colored gloves and a hymn-book in his hands, John Driver was charged at Marylebone Police-court with drunkenness. As he could not pay the fine, he was removed to the cells, protesting that he had only been singing hymns. In his cell he broke some woodwork into splinters. On being brought back to court, he raved like a madman, shouted at the top of his voice that to prohibit preaching was against the Queen's authority, sang the Doxology, and then defied the magistrate to do his worst. He would show, he said, whether he had the pluck of a martyr in him. He was fined again, ordered to pay £2 damages, or in default to go to prison for a month.

Whilst a young domestic servant in the Euston-road was kneeling at the side of her bed, with her hands clasped in prayer, she suddenly died. The God to whom she was appealing seems to have paid so much attention to her supplications that he was not even aware that she was approaching a sudden end, or, being aware, was indifferent as to the fatal result which occurred—accelerated probably by the fervour of her appeals to him.

An American Christian scientist was called in by a Captain Boxer, of Brondesbury, to attend his child. At the inevitable inquest the Captain said Mr. Riley had been a qualified medical practitioner in America, but gave up practice in 1897, and had practised Christian science since. They believed in the power of prayer to heal the sick. Prayer was the initial method of restoring the sick, but they did not despise suitable food. Mr. Riley asked the parents if they wished to put implicit trust in God and witness's treatment, or call in a doctor, and they said they would trust God to the end. Dr. Slaughter said that death was due to debility, through premature birth; no medical man could have saved the child's life. A verdict of "Natural causes" was returned, the foreman remarking that the jury did not believe that prayer would save the life of a child.

The *Sunday Companion* publishes a sketch of a church at Austinburg, Ohio, which was dedicated as a place of worship by the breaking of a bottle of whisky over its spire. The services of a sailor were procured. With a rope in his hand, he climbed to the topmost point of the edifice, and as the last timber was placed he drew a bottle of whisky from the ground by means of a rope, and, breaking it over the spire, shouted: "Three cheers for the church."

Prophecy is certainly not confined to Israel. "Old Moore" has made some long shots for 1900, and has brought down more than one event. For example, he predicted that in May there might be expected a better feeling between England and Ireland, which was a very near shot at the Queen's visit. For May, too, he foretold that the Nihilists would break out and bring danger to a royal traveller by train. Well, the Prince of Wales was attacked by Sipido. At the end of July we were warned that a foreign potentate would be in danger; all the best of the medical world would be called in, but the end was certain. Again "Old Moore" seems to have hit the mark. He tells us we shall hear of grave troubles at Hong Kong, and that troops may be needed at Canton. All this was prophesied last autumn.

For August there is the following remarkable line: "The King of Italy is plagued by insidious foes, and should beware of Anarchists."

The humors of school examination-papers are illustrated by Dr. Haig Brown, who said that the question, "What is a cherub?" elicited the answer, "An immoral being of uncertain shape."

God, according to a sailor's wife, told her to pour boiling water over her child. Of course, it was a mistaken idea, but God did not interfere. The poor child died, and the mother has been sent to prison for three months.

But the specific rules of morality are not pronounced to be permanent and unalterable. How could society advance if they were? The community undergoes a silent revolution in its moral ideas as new tastes are generated, new passions raised, and new modes of existence and of thought are laid open; but alterations such as these, slow and scarce perceptible, cannot endanger the steady authority of morals. The sea and the dry land may be changing places, but nevertheless, the sea and dry land are very distinguishable; the change is not inconsistent with the habitable nature of our globe, and each generation of mortals walks upon the shore neither deterred nor perplexed with sense of insecurity.

—William Smith.

N. B.

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To Correspondents.

- MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS.—All communications for Mr. 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.
- MR. FOOTE has not found time for his usual article in this week's *Freethinker* in addition to what he has written specially on the Freethought Twentieth Century Fund. His pen will be more represented in our next.
- R. CHILD.—Thanks. We will deal with it next week. Your letter reached us late, owing to our absence from London.
- CAVE CANEM.—Printer's errors will occur. We thank you for pointing them out, but it is hardly worth going back upon them. "Hamstringed" though is as right as "hamstrung," just as "hanged" is right as "hung." Both forms are quite permissible. As a matter of fact, Hume used the word "hamstringed" himself in relating the tragedy of the Saxon princess.
- ANGLO-INDIAN.—Thanks. In our next.
- ANDREW MILLAR, who means to subscribe to the Twentieth Century Fund, expresses an earnest hope that the Freethought Publishing Company will not suffer in consequence of it. In order that it may not, as far as he is concerned, he means to give to the new Fund what he would have spent on dearly-loved books.
- S. P.—Received. Regular acknowledgment next week.
- H. PERCY WARD.—Mr. Foote is writing you *re* the Demonstration. The other matter will be dealt with in our next issue. Thanks for your letter.
- A. HALLAM.—We are at a distance from the *Freethinker* file, and cannot tell you the date of the articles on Brother Prince. Mr. Neale, who wrote those articles, will probably supply the reference in our next.
- HORACE DAWSON.—Thanks for your letter and cutting, which will serve as material for a paragraph.
- E. VETTERLEIN, honorary secretary of the West Ham Branch, disclaims for himself and his fellow members all sympathy with the correspondent who complained of the Freethought Demonstration not being held after the speakers were all drenched to the skin. Mr. Vetterlein hopes that "none of the ladies or gentlemen suffered from the severe wetting they received." We are sorry to say that Mr. Moss was terribly hoarse for several days, and that Miss Vance has not yet got rid of the sore throat she contracted.
- G. HOWLETT.—You will find Huxley's *Physiography* just the book you are seeking. Order it of any good bookseller.
- H. R. CLIFTON.—Pleased to receive your letter. We note your statement that the advertisement of "S. A." of Margate in the *Freethinker* has introduced you and your family to suitable furnished apartments, with cleanliness, nice cooking, good attendance, and moderate charges.
- F. E. WILLIS.—Cuttings received with thanks. Yes, the stormy weather that has succeeded the tropical weather is a signal proof of the wonderfulness of "Providence." We never remember anything like it at this time of the year.
- W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings. Letter will appear next week.
- A. H. TABRUM.—Your letter shall be inserted in our next issue.
- W. G. M. (Liverpool).—You will find the subjects you mention dealt with in Mr. Foote's *Bible Romances*.
- M. A. (Cantab).—Winwood Reade, who died very young, has left a masterpiece of style and collation of facts in his *Martyrdom of Man*. His novel, the *Outcast*, is a deeply-interesting story.
- RECEIVED.—Torch of Reason—Two Worlds—Lucifer—Birkenhead News—Friedenker.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention. 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.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- 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.

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Sugar Plums.

THE postponed Sunday Freethought Demonstration in Brockwell Park will take place on August 26. Full details will appear in due course.

There is a paucity of "Sugar Plums" in this week's *Freethinker* owing to the editor's absence from London. The paragraphs under this heading are not easily written by other hands.

The Club and Institute Union Hall, in Clerkenwell-road, has been engaged by the N. S. S. Executive's sub-committee for the proposed London Conference on Secular Education and the forthcoming School Board Elections. This Conference will take place on Tuesday evening, September 11. Representatives are being invited from all the advanced bodies in the metropolis.

The Annual Children's Excursion, as already announced, is fixed for the first Saturday in September. The arrangements are in the hands of Miss Vance, the N. S. S. Secretary. We hear from her that Mr. George Anderson has given her a cheque for three guineas towards the expenses.

Freethinkers are requested not to forget the claims of the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited. It would be a great mischief if this enterprise were to suffer in consequence of other appeals. This enterprise is absolutely *vital* to the movement. Everything turns upon the maintenance of an organ of publicity. We hope, therefore, that a considerable number of fresh Shares will be taken up before the Annual General Meeting early in September.

The Belief in God not Innate.

THE belief in God has often been advanced as not only the greatest, but the most complete of all the distinctions between man and the lower animals. It is, however, impossible, as we have seen, to maintain that this belief is innate or instinctive in man. On the other hand, a belief in all-pervading spiritual agencies seems to be universal, and apparently follows from a considerable advance in man's reason, and from a still greater advance in his faculties of imagination, curiosity, and wonder. I am aware that the assumed instinctive belief in God has been used by many persons as an argument for his existence. But this is a rash argument, as we should thus be compelled to believe in the existence of many cruel and malignant spirits, only a little more powerful than man, for the belief in them is far more general than in a beneficent deity. The idea of a universal and beneficent creator does not seem to arise in the mind of man until he has been elevated by long-continued culture.

He who believes in the advancement of man from some low organised form will naturally ask, How does this bear on the belief in the immortality of the soul? The barbarous races of man, as Sir J. Lubbock has shown, possess no clear belief of this kind, but arguments derived from the primeval beliefs of savages are, as we have just seen, of little or no avail. Few persons feel any anxiety from the impossibility of determining at what precise period in the development of the individual, from the first trace of a minute germinal vesicle, man becomes an immortal being; and there is no greater cause for anxiety because the period cannot possibly be determined in the gradually ascending organic scale.

I am aware that the conclusions arrived at in this work [*The Descent of Man*] will be denounced by some as highly irreligious, but he who denounces them is bound to show why it is more irreligious to explain the origin of man as a distinct species by descent from some lower form, through the laws of variation and natural selection, than to explain the birth of the individual through the laws of ordinary reproduction. The birth, both of the species and of the individual, are equally parts of that grand sequence of events which our minds refuse to accept as the result of blind chance. The understanding revolts at such a conclusion, whether or not we are able to believe that every slight variation of structure, the union of each pair in marriage, the dissemination of each seed, and other such events, have all been ordained for some special purpose.

—Charles Darwin.

Holiday Heresy.

In the happy summer-time, when the sun irresistibly suggests a retreat to the sands of the everlasting sea, or to the shelter of inland woods, or it may be, with the well-to-do, a lazy yachting cruise in search of gentle breeze; or when the arrival of the season prompts a pursuit of grouse on health-improving moors—the average man gaily starts upon a holiday. He takes a certain amount of impedimenta—as little as possible. He leaves behind him as many as he may of his business, domestic, or society cares.

