

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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Empty Churches.

With ineffable cheek, Church of England ecclesiastics just now are inquiring in nearly all their weekly journals, Why do not the masses come to church? They give despairing accounts of empty churches, of the indifference of parishioners whom they visit; of a disregard to the Church in respect of the "solemn ordinances" in which she is supposed to figure and receive fees; of an unsatisfactory number of communicants; and of a growing spirit of scepticism in all classes of society which is directly antagonistic to the Church—High, Low, or Broad.

The situation is serious—for the ecclesiastics. No one else is very much concerned. Explanations are hardly necessary, either of the indifference or the hostility. The Church rejoices in a rotten foundation—which, according to the hymn, is "Jesus Christ our Lord." It is a serious task for her, in the first instance, to establish his existence. It is still more difficult for her to substantiate all that is attributed to him in some scrappy, contradictory, and all-too-brief records which have drifted down to us in a haphazard fashion, so that faith, otherwise credulity, is necessary to their acceptance.

The Church herself, as by law established, is, at the present time, one of the rottenest institutions on the face of the globe. She lives, not in the sympathies of the people, but upon pelf, which represents originally a robbery from an older and a better Church than herself, supplemented in later centuries by whatever she should get through fashion, force, and fraud. The Church has ever been the greatest enemy of progress. From the bishops in the House of Lords, who have always supported reactionary measures, to the parson on the rural bench who would send a child to prison for stealing a turnip—they are all the same: grasping, arrogant, vindictive, and obstinately ignorant, in the sense that they will not keep themselves abreast with the times. There are bright exceptions—and one is glad to know that the number is increasing: brilliant intellects and large-hearted, broad-minded men, who, somehow or other, find themselves in "orders."

But they are hampered and interfered with in their efforts to make the Church in some way acceptable to the people. None know this better than themselves. They may be Ritualists, or men of such diverse stamp as the Rev. Carlile and the Rev. Haweis. They are in the Church, but not of it. The Rev. Dennis Hird, in quite recent times, endeavored to leaven the orthodox lump with a little common sense, but was forced to leave the Establishment—apparently in disgust. The Church is no place for any but harmless imbeciles, who seem always longing to join the Romish Church, but dare not, and men who are constantly racking their brains to make the Cross of Calvary fit in with common sense.

No wonder there is a serious dearth of candidates for ordination. Who would think of finding his life's occupation in an Establishment, torn by internecine strife over the most trumpery questions, and in the bulk of its doctrines and teachings miles behind the knowledge even of the "man in the street"?

There is an arrogance which exceeds everything in the mere name of the Establishment. Church of England, indeed! Out of the forty millions of inhabitants of this island there are probably not more than two million communicants. On the strength of this, we must have an Archbishop of Canterbury with £15,000 a year and

two palaces, and another archbishop with £10,000, and a number of bishops all with respectable incomes running into four figures. And this in connection with the Gospel of a kind of God-intoxicated Gaberlunzie, who did not know where to lay his head, and who, moreover, made poverty a virtue, and denounced riches as a curse, if not, indeed, a crime.

The *Official Church Year-Book* states that five years ago the accommodation—mark that word—provided in parish churches, chapels of ease, mission rooms, and other buildings, represented 6,778,288; for the year ending Easter, 1899, the number was 6,979,150. The increase, it will be seen, is not at all in proportion to the added population. "In any case," says a religious weekly, "bearing in mind the lack of attendance in many churches, the position religiously is sad enough. If we suppose 5,000,000 of the sittings are filled, what of the 30,000,000 or more people who are absent? We may be thankful that other communions presumably furnish an equal supply to that of our Church, but still how the question comes home to us, 'Where are the nine?' When we think of the growing religious indifference and the abounding neglect of public worship, the great and burning question of the hour is not the number of sittings, but how to secure the far better use of the existing provision and greatly increase it."

In its despair at the neglect of church attendance, the *Church Times* is moved to bitterly reproachful comments. It says: "For the most part we seem to be settling down contentedly to the expectation of seeing only a small minority of the people assemble for Divine worship. A church which holds five hundred is pulled down as useless because there are not more than eighteen hundred inhabitants in the parish. These are conveniently annexed to a neighboring parish of three thousand souls with a commodious church holding nearly eight hundred. This sort of thing has come to seem so natural as to call for no comment, unless some enthusiast avers that the doomed building might be utilised for religious purposes unconnected with its own parish.....It is a serious fact that in towns a parish where churchgoers number a tenth of the population is a marvel of successful work, while even in the country a place where they amount to a fourth of the people is an object of respectful curiosity."

Then the *Church Times* inquires: "Why does this minority go to church? A searching inquiry will reveal a state of things even more disquieting than the statistics." It then goes on to say:—

"Motives to church-going are various. In some cases they are hard to seek. There are the young men who stand or sit in listless attitudes, looking vacuously over their collars, one hand in pocket, the other holding a book, open at any convenient page. What brings them here? This kind of worshipper is not peculiar to England, but his manner varies with his country. In Germany he picks his teeth. In Italy he hears Mass with a patronising air, tilting his chair, and surveying the toes of his shoes. Again, there are the girls who whisper and giggle behind hymn-books. These also are found everywhere. In France they affect *Salut*, and sing lustily the tunes that take their fancy. Is it for the tunes that these go to church?"

Other motives for church-going are enumerated by this candid ecclesiastical print:—

"There are the superior persons who always go to church in the country for the sake of setting an example; it would be useless, of course, to do so in town, where they are lost in the crowd. There are the frankly mercenary, who go to church for what they can get, and

who stay away if the result falls short of their calculations. There are the children who go to church because they are sent, to be out of the way. Their first exercise of independence is naturally to renounce these childish things."

As to the attempt to hold daily church services, nothing could be more conspicuous than the failure which has followed in the majority of cases. The *Times* recently had a correspondence on the subject. One writer mentioned the case of an uncle of his who held daily services in his parish church, his only congregation all the year round being his own family and the man who rang the bell. He added: "It often struck me, when visiting him, what was the use of these unattended daily services." "One such devoted rector whom we wot of," says the *Church Gazette*, "was not long since asked this very question. He said it brought down blessings. 'But how far do these extend?' 'Well,' he replied, 'I suppose they extend as far as the borders of the parish.'"

One writer in a Church paper, a little time ago, pointed out that the absence from church was not appreciably remedied among the poorer classes even by the Church methods of charity and relief adopted for this very purpose. Their object is far too commonly that of attracting poor people to church by something approaching to bribery; and all is done with no sort of precaution against demoralising and pauperising the recipients, but, as it seems, solely with a view to make them church-goers, whether they like it or not.

"Thus there is widely in vogue a system of parochial doles, almshouses, or soup kitchens where benefits depend not on merit so much as on churchmanship. The doles may, perhaps, take the form of loaves to be given to the pious poor who attend the morning service. They do it for loaves, and probably fishes; but these latter are to take another form. It may be that of a yearly gift of money, or of a ton of coals, or of some blankets, or of being put into a comfortable almshouse, where the poor old souls have to go to their little chapel and patter their unwilling prayers, and where, perhaps, the elderly pauper who is to recite them as unwillingly has his extra sixpence weekly."

Yet, with all this semi-bribery, poor people will not, in the main, go to church. As for the typical independent artisan or laboring man, the very last thing that enters his head on a Sunday is to go to any gospel-shop—Established or Dissenting. There is, for him, a much-needed extra rest in bed, the Sunday paper, his pipe, perhaps a bit of digging and planting in his garden (if he has one), possibly a stroll, and a crowning solace in a good dinner (if he can get one). What cares he for church, where everything strikes him as cant and show and make-believe, from the parson in the pulpit, who utters vague platitudes, interspersed with meaningless texts, to the fashionable people in the pews, who are obviously there for any and every purpose except that of devout worship, or who, if they worship, worship they know not—perhaps care not—what.

FRANCIS NEALE.

The Freethought Twentieth Century Fund.

In opening this article I desire to call attention to what was said at the outset of the present appeal. Reference was made to the immense sums of money that were being raised by various Churches, in addition to their ordinary revenues, for the purpose of promoting the success of the Christian superstition in Great Britain. The Wesleyan Methodists alone are raising, and have nearly raised, a million pounds. Other bodies are raising smaller, but still large, amounts in proportion to their size and strength. And although the Roman Catholic Church does not imitate other Churches, it has nevertheless been amassing great sums in order to hold its own, and even to do something more; one of its projects being the erection of a vast and costly cathedral at Westminster, which is approaching its completion, and will be opened in November. These lavish preparations on the part of the Churches are a much more serious menace than many Freethinkers imagine to the

Rationalist movement in this country. The friends of Freethought were therefore told that they were "under a serious obligation to take timely and ample precautions." "Good intentions alone," it was observed, "will not suffice; nor will courage, ability, and enthusiasm, without resources. The principles of modern warfare are carried into the regions of politics and religion. Existing society is based upon property, and power accompanies wealth. The war between reason and superstition will therefore be very largely decided by the means at the command of the respective armies. This truth is fully recognised by the leaders of Christianity, and should be as fully recognised, not only by the leaders, but by all the supporters of Freethought."

What the Freethought party was asked to do, then, was to make a special effort, worthy of its principles and traditions, and adequate to the occasion. It was expected that Freethinkers would do more than see what loose cash they could spare from their pockets at the moment. Even a little self-denial was not beyond the bounds of a reasonable calculation. Up to the present, however, I must confess, personally, to a little disappointment. A few have acted nobly, with spirit and promptitude; and I thank them, in the name of the cause, for which I have some right to speak. But the great majority of those who can afford to give to this Fund have remained silent and inactive. Perhaps they are only waiting, and will be heard from presently. I earnestly hope so. At the same time, I beg them not to wait too long. Something is due to me and my colleagues, who are carrying on, amidst many difficulties, and not too many encouragements, the work of our movement. Schooled as we are by long and hard experience, we are still but human, and the vigor of our efforts *must* depend to some extent upon the spirit which prevails amongst our constituents. If they are slack, careless, or apathetic, we are deprived of a valuable stimulus to exertion.

No definite figure was aimed at or suggested in the beginning, but I now say, without the slightest hesitation, that our party ought to raise at least £1,000 for this Fund. That amount is not colossal, but it will put fresh life into our operations; for a very little money has always been made to go a very long way in our organisation and propaganda.

I may add that I have had a special meeting of the N. S. S. Executive summoned to consider some plans of action which I have long had in mind, and which may be put into operation during the approaching winter. These plans will be publicly explained after they are discussed and (I trust) adopted.

Meanwhile I appeal to Freethinkers who can afford to give something—and there are hundreds of them—to send me promises and donations, to be redeemed some time before the close of the present year. It would be pleasant to have a good list of fresh donors in next week's *Freethinker*.

Mr. John Downing, who has generously promised £200 towards this Fund, wishes at the same time to do honor to the memory of glorious John Milton, whose *Areopagitica* is one of the great landmarks in the literature of liberty. A piece of writing which is so dear to such a Freethinker deserves special attention, and I propose to notice it, and his letter about it, in an early issue of this journal; in particular relation to a beautiful little pocket edition of this immortal masterpiece, which has just been included in the *Temple Classics*. In the interim, however, I may inquire if there is not another English Freethinker who will put a handsome donation against the name of William Shakespeare. Is there a Scottish Freethinker who will celebrate in the same way the splendid name of Robert Burns?

Mr. Downing suggests that a list of contributors to this Twentieth Century Fund should be printed on a sheet, with quotations under it about "The Sacredness of Freethought" from Copernicus, Galileo, Buckle, and other lights of progress. This would, he thinks, lift the Sacred Cause out of the domain of party, and show that our existence as a free people depends on the prevalence, the paramount existence, of "Freethought." Mr. Downing's suggestion is one that may well be adopted. It is in contemplation to issue sheets for the collection of subscriptions to this Fund.

Mr. George Anderson, whose letter respecting the

necessity of suitable headquarters for Freethought in London has already been dealt with, has forwarded another letter to the N. S. S. Secretary. He says:—

"You are trying to raise a Fund for something, but for what is not stated. This keeps me from subscribing. In addition to a proposition I made some weeks ago, there are other objects to which I would subscribe. (1) To give an honorarium to the President on account of the expenditure he has made for a number of years in conducting the Society. (2) To pay lecturers for advocating our principles, especially in breaking up new ground, according to the opinion of the Council. (3) To provide lecturers with literature to be given away, as well as that to be sold and accounted for. I have read of the President sending lecturers into the provinces at his own expense. I think the Society should recoup him for this, and will do so if it is properly put before them. I think that others will subscribe as well as I would if they knew what for. When I know how the subscriptions are to be applied, I will in all probability subscribe."

Mr. Anderson may take it from me that the objects he specifies will certainly be included in our plans for the expenditure of this Fund, as they are part of the inevitable work of our movement. If he does not consider my assurance sufficient, I shall be happy to give him the assurance of the whole Executive, after the special meeting already referred to; that is to say, in the course of next week. Personally, however, I do not seek or desire any compensation for past losses. I am perfectly satisfied, at least for the present, with the arrangement made by the Secular Society, Limited. Seeing that some provision was necessary, from some source or other, the Board resolved a few months ago to pay me an Honorarium of £50 a year, and another £50 for expenses. There are many expenses attending my office which cannot easily be booked. For ten years I never charged a penny on this account, not even for a postage stamp. But let the dead past bury its dead. These expenses are now provided for legitimately. And I certainly do not wish the Twentieth Century Fund to bring me any pecuniary advantage. I am not appealing in any way for myself, but for the work, the interests, the honor of the Freethought party.

The Board of the Secular Society, Limited, desires me to explain to our party why it would be perilous to purchase or build a Hall in London on the commercial basis of a Company with share capital. I have no room to do this in the present article, but I will deal with the subject next week. It is a matter of great and grave importance.

In conclusion, I desire all my readers to bear in mind that the first week in October is "Shilling Week." During that period I expect a large number of them to send me one shilling, or more, towards this Twentieth Century Fund. It will be an opportunity for the "rank and file" to contribute. Each may only give a little, but in the multitude of subscribers there is wealth.

G. W. FOOTE.

"Quo Vadis?"

WHEN *The Sign of the Cross* was produced at the Lyric Theatre, some critics were bold enough to suggest a certain resemblance between that play and a Polish novel entitled *Quo Vadis*?* It was alleged that the main incidents were identical, and that the plots differed in no vital particular. This imputation of plagiarism was perhaps unfair. Great minds sometimes run in similar channels; and there seems no reason why Wilson Barrett and Henryk Sienkiewicz—neither of whom has any title to literary greatness—may not similarly have found themselves working at each other's elbow.

About the beginning of last May, Mr. Whitney presented Strange's adaptation of *Quo Vadis*? at the Adelphi, where it ran for a few nights only. After some legal preliminaries, Mr. Barrett arranged to bring out a rendering of his own. It is to this version, lately presented at the Theatre Metropole, that the following remarks apply.

Quo Vadis? has a cast of twenty-seven characters, Pagans and Christians—to say nothing of the "slaves,

gladiators, nobles, lictors, guards, citizens, etc." It has four acts, comprising thirteen different scenes. Mr. Barrett (or Mr. Barrett's manager) has something of Kiralfy's spectacular genius, and from this point of view the play is a complete success.

The "plot" is briefly thus. Vinicius, nephew of Petronius, falls in love with Lygia, a Christian hostage. Poppœa, Empress of Rome, conceives a passion for Vinicius, and a corresponding hatred for Lygia. Petronius, the *Elegantia Arbitrator*,* has great influence with Nero, and uses it on Lygia's behalf. Lygia (with the Christians generally) is subject to Nero's persecution, from which she is effectively rescued, chiefly through the agency of the *Arbitrator*. In the end, Petronius loses favor at Court, and dies by his own hand.

Mr. Barrett's great mistake is his literary affectation. He obviously thinks himself a stylist, and, inspired by this delusion, flings the most tawdry commonplaces across the footlights with an air of profound wisdom. In *Quo Vadis*? as in former plays, he affects a Scriptural style. His method of accomplishing this is extremely simple. All you have to do is to write your drama in *fin-de-siècle* English, and then insert a number of thees, thous, hasts, and whithers in place of their modern equivalents. It is true that the method has disadvantages. The English idiom sometimes gets curiously mixed in a medley of archaisms. A Roman general refers to "out-flanking" an enemy. Poppœa so forgets her environment as to exclaim: "You cannot see me to advantage!" And the Christian heroine is so dead to anachronism that she springs this astounding remark upon Petronius: "Nothing has ever done what this little emblem has accomplished." Fancy such a sentence in the Bible! And imagine the "accomplishments" of the Cross thus familiarly referred to in the first century after Christ!

There is a strong family likeness between this play and *The Sign of the Cross*. The playwright has not allowed a too rigid adherence to the incidents of Sienkiewicz's novel to prevent the introduction of his own favorite effects. We again have the Neronic revels—wherein the chorus girls have to look as wicked as possible; and the secret gathering of Christians—wherein the same ladies are required to appear as patterns of virtue. Once more the "brethren" indulge in un-Christlike choruses, till their interruption and arrest by Roman guards. Then there is the agony business in the dungeons of the arena, where they cackle piously within, while the supers howl stridently in the wings "without."

The first act finishes with a characteristic Barrettian *tableau*. An order from Nero requires Lygia to leave her friends, and be confined within the imperial walls. Amid a scene of heartbreaking sorrow she advances to the footlights, casts her eyes devoutly upward, and exclaims: "He whom I serve will stand by me and protect me—even in the palace of Cæsar!" And, while the curtain was rung down to the cheers of an excited audience, I was thinking how particularly good that "stand by" was.

The leading character of Petronius is played with rare skill by Mr. Millward. He is the perfect type of old Rome—dignified, courageous, and honorable; and even the hot partisanship of Mr. Barrett cannot make the Christians look otherwise than contemptible by contrast. Like the Devil in *Paradise Lost*, Petronius defeats the author's purpose, and remains the one heroic, living figure in the piece. Mr. Strange, in his version at the Adelphi, resisted an obvious temptation. But, alas, I know Mr. Barrett; and throughout the play I am haunted by the consciousness that in the end the *Arbitrator* will turn Christian and become commonplace.

Did a gleam of artistic insight save Mr. Barrett from so wretched a consummation? As a matter of fact, Petronius does not, in actual practice, become a convert. The thing, however, is hinted; and in this way, apparently, the playwright spares his conscience. Petronius is dying; the poison-cup is emptied; and in his last utterance he gasps these words: "What said those Christians? Another life—better—brighter—!" And upon this crowning absurdity—the assumption that the idea of a future life was unknown to Paganism—the curtain falls.

* "Whither goest thou?"

* Arbitrator of Fashion.

I have indicated that the *Quo Vadis?* Christians are somewhat colorless. They are, indeed, the most melancholy crowd of invertebrates ever presented upon a stage. By juxtaposition with the virile Pagans they degenerate into shadows. Mr. Barrett evidently recognises how he is handicapped in this respect; and yet he cannot entirely throw the non-resisting, meek-and-mild business overboard. So *en revanche* he introduces one Ursus, a Christian "strong man," whose muscles, by the way, are rather too obviously unreal. This pious Hercules is a perfect miracle of strength, and he despatches two Roman gladiators with little more than a glance. He is an extremely combative, not to say quarrelsome, individual; and all without prejudice to his orthodoxy. The presumed Christian audience at the Metropole evidently admired him very much. In the *grand tableau*, where he is represented twisting the neck of an enormous bull, the applause was deafening, and the curtain had to be raised a dozen times. This is the sort of thing that appeals to up-to-date Christians. But when, on another occasion, the newly converted Vinicius wishes to resist the Roman guards, and the saintly Crispus reminds him that his first religious duty is to submit, there is no applause. It is not heroic, but it is indisputably Christian; and what is indisputably Christian is correspondingly obnoxious to popular sentiment.