But he is obliged to carry with him to the sands, or upon the sea, or the moors, what he may be pleased to call his brains—big or little, as they may happen to be. He cannot, if he has intellectual capacity—and these remarks have no application to people who are not so equipped—separate himself from his ideas. They occur to him inevitably at more or less frequent intervals. Not ideas about mere pleasure and sport, or commonplace matters, but about greater and wider subjects, which always, and under divers conditions, must gain admission to the reflective mind.

He may, if on the beach, find his meditations on life and destiny disturbed by "nigger" bands or Salvation Army drums. On board he may be equally disturbed by feminine attentions which he has to receive or, more likely, to bestow; or, if on the moors, there are the comments of his companions, with the unspoken, but still eloquent, admiration or disdain of sporting attendants. But he carries with him a thinking arrangement which, whether by his will or against it, is always at work. And he thinks at intervals, and especially when alone, of questions which concern him, not so much personally, but as a unit of mankind. Of course, he may propose to cry "Avaunt!" to all speculations of a philosophical or theological kind, but, nevertheless, they assail him. He is still as much their victim as though he were at home. There are no holidays from one's cherished ideas. They *will* present themselves, and changed conditions are powerless to effect their banishment.

And so the holiday-maker of religious turn of mind is ever and anon "looking through nature to nature's god," regardless of the logical sequence that, if nature requires a creator to account for its existence, there must surely be required a maker to account for him—otherwise we return to the original position. On the other hand, the adherent of Freethought principles cannot refrain from according to his equally-cherished opinions a like attention. Possibly it is when "far from the madding crowd," lying on the sands with one's eyes turned to the blue vault above, or reclining on some grassy bed upon which the sunshine falls through the leafy awning of overhanging trees, that rumination on these and kindred subjects is at once easiest, pleasantest, and perhaps most profitable.

If the visitor to the seaside should entertain liberal opinions, and, being "well-grounded" in them, should desire to "let them rest," he is bound to find himself setting his back up even in the course of a limited stay. Sunday at the seaside—that is to say, at popular resorts—is sure to arouse his spirit of militant Freethought. He may have started, and arrived, and even spent several days in forgetfulness of his special views. But when the Sunday comes round, he finds the "old Adam" arising, and that, too, in the way of wrath. In the morning the people who wish to appear "respectable" are marching off to church or chapel. They please themselves in so doing, but the visitor will find that they have—if local magnates—previously made arrangements to displease *him*. They have stopped his Sunday morning paper; he must shave himself or go unshaven; coach drives, at many resorts, are forbidden him; cycling, though it cannot be stopped, is looked at askance as "bad form"; he may not play billiards—cards are too shocking to think of; public bands in some places are perforce dumb; concerts are not allowed; steam-boats are stopped; rowing and angling are considered reprehensible; golf is tabooed. Really, it is difficult to know what to do on the Lord's Day in many holiday places where much is thought of godly idleness and a dead set is made against rational recreative rest. Some of these restrictions the liberal-minded visitor may set aside

regardless of odium. In respect to others he is powerless. Then it is that he becomes blasphemous, and pours out his indignation on Sabbatarianism and religion generally.

Nothing so tends to confirm the heretic in his heresy as these restrictions on his individual liberty. Later on in the day he feels that insult is added to injury by outdoor Sabbath evening services, at which there is much godly howling by the people who have done their level best to make the day, for him, as miserable and unprofitable as possible.

Have you ever noticed how joyously everybody—the pious and the unbelieving alike—arise at the seaside and other holiday resorts on Monday morning? There is a general gasp of relief. It seems as though some stifling sensation had been removed, and one could once more breathe, with wholesome and invigorating inspirations, the free, fresh air of heaven. Away now with all the pious conventionalities which on the previous day have imposed a worse than Egyptian bondage. There are now six days in front in which everything reasonable in the way of pleasure is possible. The prevailing sentiment, even amongst the "unco guid," is, when interpreted by practical manifestations, to thank God, not for the seventh day, but for the six days which follow.

What if it were all Sabbaths at the seaside! Good Lord deliver us! Life there would not be worth living. Holiday-making would be a farce and a sham. Folks would stick hard and fast at home, and railway companies relying on seaside excursion traffic would be ruined. Ought not shareholders to go down on their knees and thank God that he has only taken to himself one day out of seven?

FRANCIS NEALE.

The Virgin Sat On.