The familiarity with Christ's teachings which so strangely distinguished the Pagans of Mr. Barrett's former play* is equally noticeable in *Quo Vadis?* "You are commanded to love and be merciful," remarks Vinicius to the too frigid Lygia. Like Marcus Superbus, he succumbs simultaneously to her beauty and her religion. But in *The Sign of the Cross* the Prefect is introspective. "Is it her faith that makes her thus beautiful? or doth she beautify her faith?" he asks. Vinicius is much more artless. "Art thou a Christian?" demands a friend. Vinicius replies in the negative; then adds, with delicious *naïveté*, "But soon may be!" There is another "convert" among the subordinate characters. He is a Roman jailer, and has been much affected by the fortitude of Christian prisoners. He only retains his position in the Emperor's service because imprisonment and torture of Christians are good for the progress of their creed! "Nero has not destroyed Christianity—he has built it!" declares this far-sighted warder of the seventh decade.†

Whatever popularity may be gained by *Quo Vadis?* will not be due to skilful construction or artistic insight. Its spectacular effects may save it from entire failure. But the chief element of success in the play is its appeal to patriotism. On the face of it there seems something absurd in the discovery of such an element in a work dealing with ancient times and foreign people. But the Englishman is commonly taught to identify his country with his creed. When you exalt Christianity, you pander to his national pride. It is nothing that Mr. Barrett's Christians are all foreigners. To the Englishman they are compatriots. They represent his country's religion, which he honestly believes responsible for his country's greatness. He cheers the downfall of Paganism for intrinsically the same reason that he celebrated the capture of Cronje. Consciously or otherwise, the "religious play" evokes that racial animosity which is the chief constituent of modern "patriotism."

E. R. W.

The Universality of Religion: What is it Worth?

WHAT is called by one prominent writer "the universal testimony of the human consciousness to the certitude of religious truth" is a favorite plea among all orders of religious advocacy. From the street-corner evangelist, whose mental condition is far more pathological than normal, to the highly-placed and highly-paid professor, who veils his general disbelief in religious doctrines by emphasising his special disbelief in a too complete trust in human reason, there is the same triumphant appeal to the universality of religious beliefs among mankind. So far as it goes, this universality is

a fact. That the majority of people, past and present, have indulged in some form of religious belief is a statement that none will be inclined to deny, however differently they may interpret the phenomena. The mere existence of religious beliefs is indisputable; their influence on human affairs is unmistakable; but whether these beliefs are solidly based on the essential facts of human nature, whether their influence has been universally for good, with the relative strength of these beliefs in uncivilised and civilised times, are questions to which the religious advocate seldom addresses himself, and beside which their mere universality is of trifling importance.

For, to the scientific student, this universality of religious beliefs is not only not surprising, but, if it were otherwise, much of our present reading of primitive human history would be altogether at fault. We have long outgrown the belief that religions are manufactured articles, designed with an eye to promoting the interests of priests and kings—although such a view of the matter was far more frequently attributed by religious advocates to their critics than it was held by the critics themselves. To us religious beliefs are natural and inevitable expressions of mental culture at one stage of human development. They are as natural to the childhood of the race as are measles or scarlet fever to the infancy of the individual. The human mind, whether it be civilised or uncivilised, expresses the same general laws in its phenomena; and exactly the same mental processes that lead a modern scientist to associate the movements of the planets with the same force that governs the fall of a stone, led our primitive ancestors to read their own will and intelligence into nature at large, and afterwards to tremble before and worship the creations of their own imagination. We do not reason *differently* to uncivilised people; we have only learned to group our experiences more accurately, and not place in the same class things that have no relation to each other. Consequently, all that this universality of religious beliefs means is that, as the human mind is everywhere fundamentally alike, the same general conclusions have always been drawn from the same general conditions. Were it otherwise, the uniformity of mental operations would be non-existent and a science of mind impossible.

One might be inclined to place more reliance upon the argument from the universality of religious beliefs if these were always, or even generally, adopted by people when they had reached years of mental maturity. But this is far from being the case. Among a civilised people religious beliefs are never adopted as the result of knowledge or reflection. They find themselves in possession of these beliefs, and reason on them afterwards. Under all the specious excuses put forward by men and women *why* they retain their religion lies the basal fact that it was impressed upon them before they were old enough to intelligently question its teaching. As a prominent clergyman recently remarked, during the course of a sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral:—

"Consider for a moment by virtue of what reasons do the mass of Jews and Christians believe in such a Being (God). Is it by virtue of those observations of nature or those philosophical disquisitions by which the being and nature of God have been defended and attempted to be proved? As a matter of fact, there are not many persons who have read such arguments, or who are competent to judge of their validity..... They are not, and never have been, the actual basis and foundation of the faith of the mass of believers. The simple fact of the case is this: that men and women have had put before them from their earliest years certain messages from God..... These are, from the first, sounding in the ears of children, of the young, and of the old, of the well-instructed and of the imperfectly-instructed, and they command allegiance."

Exactly. All this amounts to is an admission of the truth of what has been so often said in these columns—namely, that people take their religious beliefs as they take the cut of their clothes—from the society to which they happen to belong, with the difference that, while a certain amount of nonconformity in the matter of dress or food is permitted or expected, nonconformity in matters of religious belief has been usually treated as the gravest of crimes. It is puzzling to see, however, after Dr. Wace's admission, what value is left in the argument from general testimony.

* See *The Sign of the Cross*, by G. W. Foote. † A. D. 64.

But whatever satisfaction any religionist may derive from the fact that the majority hold some kind of religion—and to the average individual there is a sheep-like feeling of satisfaction in the feeling that he is one of a crowd—this feeling might be weakened by another consideration that is equally patent—that is, that the more civilised a people become, the less hold has religion upon them. Among savages the belief in supernaturalism is pretty general. The few exceptions that were thought to exist have been shown to be not such, the confusion arising from investigators either not inquiring deeply enough or else restricting the meaning of religion to its higher and later manifestations. Savage life presents us with the picture of tribes of people whose lives are absolutely governed by superstitions of some form or other. And every step of their subsequent development involves a repudiation of some portion of their religious beliefs. The planting of crops, the breeding of cattle, the building of boats, the first faltering steps that man takes in any and all of the arts and sciences, involve a closer study of the natural properties of things, and a consequent diminution of the area over which supernaturalism rules. In the history of any single nation, as in the history of the race at large, to become civilised is to become dereligionised; and the more complete the process of civilisation becomes, the greater the amount of unbelief existing. The most advanced nations of the world to-day are not, as is often said, the most Christian; they are the least so. Russia and Spain are far more religious than either Great Britain, the United States, France, or Germany, and they are less advanced in the arts of civilisation. It is in the most advanced countries that we find scepticism strongest; for scepticism is, as Buckle said, not the result of progress, but its essential condition.

So that, in place of the formula that the truth of religion is demonstrated by its universality, we may, with the historic process in our mind's eye, lay down the counter proposition, that the whole development of the race is a march from Theism in the direction of practical Atheism. If man is religious in the earlier stages of his history, he becomes less so in his later phases. Such religion as he possesses now is not a product of present-day knowledge, but a legacy from a less civilised phase of existence. As man carries in his physical structures rudimentary organs that are to the scientist unmistakable evidences of his animal origin, so he carries in his emotional and intellectual nature traces of irrational and savage beliefs. And just as these physical structures have dwindled owing to disuse, so religious beliefs have been, and are, steadily losing their force in the face of developing knowledge.

A brief glance at any, or all, of the sciences will demonstrate this. There is no science that has been so closely intertwined with religious beliefs as has been astronomy. Not merely in the purely savage state, where the stars and planets are frequently regarded as actually living beings, but among comparatively advanced people, a close relationship existed. To-day there is no science that is so free from supernaturalism. The brilliant generalisations of Kepler, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Laplace, have for ever reduced all astronomical phenomena to problems of physics. Geology, because a much younger science than astronomy, was never so completely theologised; but the reduction of the causes of all geologic phenomena to purely unconscious forces has wiped out of modern text-books the many references to the power and majesty of Deity that made earlier ones ridiculous. Religious beliefs never linger long where knowledge is in any degree exact; always and everywhere the extent to which man has invoked God to account for what he saw was in exact proportion to his ignorance concerning it.

In the sciences that deal specifically with living beings theology has lingered longer, because here the phenomena are much more complex, the causes are more obscure, and exact knowledge is not so easily reached. We do not know the exact manner in which life originated, although there exists no doubt, to a really scientific mind, that the distinction between the living and the non-living is merely a convenient one, and that between the two great classes of facts there is no real break. We do not know the exact relation between molecular movements in the brain and nervous structure

and thought, although here again there can be little doubt that the relation between the two is that of organ and function. Still, so long as our knowledge is not exact on these points, it will always give a chance for the religionist to use the ignorance of science as the warranty for his own beliefs—a chance that he is never slow to avail himself of. To the thoroughly religious mind, a word is usually as good as an explanation; and the word "God"—that asylum of ignorance, to use Spinoza's phrase—may continue to do duty in these departments until a more complete development drives it from these, as it has been driven from others.

Apart, therefore, from the question of whether the decline of religion is to be hailed with acclamation or faced with fear, its existence is a demonstrable fact. The gods grow fewer in number, poorer in quality, and more limited in their jurisdiction. If they are not, like Alexander, sighing for more worlds to conquer, they are at least dying for want of a dominion to rule over. A king without a throne is a nonentity. A God that has no hand in the regulating of the world is an absurdity; and, although we may not perceive the ridiculous nature of such a deity at once, it forces itself on public attention sooner or later. To the argument, then, that the vast majority of people always have believed in religion, we need only point to the conditions that gave religion birth. To those who plead that they do so in a decreasing measure. The growth of the race is from supernaturalism to naturalism. The Theist, therefore, is not merely combatting an argument; he is fighting and seeking to reverse the whole process of mental evolution.

C. COHEN.

The National Secular Society.

REPORT of Executive meeting held at 1 Stationer's Hall Court, on Thursday, August 30; the President, Mr. G. W. Foote, in the chair. There were also present: Messrs. E. Bator, C. Cohen, J. Cooper, W. Heaford, W. Leate, A. B. Moss, B. Munton, J. Neate, E. W. Quay, V. Roger, H. J. Stace, T. Shore, F. Schaller, T. Thurlow, G. J. Warren, C. Watts, T. Wilmot.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed. Cash statement received and adopted.