For the last two months the clerical Spanish and French journals have given considerable space to the "Visions" of Francisca Guillen, a poor, hysterical peasant girl of Lorqui, in the province of Murcia. Some sanguine Castilians seem to have hoped that Lorqui had a chance of becoming a rival to the French Lourdes. Francisca, like the famous Bernadotte, of Lourdes, was favored with several visits from the Virgin Mary, who sometimes appeared with the dead body of the Savior in her arms, as the Mother of Sorrows. At other times she came in queenly splendor, attended by a court of angels. The girl's tales found ready and unscrupulous acceptance with all the members of her own family, and amongst the credulous villagers of Lorqui. Sick and troubled folk from various Murcian communes began to flock to Lorqui to obtain the benefits of Francisca's intercessions with her supernatural visitor, and the girl at last undertook to work cures, not in her own name, but in that of the Virgin. She gave the pilgrims little stones marked with a cross, which she affirmed to have fallen from the mantle of the Blessed Virgin, and to possess miraculous powers of healing. At last the strange proceedings at Lorqui attracted the attention of "the Godless Press," which is pure Castilian for a Radical newspaper, and the secular interviewer, with note-book and pencil, appeared in the village. Meanwhile the crowd of pilgrims who thronged to Lorqui, and had to pay for food and lodging to the owners of the wretched huts, brought the business to the notice of the Spanish Government. The Government, as might be expected in Castile, was powerless to grapple with the scandals, and had to appeal to the Bishop of Murcia, Monsignore Maura, to intervene with the spiritual arm. That prelate, happily, had no ambition to have a new pilgrimage resort established in his diocese, and issued a pastoral letter to his clergy, requiring them to expose the folly and superstition of Francisca's pretended visions. The State then plucked up courage to follow the Church, and ordered a medical commission to examine the hysterical visionary. The business has ended in the confinement of Francisca in the Provincial Lunatic Asylum.

—Daily News.

One can say without exaggeration that the most religious times and the most religious peoples, or those in which or among whom the power of the Church has been the strongest, have, generally speaking, been the most immoral. One has evidence enough in the horrors of the Middle Ages, and, if to-day it be otherwise, it is not to religion that we owe the change, but to the spread of education and the progress of intelligence. Experience teaches us that at all times the blackest crimes and the most degraded criminals have been associated with excess of sanctity, and this among peoples generally, as in individuals.—Ludwig Buchner.

The Tragedy of Religion.

HOLY HATRED OF THIS WORLD FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD.

RELIGIONS agree in reducing human life to a religious tragedy. Religions are written in the minor key; they are unanimous in the exaltation of sacrifice and the worship of sorrow; they rejoice in sadness; they sanctify despair; they can only feel good when they feel bad. It is religion that has chanted the lamentations of the world. Under whatever name or form, the same gloomy view is found. Given any religion old or new, and they are weeping and wailing. Religion might be classified as sanctified pessimism, or holy hatred of this world for the glory of God. Buddhism taught that it was a great misfortune to be born, and, because man had acquired so much demerit by being born, he must be born over and over again until the infliction of birth and successive incarnations had sufficiently cleansed him from guilt and fitted him to pass on beyond the necessity of any further humiliation of that kind. That old system also teaches that the final and supreme good is absorption into the unconscious existence where individuality is merged as a drop of dew is merged into the sea. Mohammed taught that human life was but the sport and bauble of an inexorable fate, that man could neither choose nor resist, that in the great game of life men were not players to move, but pawns to be moved. The Christian theology taught that this poor world and everything it contained were cursed by its creator; it is now under his insatiate wrath and spending on to its inevitable doom.

UNIVERSAL PESSIMISM OF RELIGION.

No task is more difficult than to account for this pessimism that pervades religions. The fact that it is universal is startling. If the religious instinct had shown some of the versatility of genius, if there had been some rapt and illuminated imagination that had dared to offer an amendment or propose a change to the vindictive God, it would have been a delight to come upon it—it would have been a pleasure to exalt that religious genius, and make of him a saint. To his shrine we would have made loyal pilgrimages, and put laurels above his dust; but there is no such pleasing exception; everywhere is the same lamentation—everywhere the despair of this world, and, impliedly, the despair of its great author.

An explanation may be attempted by remembering that all religions are old. All the systems that we speak of commonly, when we refer to the religions of man, have come to us from ages long since past. Religion is the only thing that has been transported into the present time unchanged. If men were attempting now to carry forward the science of agriculture, using the implements of two thousand or five thousand years ago, they would be laughed at. If men undertook to carry on the affairs of the business world, and used the methods that were in vogue thirty years ago, they would be distanced by every competitor in the field; but if they should attempt to apply the ideas and the methods that prevailed two thousand years ago, they would be sought after as specimens for a museum. If literature, law, custom, morals, or commerce were attempted upon the ideas of two thousand years in the past, the result is obvious; and yet religion, with theories promulgated thousands of years ago, claims the same allegiance and the same authority that it claimed then. It has admitted of no amendment, suffered no change, responded to no new urgencies, yielded to no new demands. It was pessimism and despair two thousand years ago, and remains so still.

GOD-INFATUATION.

We may find a partial explanation by remembering that men in the olden times had to imagine their gods—they do yet; but when we have a religion that is old enough, with traditions that are hoary with age, ancient and unclean with the dust of centuries, it is the infatuation and as vouchsafed to this world by a revealing God. A little thought will show anyone that the gods that were formulated thousands of years ago were precisely what the gods must be that are formulated now—the result of the imagination of man. Man does not know

and he did not know—he guessed. To know God then was as impossible as it is now. There was also a profound ignorance of nature. Man did not understand its purposes or its methods, he only saw results; he was acquainted with the external phases of phenomena; he did not know how they came or passed away, and in that superficial knowledge, with that dense ignorance, he attempted to account for things. How could he arrive but at a false conception of the great God that is behind all nature? Besides, man at that time was unable to account for the presence of suffering and imperfection and sin—as he is yet; but he has sense enough now to suspend his judgment. He is not driven on by the infatuation of making a creed and formulating a religion and establishing a church and instituting a priesthood to wield the spiritual authority over men. He is not driven on by that fatal infatuation to explain sin and suffering by some metaphysical device upon which he may establish a system of theology. If the religion of this world has made any progress at all, if the religious sentiment has been elevated above what it was in the ages past, then that elevation and that new illumination are most conspicuous in this: that before some of the great and insoluble problems of life the reverent man, the thinker, the truly religious soul, dares to stand and say: "Can you explain that? Do you understand that? I cannot."

MIGHT WAS RIGHT WHEN GOD WAS MADE.

Then the old religions were formulated before man had advanced far enough to have a moral God. The idea of justice cannot be found in any of the old conceptions of God. The idea of morality is wanting in all the religions or theologies that attempt to explain the relation of God to this world. That applies to the Christian theologies just the same, and the reason for it was this: All of the life of man in the early ages was founded upon the conception of power. Might necessarily implied right. It made it right; God was all-powerful, therefore infinitely right, no matter what he did. Perfectly right was it for him to drown the world because he had within the grasp of his hand all the waters of the clouds and skies, of the rivers and of the seas. Therefore the flood was right. Perfectly right was it for him to burn up cities and destroy women and children because he could command consuming fire. It was the power that made the right in whatever God did, and that will explain a great many things about our theology. Hell is right and eternal pain is right because God is infinite and has power to create one and inflict the other. The question of morality or justice, or even decency, does not enter; it is simply one of power.

Then we may partly account for the pessimism by remembering that man was not then able to separate the sense of injury from the thirst for revenge. His moral idea was so low that to be injured implied the right, if the power existed, of repaying with vengeance. Thus men, when they were imagining God, unable to do any better, made him a vindictive being, a God of revenge, a God that would, and did, destroy with fire and flood. And when in time the floods could be accounted for by the giving way of barriers of natural walls, or cloudbursts; when the destruction of cities could be accounted for by natural causes, as by eruptions of volcanoes or earthquakes, and they could no longer satisfy their feelings that God must revenge himself by saying, "that was his flood for your sins," "that was his fire for your irreligion," then they said: "Out in the future whither all footsteps tend and whence none depart, out in the irrevocable future, is an abyss which God has filled with fire, and all are going there who do not pass our way." So we have the religion of pessimism and despair, and the teaching that human life is a tragedy, and it is a misfortune to be born. Through it all runs the cry of despair, the tremor of fear, and the agony of apprehension.

DEGRADING PRACTICES AND IDEAS OF RELIGION.

All of these things dishonor God. Every conception of religion that has ever reddened an altar with blood is an insult to the infinite. Think of men—men who know pain and the love of life—taking doves and pigeons and cutting their white throats, reddening the feathers of their breasts with blood, robbing the air of

these visitors of the wing, and spreading them upon an altar, and then burning them with fire to please the being that made them and taught them to build nests and care for their young. It is as wicked as it is to kill those same birds to adorn women's hats—just as wicked and no more religious. Every conception of religion that exalts penance and self-inflicted pain as something by which the infinite may be approached or appeased or placated is an insult to the infinite. Every conception of religion that promulgates a beggary of prayer as if it might change or alter the plan or make favorable the infinite insults him. Every plan of salvation that religion has ever outlined has proceeded upon the supposition that God wanted pain, and was pleased with the sight of blood—could look on agony, and have his divine heart touched. The cruel, hideous, ghastly, blood-marked cross is an insult to the intelligence of man and the infinite goodness of God. The entire attempt to explain God has been a signal failure, the old and the new alike—all a failure.

Just now our Presbyterian friends are awakening to the consciousness that their formula by which God is required to work, a receipt book which they made for the infinite, is not up to date. There is a little controversy about the necessity of change. The change suggested is this, whether the creed shall say God made hell and then ordained man to go there, or whether it shall say he just made hell and then made man and left him to go there of his own accord. For my part, I cannot see that it will make any difference in a thousand years with any of us how we get there, just so we are there. The main thing is to keep hell in the creed. The good tidings of great joy would not be joyful without hell. We would suggest to the Presbyterians that, instead of changing their creed, they change their God. If there is one thing that this world can get along without having it is the God of the murderer of Michael Servetus.

PREPOSTEROUS NOTIONS ABOUT SIN.

The old pessimism of religion grows largely out of a false and irrational conception of sin. Let us understand this thing that men call sin. No one who has the capacity for suffering; no one who has known friendship and its cost or love and its agony, can deny that in this world of ours there are paths trod by naked feet and paths strewn with thorns. No one can doubt that in the cup pressed to human lips are mingled all the drops of bitterness. All know that the world, as it is, is bad enough, but does it help it any to formulate a theory of sin that makes it a million times worse than it is? Is that getting ahead any? We are told by the religions that sin is an offence against God. Can a man injure the infinite? Can he rob him? Can he make him unhappy? Can he destroy the infinite stillness of his immovable calm? Can he take anything away from him?