On behalf of the Sub-Committee appointed to make arrangements for the Conference re Secular Education, Mr. Cohen reported the result of his attendance at the Metropolitan Radical Federation, where he was most favorably received, and three delegates were elected. The Executive then proceeded to elect its own delegates—namely, Messrs. G. W. Foote, A. B. Moss, C. Watts, W. Heaford, C. Cohen, T. Shore, and G. J. Warren.

The following resolution was then carried unanimously: "That this Executive is of opinion that definite and special 'Secular Education' candidates, giving it first place in their program, should be found to contest the approaching London School Board elections."

The Delegation to the Paris Congress was next discussed. Mr. Foote informed the meeting that pressure of business would keep him in London, and Mr. Heaford would therefore be the only delegate. Mr. Roger said he was going to Paris himself, and he was asked to represent the Society with Mr. Heaford, to which he consented.

The President indicated a scheme for a six months' experiment in lecture work, fuller details of which he promised to lay before a special meeting to be held on Thursday, September 13. The meeting then adjourned.

EDITH M. VANCE, Secretary.

Religious "Corner" Men.

WHEN the curtain rises upon a group of "nigger" minstrels they are generally found to be seated in a semi-circle. Somewhat similar is the order with the religious groups who monopolise the street corners on Sunday evenings, only for real arrant nonsense the latter persons describe a whole circle. One walks out into the Sabbath evening and passes band upon band of these shouting, gesticulating pilgrims—"Yus, once I was a miserable sinner" at one corner, and we know that the professional convert has been turned on. As we go on we hear sundry remarks concerning "Lamb," which gives us pleasant memory of mint sauce and green peas. Further along the air is quite sulphurous as a gentleman in red breathes forth threats of damnation, hell fire, and other portions of the gospel of love. One individual, though, fairly gave the game away. Pointing to an adjacent public-house, he exclaimed: "There lies the road to destruction," and he turned round and pointed to his church, "Come to Jesus and be saved." Business is business.

FRANK HALL.

Acid Drops.

MR. JOB WILLIAMS has been writing to the papers against the action of the London County Council in regard to the Public Parks under its control. It seems to us, however, that he and his friends have a very slender grievance. Christians have had their own way in nearly everything so long that they cannot understand being placed under restraint. Mr. Williams forgets that the primary purpose of the Parks is recreation. It is simply impossible to let anybody and everybody sell things and distribute printed matter in such places. Tradesmen would soon be there with advertisements, and the ground would be littered with handbills. It seems to us that the County Council has effected a reasonable compromise. A place in each Park is set aside for public meetings, and within the limits of these meetings the sale of literature is permitted. True, the County Council exacts that copies of the literature sold shall be deposited at its office, and this is called a "censorship." But some sort of precaution seems necessary, and it will be time to cry out when this theoretical censorship becomes a practical hindrance to freedom. Up to the present we have not heard of any case of interference.

With regard to collections, the County Council has made another sensible regulation. They may be made at meetings, providing they are not taken up by and for individuals. This has had the effect of clearing the Parks of a number of adventurers, who went there merely to pass round the hat for themselves, and had become a perfect nuisance. A few loud-mouthed and vile-tongued Christian Evidence fellows, unconnected with any real organisation, have disappeared since they were unable to "make a bit."

Citizens cannot claim precisely the same rights in a public place that they exercise in their private residences, meeting-houses, or places of business. There must be some sort of regulation, or the fools, cranks, fanatics, and self-seekers make life unbearable for the mass of sound and decent people. All that can be fairly stipulated is that the regulations shall be as few as possible, and that they shall be strictly impartial, which they certainly are under the London County Council.

"We shall meet in heaven," said Mrs. Weston, of Tooting, to her husband, after drinking poison, which caused her death and necessitated an inquest, resulting in the usual verdict of "temporary insanity." It is generally the cracked people who are so cocksure about these distant foregatherings.

The portrait of Pope Innocent X. by Velasquez is considered by Professor Friedrich Wagner as the best portrait in the world. He describes it as "really fearful in its truthful presentation of the characteristics of the sitter." "The artist has produced," he says, "so astonishing a combination of astuteness, of dignity, and of meanness." This proves that Velasquez was a great reader of men, but it hardly proves that Pope Innocent X. was a first-class representative of a God of infinite wisdom and goodness.

The Oxford Mission to Calcutta, which originated with the Cowley Fathers, began in a small way, but has now a magnificent house of its own in the centre of the student quarter of the city. There is a complete system of education for natives, with special boarding schools, and a college for resident students. But there seems to be a great paucity of converts. "From time to time," says the official record, "at the rate at present of one or two a year, students do come forward to make a public profession of the Christian faith." One or two a year! What a catch! At this rate it will take millions of years to convert the people of India. And long before that Christianity will be forgotten.

That very lively weekly journal, the *Topical Times*, has some editorial remarks in its latest issue on the missionary question. "Why not," it asks, "put an end once and for all to the attempts that are being made to ram Christianity down the throats of Chinamen. It is not good for them, and it is not good for Christianity. After all, what we want is to cultivate friendly relations with China, and to trade with her. But there is no need to include our religion among the articles exported; more particularly as the supply for home consumption seems dangerously short."

As a sort of set-off to the current criticism of Chinese and other foreign missions, some marvellous yarns are now being told by mission supporters. In face of all the facts to the contrary, we are still assured that the Chinese, Mohammedans, Japanese, and Hindoos are yearning for "Christ and him crucified." Here is a specimen yarn from the *Christian Herald*: "A poor old woman in China, who had been converted, but who seemed unwilling to be baptised, was asked why she hesitated. 'Why,' she replied, with tears running down her cheeks, 'you know that Jesus said to his disciples: "Go ye unto all the world and preach the Gospel to every

creature." Now, I am an old woman, nearly seventy years of age, and almost blind. I can tell my husband about Jesus Christ, and I can tell my son, and his wife, when he has one; I am willing to speak to my neighbors, and perhaps I can go to one or two villages; but I can never go to all the world. Now, do you think he will let me call myself a disciple if I can do no better than that?"

The chances are that this silly story is a pure invention. By the way, there is always one little touch introduced in these tales of so-called conversions. Whether it is a heathen who is being rescued from his blindness or a hardened "infidel" who is about to decide for Christ, we always find that "the tears ran down his cheeks." We don't find people outside these pious anecdotes so readily given to turning on the eye-water, and streams of it too. But, somehow, no story of conversion seems complete without a copious flow of tears either of repentance or of joy.

When Nonconformist ministers from Wales go on a few weeks' or months' tour through the United States, the comment on their visit is that they are going to qualify themselves for the title of "D.D." So says a religious weekly, which in this instance may probably be relied on. The comment, with its veiled sarcasm, might also be applied to Nonconformist ministers who from other parts of the British Isles go a-touring in the States and return full-fledged "D.D.s." Our American cousins are singularly generous in the bestowal of these distinctions. If a little more discrimination were exercised, there would hardly be the crowd of sky-piloting ignoramuses who now go flaunting about as the "Rev. Dr." This or the "Rev. Dr." That.

An American journal says that a certain religious gentleman in Chicago rents a pew for £600, and then sub-lets half of it for a sum a trifle in advance of £600. The rent named seems a little "stiff" for a pew; but, apart from that, the statement is not incredible. We have met this kind of Christian before.

A very nice and gentle curate went to a Yorkshire parish where the parishioners bred horses, and sometimes raced them. He was asked to invite the prayers of the congregation for Lucy Grey. He did so. They prayed three Sundays for "Lucy Grey." On the fourth the clerk told the curate he need not do it any more. "Why?" said the curate; "is she dead?" "No," answered the clerk; "she's won the steeple-chase." The curate became quite a power in the parish.

The Ballet Girls' Mission had a tea meeting in the Congregational Chapel, Leicester Square, the other day. It is specially described in the *Examiner*. After tea the assembled young ladies began the proceedings by singing "Safe in the arms of Jesus." That is well; he is sufficiently far off. Heaven is a long way from the side wings and the stage door. Still, the fair damsels may be advised to fight shy of the Holy Ghost, who once swooped down on a married woman.

Perhaps the Lord was sleeping. A monastery and church at the Polish Lourdes were recently destroyed by fire caused by fireworks discharged in connection with the encampment of 40,000 pilgrims. Nine firemen and five pilgrims were killed, and eighty persons were injured.

The Rev. H. R. Haweis, the outspoken incumbent of St. James's, Marylebone, has been "going it rather strong" on God's Holy Word. In a recent discourse at Margate he said that many people were not happy about the Bible; the clergy were not happy, and children asked awkward questions which mothers did not know how to answer. Intelligent men also asked questions. References were here made to the creation of the world in six days, to Noah's Ark, to the standing still of the sun, to Jonah and the whale. Explanations, Mr. Haweis continued, were attempted by the clergy and others which were not satisfactory. Then was all the Bible fit to be read? Surely not. There were passages in Genesis and Ezekiel wholly unsuitable. And as to the imprecatory Psalms, he declined to read them in his church. Is the Bible everywhere a reliable guide in morals? How about polygamy, slavery, killing those who killed others by mistake? There were, doubtless, in the Old Testament many things not true, not fit to be publicly read, and not good as a guide in morals. It was useless to try to hush up these matters; they had to be faced.

Verbal inspiration, Mr. Haweis went on to say, was surely a myth. How foolish it was to give oneself away to the Bible objector, as we must do if we advocate verbal inspiration. He did not maintain the Bible to be absolutely the Word of God, but he slightly altered the phrase, and he did say the Word of God was in the Bible; and, instead of speaking of an inspired history, he preferred to say the Bible was the history of an inspired people.

That the Jews were an "inspired people" is just as much open to dispute as that their history is inspired, and Mr.

Haweis disposes of the latter notion almost as effectively as Thomas Paine did over a century ago, and with very much the same kind of arguments. Truly, the world moves.

Believers who lightly discard the notion of a personal Devil will not find much support in the *Methodist Times*. A work has just been published on *How Much is Left of the Old Doctrine?* by Washington Gladden. That writer says the idea of a personal Devil was unknown to the Hebrews of ante-exile days. The belief is of Persian origin, and was borrowed by the Israelites during the exile. "Jesus found this conception in the minds of the people. He did not antagonise it, but accommodated his teachings to it."