How can a man injure God? But they say sin is a nature and that nature guilt. That is the darling old Calvinistic doctrine of sin—sin is a nature and that nature guilt—that is worth remembering when a person knows that he is pretty well established in his theology. Just to be born, just to be here, only a tenant in this world, just to breathe the sweet air and look at the fields and sun and stars, is guilt. That is our nature, and that nature guilt, and that is sin. But God made this nature; then is not God a sinner? But God did not make it this way; he made it clean and wholesome and pure, and then the devil changed it and drew across it his slimy track; but God made the devil. Ah! but the devil was a rebellious angel, and God cast him out of heaven and sent him to hell; but he did not stay there—it was the bottomless pit, and maybe he got out that way.

If sin is a nature and that nature guilt, then the individual is exempt from responsibility, and no just creator can damn him for that. Sin is not a nature, and that nature is not guilt. I deny it in the name of all friendships that are loyal, of all love that is pure: nature at its best is holy and sacred and divine.

DISCREDITING AND DEFAMING MOTHER EARTH.

The Church has made an unreality of sin, and so it has weakened the emphasis upon right living and good conduct and morality by laying an exorbitant and

irrational emphasis upon sin as a mere fiction. The wrong that a man can commit is against his neighbor and against himself. If there were no injustices performed by man against man, sin would be eradicated from this world and "leave not a wrack behind." This pessimism of religion discredits the old earth—God's earth. There are two ways of treating the world from a religious standpoint; one is just to revile it. It is involved in this guilt of nature. It was cursed; even the soil—the soil was cursed. Think of a God cursing the soil. Think what the soil does for beauty and beneficence. All we eat, all we drink, all we wear, comes out of the soil; but the old earth has been cursed, and we must revile it. We must be sorry that we have come, and promise never to come again. We must abhor this world, and say that this "vile world is no friend of grace to help us on to God"; we must long for that day when our eyes shall look for the last time upon its descending sun, and we can spread our glorified wings and perch on some other world. That is the religious way of viewing this world—shun it, abhor it, call it vile, because God cursed it. If there are any pleasures, come away, distrust them, because we have no right to be happy; we ought to be miserable: that is the only way to be happy.

Our Methodist friends have a little controversy on their hands. They have a rule (No. 17,000) that states that no one must dance or play cards or go to the theatre. Notwithstanding the rule, a few of them do those things; and now the question is whether they shall discipline the persons or discipline the discipline. Probably the consistent way would be for them to let the rule stand, and put in a few more things. People cannot pay too much for heaven; it is cheap at any price. If this world is vile—a gin-trap set for souls, a lurking-place for smiling devils that deceive—then let it all be abhorred. Let us wear sackcloth and ashes, and practise Delsarte treatment for lengthening out our faces longer still. There is nothing so effective as consistency in religion.

The other way of treating the world is that of the new religion—a religion so new as to scarcely be included in the religious classification. That is to deny the world and to say it is a delusion; there is not anything there, there is nothing here but us, we are all of it; there is no such thing here as a theatre or pain. There is nothing external, it is all mind; we are just thoughts. Somehow we have been deceived; we have a race belief that we live on a world and revolve with it about a central sun; but we do not; we are just a company of invisible, intangible thinks and thinklets.

COULD WE IMPROVE THE PLAN OF THE UNIVERSE?

It is simply a question of individual choice. For my part, I believe I would rather take the first position. I think I should feel more at home living in a real world, though it were vile, than living in a world that was not there. The rational plan is to take the universe on trust. What if we cannot explain something, what is there that we can explain? Why should theology, in its arrogance and unmitigated egotism, seek to account for the infinite in particular and detail? Sometimes we think we could have made this world a little better.

Ah, love, could you and I with him conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits, and then
Remould it nearer to our hearts' desire?

But could we, honestly? What change could we suggest in the ordering of this world that we are sure would be an improvement? Suppose we were to take out some of the suffering. What suffering could we take out and not destroy more beauty and good things than we restored, or impair more values than we increased? All suffering is kind; all suffering is wise. There is no pain of the mind or flesh but what comes as the inevitable consequence of some law transgressed, and to make the transgressor exempt from that consequence would be a worse happiness and most terrible doom.

THE PUNISHMENT OF BEING IGNORED.