Upon this absurd evasion the *Methodist Times* observes: "The explanation really means that Jesus accommodated His teachings to what He must have known was a heathen superstition and a lie"—a supposition the *M. T.* resolutely declines to accept.

The following curious advertisement is from an East Anglian paper: "Wanted, a steady man to look after a garden and milk a cow who has a good voice and is accustomed to sing in the choir."

Another remarkable advertisement is that which appeared in the *Church Times* the other day. It was from a cleric desiring work. Of his "views" nothing was said; perhaps he was not particular on this point. But he insisted that there should be trout-fishing in the neighborhood, and went so far as to add "brown trout preferred."

Magistrates, like other official persons, are apt to exceed their proper duties. One of their common weaknesses is to air their opinions on various outside questions, as though speaking from the accidental altitude of the bench gave an extra importance to the views they happen to entertain. When will these gentlemen learn that their business is to administer the law as they find it, and that their individual notions as to the changes that should be made in the law by Parliament are of no more authority or value than those of any other citizens? "Stick to your last" is good advice to a cobbler; and, metaphorically, it is good advice to the members of every other trade or profession—including magistrates, and even judges.

Mr. Plowden, the Marlborough-street Police Court magistrate, recently had before him the case of George Carroll, a clerk, residing in Tichborne-row, Edgware-road, who was charged with "conducting a meeting otherwise than in a decent and orderly manner in Hyde Park." He appears to have used some vigorous language against Roman Catholicism, and thus to have caused a "disturbance." But his language was not "indecent," and it was no stronger than the language that may frequently be heard from the lips of Protestant speakers at very "respectable" meetings. Indeed, it was nothing to the language used by the foremost Protestant controversialists two or three hundred years ago. "That damnable cursed holy water" is, perhaps, not an elegant expression; but "damnable" and "cursed" are both good Biblical words, which have been, and still are, frequently in the mouths of priests. But what in the captain is a choleric word is in the soldier flat blasphemy; so the indignant magistrate sentenced the culprit to pay a fine of forty shillings, or to go to prison for fourteen days.

In passing this sentence upon the Hyde Park "disturber" of the Catholic peace, Mr. Plowden was moved by the spirit to deliver a homily on public speaking in the parks. We do not wish to misrepresent him, and we therefore give his remarks *in extenso*, as reported in the next morning's newspapers:—"Many people would like to see all public speaking stopped as liable to become a very great nuisance. Persons are allowed at present by law to make speeches in the parks, but they must do so according to the rules, one of which is that no assembly of persons is permitted unless conducted in a decent and orderly manner. I think you probably owe it to the judgment and forbearance of the police that you escaped last night with a whole skin, and certainly if the people you were addressing and those you were insulting by the offensive caricaturing of the Catholic faith had lost patience with you, and laid hands on you and taken you to a pump, or otherwise assaulted you, I do not think anyone would be found to pity you. People like you, who make addresses of this kind simply to pander to their own vanity, deserve no pity. It is a scandalous thing that any man with a grain of common sense should attack religion in a public park, without knowing the components of his audience, merely to satisfy his own vanity. It is a perfect miracle breaches of the peace are not more frequent. I hope to see the day when all this kind of speaking in the park will become contrary to law."

There is a great deal of nonsense in this gratuitous sermon. It was ridiculous to dwell upon the prisoner's "vanity." Mr. Plowden had never seen him before, and could not possibly know all his motives. It should have occurred to him that,

although George Carroll was not a finished orator, or even a discreet speaker, he might nevertheless be animated by a perfectly sincere opposition to the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Whether he "caricatured" the "Catholic Faith"—as the magistrate put it—is a matter of opinion; and, in any case, there is no such crime known at present to the law of England. It should also have occurred to the magistrate that he of all men, by virtue of his office, was one of the last persons to suggest the propriety of putting a controversialist under the pump, or assaulting him in a still more dangerous manner. Finally, we may observe that Mr. Plowden's hope to see all public addresses on religion stopped by the law, while it shows him to be a bigot, is of no particular importance to the public. His individual opinion only counts as he is a member of the general community, with a vote in the election of members of Parliament. When he goes to the ballot box, he goes, not as a magistrate, but as a citizen. And the man who votes immediately before him, or immediately after him, may be one of the very Hyde Park orators whom he finds so obnoxious.

There are squeamish, timid, or bilious persons who want "liberty" without paying its price. When they see or hear anything they dislike they call for the police. They forget that liberty presupposes variety, and that they differ from others precisely as much as others differ from them. Liberty is the policy of live and let live. No doubt it has some disadvantages. If you let all men speak, some men will speak nonsense; and if you let all men have razors, some men will cut throats. But no one has yet discovered any good without a mixture of evil. What we have to go by is the balance of advantage; and the balance is decisive in favor of liberty against compulsion. Liberty is the first condition of accurate thinking and real virtue; it is the sole protection of truth and the only safe guarantee of progress.

Theodore Roosevelt, the Republican candidate for the Vice-Presidency of the United States, has called Thomas Paine "a filthy little Atheist." Thomas Paine was not filthy, he was not little, and he was not an Atheist. With those exceptions, the description is fairly accurate.

Perhaps it is too much to expect consistency in a bishop. Though whether we expect it or not, the fact remains that we don't get it. Take the following glaring example: Recently the Bishop of London declared that he could not give his livings to elderly curates, age being a disqualification. Yet he did not hesitate to make Bishop Barry, who is seventy-four years of age, Bishop-Suffragan for West London. And he has given the rich and important living of St. James's, Piccadilly, to an already beneficed clergyman who is nearly seventy years of age. How is it possible to reconcile the prelatial declaration of policy with the prelatial performance?

A well-known Sydney clergyman has been telling a good story against himself. While preaching recently an extemporaneous sermon, he had occasion to refer to the question of miracles. Some people, he said, had a difficulty in believing some of the miraculous stories of the Bible, as, for example, the speaking of Balaam's ass to his master. Looking solemnly at the congregation, he suddenly clinched his contention with the remark: "Why should not God make an ass to speak—he made me to speak?"

An amusing illustration of the growing demand for athletic clergymen was recently given by a country curate, who received notice to quit because, though unexceptionable in other respects, his vicar declared that "what this parish really needs is a good fast bowler, with a break from the off."

A Freethinker at the front in South Africa, writing to a Newcastle-on-Tyne friend who has sent him this journal, says: "I am quite elated with your kindness in sending me the *Freethinker*, which I am reading with avidity. De Wett burnt a mail of letters, etc., lately, and I presume some of mine are among the ill-fated ones.....Out here at most stations of any consequence are large green tents, where Christianity is preached; and at times they have experience evenings, when all the silly, puerile, and most foolish language of illiterate puppets can be heard. They also have visits of preachers from the Cape. One, a Baptist, used the old stock-in-trade bosh that the infidels had never built a hospital. I could have heckled him, I felt so touched. Another idiot, at the Bloemfontein chapel, addressed the children, and took for his text eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and if thy right hand offend thee cut it off. The blatant jackass!.....The first day [at Paardeberg] we made a charge from the river bed, but the effort was futile, the men falling rapidly, and the balls coming on to us like hail. I was within two yards of the first five men killed and wounded. The first got shot clean through the head, and dropped dead with a Bible in his pocket. He was a religious bloke, poor fellow! One poor fellow was retiring soaked in blood from head to foot. I turned round and remarked to a man behind: 'They say God is good.' In the thickest of the fray I never lost

any of my Atheism. In fact, I became stronger in my convictions." His last words to his friend are: "Continue sending the *Freethinker*."

The old story of the "Astronomer and the Atheist" has turned up again—this time in the *Sunday Companion*. It professes to relate how an Atheist, admiring an orrery, asked "Who made it?" To which his host, an astronomer, sarcastically replies: "No one made it. It came by chance." This dialogue a little time ago was retailed as having taken place between Colonel Ingersoll and Henry Ward Beecher. A denial was given by members of the Ingersoll family, but, all the same, the paragraph went the round of the press. It is now re-appearing in its original form as a conversation between Athanasius Kirchner and an Atheistic friend unnamed. The story is silly, because there is no analogy between an orrery fashioned out of pre-existing materials and a universe made out of nothing.

A certain minister, during his discourse one Sabbath morning, said: "In each blade of grass there is a sermon." The following day little Gordon discovered the minister pushing a lawn-mower about his garden, and ran home to say: "Oh, mother! I saw our pastor mowing his sermons this morning."

The Lord rather alarmed his worshippers in Bangor Cathedral the other Sunday afternoon. During the service the sacristan, hearing a disturbance towards the west end of the cathedral, went down the aisle, and found that the tiled floor was opening and gaping all around. He hurried to the canon in residence, who was preaching, and whispered into his ear the terrible words, "Earthquake, sir!" The service was immediately brought to a conclusion. The phenomenon is supposed to have been produced by the recent tremendously heavy rainfall, combined with the great heat.

That is the natural explanation. As for the Lord, he seems to have been quite content to let his devotees undergo a little fright. And, perhaps for the fun of the thing, didn't mind the prayer and praise being abruptly terminated.

Many are the tales told of local preachers. On one occasion an exhorter, belonging to Gateshead Fell, was preaching after a prayer-meeting; and, when praying for a penitent, he shouted as loud as he could: "O, Lord! if thoo winnet save this sinner, I'll split the form."

Surely the Deity is to be pitied. He is now to be assailed with what is called "an endless chain of prayer" against the re-election of President McKinley. The Women's Christian Temperance Union have arranged the plan, which works in this way: The President makes the first prayer. She writes to two women, asking each of them to offer prayers, and to write to two others to do so. The praying is to continue until the election day, and the promoters of the chain expect that before then half the women in the States will have petitioned Heaven to bring about McKinley's defeat. Poor God!

A contemporary, discussing the next Church Congress after Newcastle, says: "Brighton is not popularly supposed to be fervently attached to religious exercises." "No!" says the *Topical Times*; "we have never noticed Brighton absolutely oozing spirituality ourselves, now we come to think of it."