Years ago, so long now that it seems as if it were in another existence, I was behind a rude desk in a country school-house, a very small boy, but pretty well matured and somewhat precocious in the ability for making trouble for the teacher. I think every punishment of

every kind that could be devised or imagined by the versatile genius of a large number of country school teachers had been exhausted in my particular case, without any particular results; then this thing happened. One day the teacher began to ignore everything I did. The "things" began to get more numerous and boisterous, yet no notice was taken; talking out loud, throwing pellets, afterwards books, then smashing a slate over a desk, leaving the seat and running about the school-room; still absolutely no attention was paid to anything whatever. I swear to you that all the punishments ever inflicted could not, and did not, equal that of being ignored and being unable to be treated as a culprit. I was no longer given the poor dignity of an offender. I was outside of law, outside of rules; I was no longer one of them. I have thought of it ten thousand times, and when I have rebelled at the suffering of this world, and cried out at the pain, and in anguish said, "O Lord, how long?" I have thought there were no sinners fallen so low but that this infinite frame of things we call nature, the universal God, holds them still in such an attitude of dignified regard that he counts them worthy to suffer whenever they shall transgress. I will believe that the old world, with all its pain and anguish and longing and heart-aching is best as it is. I decline to apologise for the infinite power that made it, and I decline to accept any theology descriptive of him or any formula that explains his purpose or his method, or any religion that implies or expresses it in any way—a God that needs to be apologised for.

GOD SHOULD PREFER HIS CHILDREN TO BE HAPPY.

The rational view of this old world is to accept it as it is, and to count and keep in mind its assets and their values. If I drag on the sounding wave-washed shore of time the net of experience for three score years and ten and gather at last, with sand and shells and weeds and slime, the jewels rare of pure and stainless love, I shall not count the labor vain. We should use this old world in a normal way for the end of happiness. Not to please God, but to please ourselves and those we love, is the highest aim. The God that wrote the invisible score for the chorus of the forest and the field, the God that taught the morning stars at creation's dawn the song they are singing in the silence still, and touched with exquisite artistic hand the lips of the flower with passion's color, and laid his own lips upon it, and breathed upon it once to make its own breath fragrant for ever, is better pleased, I hold, with the happiness of happy men and women than with the sadness, real or feigned, of lying devotees at blood-stained shrines. The happy are always good, the good are always happy. Whereas a man may be religious, and be neither happy nor good—he may be a pious nuisance. I think again of dear old Tom Pinch and his lie. I don't know how many times I have referred to it, but this is once more. When he gave that five-pound note to Martin Chuzzlewit when Martin was going away, Martin did not find it for a long time, and when he found it he knew that out of his poverty and suffering Tom had given it to him with this little note, "I do not need it, Martin." He knew he did; he knew he went to bed every night hungry, and in the cold days shivered from inadequate clothing; he knew Tom lied when he said he did not need it; and then the great author said about Tom: "I had rather have to fan my brow in the dying hour with the white feather of falsehood such as thine than all the quills that were ever plucked from the sharp porcupine, reproachful truth, since time began." And so leaving the religious tragedy for the religious pessimists, and the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth for sins that were never committed, to those who are persuaded that they did commit them before they were born, and the agony of forensic remorse for sin to the people who believe in an angry and revengeful God, let us take a rational view of him and of his world, and of destiny and of his children, and help "to eliminate superstition from religion and cleanse the vermin from the garden of God."

J. E. ROBERTS.

—*The Truthseeker* (New York).

Do you know the story of the pupil teacher under examination on the New Testament, who wrote as an answer:—"On this subject the Bible is almost entirely silent, but for full details see Farrar's *Life of Christ*"?—*Saturday Review*.

Profane Jokes.

"Now, boys," said the Sunday-school teacher, "our lesson to-day teaches us that if we are good while here on earth, when we die we will go to a place of everlasting bliss. But suppose we are bad, then what will become of us?" "We'll go to a place of everlasting blister," replied a small boy at the foot of the class.

"Is this Bible the latest revised edition?" asked the Imperialist. "Yes, sir," replied the book agent. "You will notice that it has an appendix containing the business cards of all the prominent manufacturers of ordnance and armor plate."—*Corning Democracy*.

Sceptic—"You still believe in Spiritualism, and yet at the séance last night the medium called up your grandmother, and she didn't know how many daughters she had." Believer—"Oh, well, grandmother's memory was getting very poor a few days before she died."—*Judge*.

"Young man," said the long, lean gentleman in the clerical clothes, "did you ever pause and think that each tick of the clock brings you another moment nearer the grave?" "I was thinking of something of that kind this morning," cheerfully replied the young man with the red necktie, "only the idea struck me that each tick brought pay-day that much closer."—*Indianapolis Press*.

"I am going to stop and look back," said Lot's wife, who was a short distance in advance. "Don't!" urged Lot. "It will go hard with you if you do!" But she disregarded his warning, with the result recorded elsewhere. "Well, I called the turn on her all right," panted Lot, struggling on.—*Chicago Tribune*.

Smith—"Brown's turned Christian Scientist." Jones—"Brown! Well, that beats me. How'd it happen?" Smith—"His mother-in-law was dangerously ill."—*Brooklyn Life*.

What is Left of Christianity?