The author of *The Dawn of Revelation*—which book, by the way, would be better named *The Eclipse of Revelation*—does not seem disposed to sit down meekly under the censure of the "Presiding Member of the Mothers' Union." He defends himself quite manfully against her strictures. He says: "If the 'Presiding Member' were aware how the Old Testament has been of late neglected in the teaching of Christian families, and perfunctorily taught in schools by those who were aware of the existence of modern controversies about it, but who had neither time nor books to enable them to work out the question for themselves, she might have more sympathy with an attempt to restore it to its proper place in education."

This is very well, except as regards the use of the word "restore." What he really means is "an attempt to reduce it to its proper place in education." To restore means to return, to reinstate; but that, as applied by him to the position of the Old Testament, is absurd. His view of the book has never been generally held in history by any but much-maligned "infidels"—to whom, by the way, he is indebted for most of his incredulity.

"A Member of the Mothers' Union" also writes to the *Church Times*. She laments that there is only too much truth in the assertion that "the English are no longer a church-going people." She remarks that "Family prayer—grace before and after meat—the observance of Sunday, have passed away in a vast number of homes, and even among more religious people church-going is not unfrequently reduced to an early service on Sunday morning, while the

rest of the day is given to pleasure and society. It is said that only one per cent. of the working men in East London go to any place of worship whatsoever."

"Hubert" contributes to the *Sunday Chronicle* an interesting sketch of Nietzsche and his philosophy. He quotes the following observation by Nietzsche on moral Agnostics like George Eliot: "They have got rid of the Christian God, and now think themselves obliged to cling firmer than ever to Christian morality. Having given up their religion, they feel that they must make up for it with a double dose of respectability."

Upon this "Hubert" observes: "I rather fancy that anyone who has the acquaintance of a certain type of Freethinker will recognise the truth of this biting gibe."

One must certainly dissent from Nietzsche's suggestion that Freethinkers cling to "Christian morality." That is the very thing that Freethinkers are mostly impelled to assail. As to the "double dose of respectability," a great deal, of course, depends on what is meant by "respectability." In the true meaning of the term, disassociated from any notion of mere conventional pretence and cant or smug conceit, respectability is something very much to be aimed at. And we take it, therefore, to be a compliment and not a gibe when Freethinkers, "of a certain type," are credited with having absorbed a double dose.

The tender mercies of the righteous are cruel. A pious hound named Frederick Ellen has been charged at Westminster with ill-treating his daughter aged eight. On the night of June 19 this sanctimonious brute kept the child up till one o'clock to learn a Bible lesson he had set her. She grew tired and stupid, could not learn the texts, and was then beaten by defendant with a strap for a considerable time.

The savage wretch, of course, whined like a cur when brought before the magistrate by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. He pleaded that he had been in one situation a long time. We hope his employers will kick him off their premises. Then he said he was practically a total abstainer—as if that had anything to do with it. The stipendiary merely bound him over in his own recognisances. He ought to have been sent to gaol for a month, or, better still, he should have been flogged for an hour with his own strap.

Righteous Rhyl! A tobacconist there was last week fined £3 12s. for selling tobacco on Sunday. Two visitors were fined 2s. 6d. each for aiding and abetting. This is one of the dangers of visiting that howling wilderness of arid sand, with its meagre glimpse of sea somewhere on the horizon. The place deserves to be reduced to bankruptcy.

There was a large gathering of the Y.M.C.A. at Exeter Hall on Sunday afternoon, and a Mr. Coldicott, who addressed them, said that "Insincerity was one of the great crimes of the times." Yes, and it is the peculiar "crime" of religious circles.

This Mr. Coldicott showed that, in one respect, there was no hypocrisy about himself. He boldly enunciated the orthodox old Christian doctrine of exclusive salvation. He said that he had found, especially in Buddhist countries, many who were "moral, philanthropic, patriotic, kind, and generous." But these good people were all "unsaved" because they did not "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." This is the doctrine of the Thirty-nine Articles. What is more, it is the doctrine of the New Testament. A good life does not take a man a single step on the road to heaven. That place is reserved for true believers. Many an honest unbeliever is roasting in hell, and many a believing scoundrel plays a harp in heaven.

Archdeacon Colley, of Natal, is at present in London, and on Sunday last he preached at St. Peter's, Kensington. In the course of his sermon he asked, "Was there not such a thing as a religion of common sense?" And his answer was, "Yea, verily." Well, perhaps there is such a religion; but, if so, it must be very much like the religion of that famous writer, Lord Shaftesbury. Being asked of what religion he was, he replied: "The religion of every wise man." And being asked what that was, he replied: "No wise man tells."

As the word "religion" is used by Archdeacon Colley, and his brethren of the Black Army, there cannot possibly be a religion of common sense. As easily might there be a round square, or a bitter sweet. The very terms contradict each other. All supernatural religion is based upon "faith," and that is the negation of common sense. The priests of every religion, where they dare to say so, teach that the man whose reasons is lost. In other words, as old Hobbes pointedly put it, religion is like a pill; if you chew it you will never swallow it.

Special.

The FREETHINKER has been for several months, and is still, published at 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C., the office of the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, where all orders and communications should be addressed. Readers are warned against sending orders to Mr. R. Forder, 28 Stonecutter-street, E.C. Those premises have for some time been definitively closed, and Mr. Forder has no connection whatever with the Freethought Publishing Company, who cannot be answerable for anything sent to him.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

September 16 and 23, London; 30, Glasgow.
October 7, Manchester; 21, Birmingham.

To Correspondents.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS.—September 9, 16, and 23, Camberwell; 30, Athenæum Hall; October 7, Athenæum Hall; 9 and 10, debate at Bolton; 14 (Sunday), Bolton; 21, Birmingham. November 4, Liverpool.—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.

R. CHAPMAN.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."
J. WALKER.—The American complete edition of Colonel Ingersoll's lectures, addresses, essays, articles, etc., published by his family, is to be in twelve volumes, and to cost £5. It has not yet reached England. There has been a delay in consequence of the inclusion of extra matter.

W. CAMPBELL.—Duly to hand. We are obliged.
A. R. FRENCH.—You will find a mass of valuable information on the subject in the late J. M. Wheeler's *Footsteps of the Past*, which you can order from our publishing office. The price is 2s., with 2d. postage.

MIMNERMUS writes:—"By all means have the *Freethinker* folded. The newsagents are awfully careless. By the way, I had a fine job to get the paper here [Brighton]. I called at eight different shops before I got a copy. The local 'saints' ought to see to this."

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

WALTER DAVIDSON.—Duly to hand. Much obliged. "My experience," you say, "of Spiritualism is that investigation is denied. I could get into a *séance* now and then, but anything like a test was refused, which rendered all I saw useless as a proof of anything." We believe your experience is not uncommon. We have frequently offered to find some competent Atheist to sit on a committee of investigation, but our suggestion has never fascinated the Spiritualists. By the way, and with all due respect to them, it is difficult to see what special right they have to the name they bear. They ought to call themselves *Spiritists*. That is honest and distinctive.

W. COX (Liverpool).—Glad to hear you opened with a good meeting in your hall on Sunday evening.

F. J. GOULD.—Your article on "A Talk About Heaven" arrives too late for this week's issue. It will appear in our next, and your admirers, who are many, will have the pleasure of looking forward to it.

E. W. SCOTT.—Pleased to know you appreciate our articles on Shakespeare. We have begun the writing of our projected volume. We note your opinion that Mr. Cross's portrait of Mr. Foote, which is being sold for the benefit of the Twentieth Century Fund, is most excellent. Glad to hear that you will contribute to "Shilling Week." Every Freethinker should do likewise.

W. B. THOMPSON.—Sorry to hear the attendance was not as numerous as it should have been at your opening meeting at New Brompton, but pleased to hear that Mr. Watts gave you such an excellent and highly-appreciated lecture. "Deeds, not Words" is a good motto, especially if the deeds have a financial color about them.

T. W. R. TURNER.—In our next.

A. B. MOSS.—You must indeed have had a rush to get to West Ham after your lecture at Station-road, where we are gratified to hear you had such a good meeting.

F. H. WATTS.—Thanks for cuttings.

GLASWEGIAN.—Yes, it is amusing to read that the Catholics resent the burning of two dead bodies, formerly tenanted by souls of their profession, but finally stinking and dangerous from the plague. Never mind the danger to the living. The Catholic Church is against cremation, because it knows that the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is bound up with the practice of burial.

G. E. H. MCCLUSKEY (Devonport), sending a donation to the Twentieth Century Fund, says: "I think the Fund ought to reach at least £1,500, if every Freethinker had a clear conception of his duty, and did it."

F. E. WILLIS.—Thanks for cuttings.

J. PARTRIDGE.—Acknowledgment in another column. Thanks for remittance with list.

FREETHOUGHT TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND.—Fresh acknowledgments:—Captain Taylor, £1; G. B. H. McCluskey, £1; James Hooper, 5s.; Jane Hooper, 5s.; Well-wisher, 10s. 6d.; W. Smithyman, £1; J. Partridge (promise redeemed), 10s. 6d.

G. J. WARREN.—Thanks for the marked copy of *Justice*. It is pleasant to see that our Socialist contemporary is alive to the fact that "secular education" must be fought for, and that "it is hopeless to look for any very material progress in education while it is dominated by clerics."

OLD READER.—A characteristic answer, and just what we expected. It is useless to argue against a malignant prejudice. Silence is the best policy. We suspect we gave more space to the matter than it deserved.

A. BUTLER.—Thanks for the extract. Mrs. Besant's new recipe for India—to send out a member of the Royal Family as a permanent ruler—is of a piece with all her "philosophy" since she abandoned Secularism. The red-hot Republican and rampant Materialist has gone far since she fell under the Blavatsky influence, as we predicted she would when she took her first step on the road. A good many Freethinkers thought us "severe" then. But we knew the road, and they didn't.

ENQUIRER.—There are just a few copies of Dillon's *Sceptics of the Old Testament* still in stock. The book is really an admirable one. The price is 3s. 6d. Order of the Freethought Publishing Company, and add 3d. for postage.

H. SHEPPARD, J. WARNER, W. WAYMARK, J. PLATT, M. SAMUELS, and J. ISAAC.—Thanks for copies of the paper sent.

RECEIVED.—Margate Gazette—Grays Gazette—Crescent—Daily News—Justice—Huddersfield Examiner—Ethical World—Blue Grass Blade—Literary Guide—Manchester Daily Dispatch—Newcastle Weekly Chronicle—Truthseeker (Bradford)—Public Opinion—Liberator—Lucifer—Truthseeker (New York)—Bradford Telegraph—Torch of Reason—Fria Ord—Secular Thought—Two Worlds—Boston Investigator—Free Society—Glasgow Daily Record.

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.

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SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS:—Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

Sugar Plums.

WE regret to state that the Athenæum Hall will not be opened for Sunday evening lectures until September 16. The proprietor has delayed the necessary cleaning and repairs, and it is impossible to resume the meetings until these are completed, which he promises they will be by the date mentioned.

The last of the Freethought Demonstrations for the present was held at West Ham on Sunday afternoon. Mr. Wilson's brake served as a platform again, and a good crowd assembled around it. Mr. A. B. Moss acted as chairman, and led off with a capital speech, which was much appreciated. Mr. C. Cohen followed with an excellent address, full of good points. Mr. Watts was not present, being engaged elsewhere; but Mr. Foote wound up the proceedings with a speech that was freely punctuated with laughter and applause; Miss Vance meanwhile looking after the collection. Altogether it was a highly successful gathering.

August was a most disgraceful month in the matter of weather, but it ended very fairly. The last day was fine and warm, and we looked forward to a good day on September 1 for the N. S. S. Annual Children's Excursion. Unfortunately, the climate of this dear island kept up its fickle character, and the day opened with a steady, nasty rain, that looked as though it would last till the same date in 1901. However, it desisted somewhat before eleven o'clock, and the children whose parents had allowed them to dare the weather—about a half of those who would have come under other conditions—were driven off in brakes to Underhill Farm, High Barnet. Had the sun been shining, it would have been a very enjoyable drive, for the longest way was taken, as arranged, and it was through some beautiful country, adorned with lush grass and noble trees. Still, the youngsters were merry enough, and the rain mercifully held off most of the time. When they stopped on the road for their first refreshment they disposed of piles of buns and gallons of gingerbeer. Arriving at Underhill Farm, they first repaired to a tent fixed up for them, and were presented with packets of confection. Then they broke loose into a big field, where they

had donkey and pony rides, swings and races. Some of the bigger boys played football. The grass was wet, but the sky kept clearing, until at last the sun came out and threw a welcome cheerfulness upon the scene. At five o'clock they sat down to a good tea, and after more fun in the field they were packed into the brakes again and driven home by another and shorter route. All the way back they sang songs, and were as jolly as jolly could be; and, in spite of all disadvantages, they said they had had a "lovely" time.

The elders who were with the party included Mr. and Mrs. Foote, Mr. Watts, Mr. Cohen, Mr. Quay, and Mr. Leat, who mounted a pony in clown's costume, and afforded the youngsters a good deal of merriment. Mr. Leat is a handy man for these occasions; indeed, he is so for *all* occasions. Miss Lovell played the attentive nurse to an indisposed little girl, who was evidently suffering from a cold; and Miss Vance was, as usual, up to eyes in all sorts of work. She must be glad, in one sense, that the excursion is over.

This Children's Excursion is not yet paid for—that is to say, its expenses are not covered by subscriptions. The total cost is about £15. Roughly, a half of that amount has been subscribed. The other half ought to be in the Secretary's (Miss Vance's) hands immediately.

Last Sunday evening Mr. Charles Watts lectured in the Secular Hall, New Brompton, to an exceedingly attentive audience. We are pleased to hear that Mr. Watts was in "excellent form," and that his lecture was "enthusiastically received." This evening, Sunday, September 9, Mr. Watts lectures in the North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road, under the auspices of the Camberwell Branch of the N. S. S.

The Birmingham Branch issues an appeal for Funds, which we hope will meet with a liberal response. Mr. Percy Ward's engagement with the Branch terminates at the end of September, and it is desired to secure a continuance of his services, but this cannot be done without further financial support. Mr. Ward is Lecturer and Organiser to the Branch. He has delivered a number of open-air lectures during the summer, and a considerable quantity of Freethought literature has been distributed at the meetings. He has also delivered indoor lectures at the Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms. Last, but perhaps not least, the Branch has invited him to stand as a "secular education" candidate at the Birmingham School Board elections in November, and he has consented to become a candidate. This is a bold, but necessary, challenge to both the great parties, and particularly to the so-called Liberals, who have actually expanded their "religious education" program in order to take the wind out of the sails of the Church party. We sincerely hope that Mr. Ward will win a seat. That he will make a good fight is beyond question. But fighting is thankless work without resources, and we trust the Branch's appeal will bring these into its exchequer. Donations can be sent to Mr. J. Partridge, hon. secretary, 65 Cato-street; or to Mr. W. T. Pitt, hon. treasurer, 60 Kenyon-street.

London newsagents are complaining that they cannot get the wholesale agents to supply them with a proper number of copies of the *Freethinker*, or to take back their changes. This is simply pure "cussedness," for the *Freethinker* has always been supplied on sale or return. Perhaps the newsagents who experience this difficulty will kindly send particulars direct to the Freethought Publishing Company. If they do, they shall be waited upon, and some arrangement made for supplying them sufficiently.

The important Conference on Secular Education and the approaching London School Board elections, convened by the Executive of the National Secular Society, will take place on Tuesday evening (Sept. 11) at 8 o'clock in the large hall of the Club and Institute Union. The following organisations have appointed delegates to this Conference:—The Metropolitan Radical Federation, the National Secular Society, Edmonton Branch N. S. S., East London Branch N. S. S., North Camberwell Radical Club, East London Ethical Society, Kentish Town Branch S. D. F., Marylebone Branch S. D. F., Stoke Newington Branch S. D. F., New Lansdowne Liberal and Radical Club, South London Ethical Society. Other appointments have probably been made, or will be made, but we can only include those to hand on Tuesday, September 4. Messrs. Foote, Watts, Cohen, Moss, Heaford, Shore, and Warren will attend on Tuesday evening.

Secular Thought (Toronto) reproduces Mr. Foote's article on "Chinese Horrors." We are glad to receive our excellent Canadian contemporary again. It has been reaching us fitfully of late.

We beg once more to call attention to the Application Form for Shares in the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, which will be found on the last page of this week's

Freethinker. In the midst of other enterprises, this one should not be forgotten. The fate of our literary propaganda in the immediate future is bound up with it. Every Freethinker who can afford to invest something in this Company, even if it be only the amount of a single share, is under a moral obligation to do so. We are not mincing matters, and we do not intend to. We appeal straight to the sense of duty to the cause in the hearts of Freethinkers.

Bible English.

FOR many years I have been under the second-hand impression that, brutal, disgusting, and silly as are many of the incidents and teachings translated of the Jew Book, yet, these drawbacks notwithstanding, its English was impeccable, and that our ablest writers in prose have found the example for their best style in the English translation of that book, or of those books. Now, I am no stylist myself, although I admire concise, terse, vivid, and chromatic writing whenever I meet with it; and to-night it occurred to me to take down my Polyglot Bible, and sample its renowned prose, which, up to now, I have weakly accepted as being what so many have claimed for it—a perfect pattern of English as she should be written. My copy opened haphazard at Deuteronomy cxvii., and verse 5 runs therein as follows: "Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman which have committed that wicked thing unto thy gates, even that man and that woman, and shall stone them with stones till they die."

Will you be surprised at my astonishment? I read no further then, but took up my "pupil pen," and began this screed. The verse quoted contains thirty-four words; of these thirty-four words, fourteen—those printed in italics—are mere redundances and repetitions. As for stoning a woman to death, how *could* that be done without stones? Mark Twain probably would suggest stoning to death with feathers as a more humane method of murdering heretics; but he is a mere wag, and didn't learn his English from a translation. To me the verse reads more like an attorney's business-English than that of a scholar. Verses 9, 10, and 11 read: "And thou shalt come unto the priests, the Levites, and unto the Judge that shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment. And thou shalt do according to the sentence which they of that place which the Lord shall choose shall show thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee; according to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee thou shalt do; thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall show thee to the right hand nor to the left." English, quotha! Padding, legal padding; mere horsehair, mere chair stuffing! One hundred and nine words—if I count not miss, for I am not strong in figures, which are even more delusive than facts—and of these five score and nine words not less than forty-eight are mere repetitive surplusage and meaningless addenda!

O ye gods, Hebrew and heathen, save us from more of this flood of tautologic slush!

I can no farther go on hunting after English in the book of our idolatry. Errors upon error's head accumulate! Why, my solicitor's charwoman can express herself in an English more compact than the English of the drivellers that did for Deuteronomy. Poor penny-a-liner writers of tortuous Telegraphese, go ye to Deuteronomy and learn your long-drawn-out trade: how to convey the smallest quantity of unimportant information in the greatest quantity of windy words; this the translators will teach you, and in this, our Holy Book, shall be examples for you wherefrom ye shall learn to fill your columns with verbal bran-mash, to save your heads from the trouble of providing ideas, and to make one small fact go as far as fifty big ones did before!

Really, sirs and madames, when I started this screed I had a little English at the tip of my pen; but now, after four verses of holy writ, I am corrupted, my prose is demoralised, a long-cherished—on faith of others—illusion has gone, like unto a burst bubble; and, after the Deuteronomical fashion, seeing how wickedly I have done this thing of libelling our glorious English language by ignorantly referring to the translation of the Bible as its famous exemplar, I beg ye to hale me before some good judge of prosody "that shall be in these days, and ask him to show the sentence of judgment, and thou shalt do unto me according to the sentence which he of that place, which the Lord-knows-who shall choose, shall show thee, and shall observe to do according to all that he informs ye; according to the sentence of the laws of prose which he shall teach ye, and according to the judgment which he shall tell ye ye shall do; ye shall not decline from the sentence which he shall show ye to the right hand nor to the left." And so that he, that shall be a good prosodist in these days, sentence me not to learn any more English from the translation of ancient and unknown Asiatic authors, humbly will I bow to his decree. For 'twere better freely to read the good English of James Thomson's *Speedy Extinction of Evil and Misery*, or his *Fair of Saint Sylvester*, in durance vile, than to be compelled to read English, as she is written in Deuteronomy, on the other side the wall.