The time was when Christianity stood for something, when there was no dispute about the faith held by Christians. The dogmas of orthodoxy were preached as Christian truths. Hell was once a burning fact, heaven an alluring reality. The devil was no myth, but an actual devil whose business of ruining souls was carried on night and day. God's wrath was a common theme of the pulpit and vicarious atonement a better way to salvation than all the roads of good deeds ever built by toiling hands and bleeding hearts. The Garden of Eden bloomed in the fields of faith as palpably as the peak of Monadnock kisses the sky, and Adam and Eve were the sculptured models of God's image carved by the divine chisel, and the whole Bible was God's word of truth to man. When we refer to these things now, we are informed that we are "behind the times"; that hell and heaven are "states of existence," not places; that the devil is only "a word to express evil"; that the Garden of Eden story is an Eastern fable; that man is "saved by character," not by faith; that it is "an insult to God to say that he gets angry"; and that "no intelligent Christian regards the Bible as all equally inspired and true," etc. With all these dogmas dead, we would like to know what there is left of Christianity.

—*Boston Investigator*.

A Motto for the Baptists.

Some few years ago, says the New York *Truthseeker*, a Mr. Aiken, an old friend of Colonel Ingersoll's, made a bad break of asking him for money for a church. A copy of the letter he sent in reply has just been found by Mrs. Farrell, the Colonel's literary executor, among his papers. Here it is, and it just fits the case:—

No. 45 Wall-street, New York, Nov. 20, 1890.

Mark M. Aiken, Esq., Paris, Ill.—My Dear Friend,—I often think of you and often speak of you, and I remember the old days with pleasure. I received your letter to-day in reference to the Baptist church. You say it is nearly completed, with the exception of the roof. I do not see why there should be any roof on a Baptist church. They believe in salvation by water, and why they should fight the "means of grace" with a roof is beyond my comprehension. Thanking you for your letter, I remain, as ever your friend,

R. G. INGERSOLL.

P.S.—Motto for the Baptist church:—
The wetter,
The better.

Science knows nothing of the origin or destiny of Nature, who or what made the sun and gave his rays their alleged power, who or what made and bestowed upon the ultimate particles of matter their wondrous power of interaction? Science does not know. The mystery, though pushed back, remains unaltered.—*Tyndall*.

Let any man once show the world that he feels
Afraid of its bark, and 'twill fly at his heels;
Let him fearlessly face it, 'twill leave him alone;
But 'twill fawn at his feet if he flings it a bone.

—*Owen Meredith*

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.): Closed during the summer.

EAST LONDON BRANCH (Milwards, 144 Whitechapel-road): 8, Half-yearly Meeting.

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

STATION-ROAD (Camberwell): 11.30, R. P. Edwards.

PECKHAM RYE: 3.15, R. P. Edwards.

BROCKWELL PARK: 3.15 and 6.30, C. Cohen.

CLERKENWELL GREEN: 11.30, C. Cohen.

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, F. A. Davies.

KILBURN (Glengall-road): 7.15, F. A. Davies.

HAMMERSMITH (outside the Lyric Opera House): 7.15, F. Schaller.

FINSBURY PARK: 3.30, A lecture.

VICTORIA PARK (near the Fountain): 3.15, F. A. Davies, "The Ethics of Secularism"; 6.15, R. P. Edwards.

MILE END WASTE: 11.30, E. Leggatt, "Religious Education in the Board Schools"; 7.15, S. E. Easton. August 15, at 8.15, R. P. Edwards.

EDMONTON (corner of Angel-road): 7, E. Pack.

WEST HAM BRANCH (Stratford Grove): 7.30, E. Leggatt.

COUNTRY.

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): Closed during the months of July and August.

FAILSWORTH SECULAR SUNDAY SCHOOL: Annual Services; H. P. Ward—2.45, "The Gospel of Secularism"; 6.30, "From Wesleyan Pulpit to Secularist Platform." Hymns, etc., by the choir. Instrumental Music by the Failsworth String Band.

LIVERPOOL: Alexandra Hall, Islington-square. Closed until September 2. Outdoor lectures at the Monument, bottom of London-road, on August 12, 19, and 26, at 7 p.m.; and on September 2, at 3 p.m.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—August 12, m., Clerkenwell Green; a. and e., Brockwell Park. 19, a. and e., Victoria Park.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, London, S.E.—August 26, m., Mile End.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall-Heath, Birmingham.—August 12, Failsworth; 19, Northampton; 26, Birmingham. September 10, Debate at Bradford; 16, Birmingham. October 1 and 2, Debate at Birmingham.

F. A. DAVIES, 65 Lion-street, S.E.—August 12, m., Hyde Park; a., Victoria Park; e., Kilburn. 19, m., Battersea; e., Hammersmith. 26, a. and e., Brockwell Park. September 2, m., Clerkenwell Green; a., Finsbury Park. 9, Hyde Park; e., Kilburn. 16, Mile End; e., Hammersmith. 23, e., Stratford.

Ingersoll's Last Lecture.

"WHAT IS RELIGION?"

An Address delivered before the American Free Religious Association, at Boston, June 2, 1899.

Freethinkers should keep a copy of this Lecture always by them. It was Ingersoll's last utterance on the subject of religion. It shows him to have been a "rank Atheist" to the very end. Moreover, it is a summary of his life's teaching, and embalms his ripest thought.

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(Continued from p. 512.)

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[Continued on p. 511. Look There!]

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