Free Inquiry.

It has been well said : " Let not the freedom of inquiry be shackled. If it multiplies contentions among the wise and virtuous, it exercises the charity of those who contend. If it shackles for a time the belief that is rested only upon prejudice, it finally settles it upon the broader and more solid basis of conviction." This is precisely the Secularist's position, inasmuch as he contends that free inquiry is not only a right all should possess, but that it is an indispensable essential in the pursuit of truth. As uniformity of opinion upon speculative questions is not always practicable nor desirable, the utmost liberty of investigation should be afforded to each individual, whose thoughts and expressions of their views should have the fullest range. We believe with John Stuart Mill that " the peculiar evil of silencing an expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race, posterity as well as the existing generation, those who dissent from the opinion still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of changing error for truth ; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error."

Professed Christians are very fond of quoting the words of St. Paul—" Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good"—for the purpose of showing that their faith favors free inquiry. But this is one of the many mistakes which Christian advocates are constantly committing. The method which they usually adopt in their propaganda certainly does not accord with the injunction to " prove all things." A far more appropriate phrase for them to adopt, judging from their treatment of opponents, would be : " Believe, and take for granted, what we say unto you." Those who have impartially read the history of the Church need not be informed that its policy has always been to discourage their own opinions. The most consistent followers of St. Paul's advice have been condemned by the Church as heretics ; and the result of their inquiry has been persecution and death. There is a marked difference between the Christian interpretation of St. Paul's injunction and that which is supplied by the logical method. The Christians practically say : " Carry on your examination by all means ; but it must be within the limits we think allowable." Logic, on the contrary, says the reasonable meaning of the injunction is, that the only limit of the examination of any question is the boundary of human capacity. Of course, the reason why the Church has restricted free inquiry is obvious. To allow the examination of the claims of Christianity by untrammelled thought, in the light of cultivated reason, would doubtless lead to serious " religious difficulties." For it is well known that the exercise of human reason tends to impel an honest inquirer to

Seize on truth where'er 'tis found,
On Christian or on *other* ground.

But supposing we assume that St. Paul's injunction really means that we should prove all things, including Christian claims, then we have to face the important question, What will be our fate if we fail to " hold fast" to that which Christianity has pronounced to be *the* good that ought to be sought after? It must not be ignored that Christianity threatens severe punishment to those who do not accept what it deems the truth. Here we have an illustration of what frequently occurs in the teachings of the New Testament. When it propounds a useful precept it often accompanies it with that which mars its utility. It is quite right that we should, so far as it is in our power, prove the truth, or otherwise, of whatever is presented to us for our acceptance. But it is only just that every inquirer should be permitted to " hold fast" to that which his own reason and judgment tell him is true. There is no stimulant given to free inquiry in the words ascribed to Christ : " I am the Father but by me.....if a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered ; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." There is no incentive afforded to impartial investigation in the gloomy words : " He that believeth

and is baptised shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Once establish among mankind the erroneous notion that truth is confined to one particular channel, and that those who do not go in that direction are to be cast forth as a " withered branch," then the impossibility of unfettered thought should immediately be apparent. The fact is being more and more recognised by intelligent thinkers that opinion is the result of organisation and evidence. And instead of inflicting punishment for the imperfections of the one, or for the limitation of the other, the Secularist policy is to encourage the widest and most diversified thoughts, seeking to correct by unfettered inquiry and honest criticism those which are erroneous.

If we take literally the injunction to " prove all things," and apply it to the evidence necessary to establish the truth of Christianity, what does the impartial inquirer discover? Apart from the ethical features of Christianity, which furnish no evidence of the validity of its claims, what does it present to our view? Very little else than dreams and visions that violate rational conceptions of the methods of nature. We are asked to accept as " proofs" stories that stagger reason and defy common sense. Laws of logic and rules of evidence demand the production of facts that would carry conviction to the mind. But this is what the " proofs," offered on behalf of Christianity, do not provide. Instead of doing this, the New Testament is full of narrations that mock our reasoning faculties. Glaring as the evidential defects are, the excuses made for them are as fallacious as they are impertinent. We are told, for instance, that such stories might convince us if we did not refuse to be convinced. It is supposed that we can *will* a thing to be untrue. That is, it is held that those extraordinary tales in the New Testament appear to be erroneous because we are determined not to be convinced that they are true. Wilful unbelief is recklessly urged against us. But really such charges only reveal the ignorance and bigotry of those who make them. Nothing ought to be plainer to the candid mind than the fact that it is the insufficiency of evidence that is the cause of non-credence. No evidence is sufficient for its legitimate purpose unless it produces conviction. As Volney puts it : " To believe without evidence and demonstration is an act of ignorance and folly."

It may be useful to point out the confusion of thought evinced by certain Christian advocates in their endeavors to prove that the Church is in favor of free inquiry. They use glowing terms and brilliant rhetoric, with a view of persuading their followers that their faith is on the side of freedom of thought. But persuasion is not conviction, and declamation is not demonstration. By some it is contended that Christianity is a religion of reason, and therefore can stand its test. Is this so? Let us see. Reason is in accord with the laws of nature, while the alleged proofs of Christianity are composed of words and actions contrary to those laws. Thus supposed facts that are opposed to natural law are adduced to substantiate theories and doctrines that are contrary to reason. The reader must not confound reason, when seeking to discover truth, with the state of mind resulting from having been taught to believe in a particular faith. The orthodox Christian, as a rule, accepts his belief without doubt or examination, while the student of reason deems it a duty to examine the credentials of a faith before accepting it as true. With Secularists reason is the arbiter between the claims of truth and error. It is the true light and guide of man ; upon it Secularists rest their beliefs, and not upon mere faith and assertion. Doubt and fearless investigation are absolutely necessary to free inquiry, and to these the Church has been, and in many instances still is, a determined foe.

CHARLES WATTS.

An amusing story is told of the great Norman McLeod and McGregor of the Tron. They were being rowed across a Highland loch by two stalwart Highlanders. Seeing the water very rough with a strong head wind, Archie remarked to Malcolm : " I'm afraid we are going to be swamped ; as we have two ministers on board we might ask them to put up a prayer." To which Malcolm promptly replied : " The wee fellow may pray away as long as he likes, but the big one will have to take an oar."

An Apostle of Humanism.

"Rabelais laughing in his easy chair."—POPE.

"I class Rabelais with the great creative minds of the world—Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes."—COLERIDGE.

THE popular idea of Rabelais coincides with Pope's famous line. He is pictured as one who laughs and mocks at all things—a hog for appetite, a monkey for tricks. He has been described as a great moral teacher, a grossly obscene writer, a reckless buffoon, a Catholic, a Protestant, and a Freethinker. To paint him as a moral teacher alone is to ignore the innate drollery of his character. To set him up as a mere mountebank is to forget the stern reality which underlies his writings. Other unconscious ironists would turn the first of French humorists into a trumpery ecclesiastical historian. To treat Rabelais as destitute of all serious purpose in art or life is even a greater error. Whatever Rabelais may have been, he was not a trifler. He had seen ecclesiastical life from the inside, and he hated priests with every drop of his blood. He studied Greek when it was a hated and forbidden language. He was an enthusiastic disciple of the new learning in an age when scholars carried their lives in their hands. His noble zeal for intellectual freedom, untrammelled by priestcraft, entitles him to rank with Erasmus and Von Hutten as an apostle of humanism.

François Rabelais was of middle-class parentage. He was born in 1483, near the lovely little city of Chinon, on the Vienne, where Henry II. cursed his sons, and died. He always regarded Touraine, its cities, rivers, and vineyards, with affectionate admiration. The fact of his father having been an innkeeper was used as a weapon against him in literary controversy. His father, unfortunately, wished to make him a priest. Accordingly, little François was sent, at nine years of age, to the Benedictine monks of Scully, so young that the white shirt was put over the child's frock. Later, Rabelais was removed to the Franciscan Monastery of Fontenoy le Comte. The Franciscan vows seem to have included ignorance as well as celibacy and poverty. He remained there for fifteen years, taking priest's orders in 1511, at the age of twenty-eight. It is to this long period spent among the ignorant, bigoted, narrow sons of the great lying Catholic Church that we owe his undying hatred of priestcraft. It breaks out in every page of his writings—now passionately, now sorrowfully, with a cry of rage, a sob of pain, or a laugh of scorn. He hated the "monk birds" more bitterly than even Erasmus, for his nature was stronger.

At the age of forty he came into the world a free man—free, that is, to follow his studies—burning with a pathetic enthusiasm for the new learning. He threw aside the hated monastic garb, and became secretary to the Bishop of Maillezais. About 1530 he went to the University of Montpellier, with the intention of getting a medical degree. Remark that at this time, when Rabelais is following the lectures, he is already within sight of his fiftieth year. Two years later he went to Lyons, where he held an appointment as physician to the hospital. His friend, Etienne Dolet, was already established as a printer in the place. Rabelais's connection with the first reformers of France is certain; the extent difficult to determine. Rabelais had no desire for the martyr's crown. He never contemplated following Calvin into exile, or Berquin to the stake. His sympathies were antagonistic to all dogmas. He held Luther and Calvin in almost as much abhorrence as the priests. The society of Des Perriers, Dolet, and the Lyonnais Freethinkers was more congenial to his habits of thought. Moreover, he had excellent reasons for knowing the power of the great lying Church and the pious malignity of her hired assassins.

Heretics were then handed over to the secular arm to be burnt for the good of their souls and the greater glory of God, and François Rabelais did not intend, if he could help it, to be butchered to make a Roman holiday. When he was denounced as a heretic, he challenged his enemies to produce a heretical proposition from his writings. They were unequal to the task; but, none the less, the heresy was there. Rabelais's caution was necessary if he wished to live. Three at least of his contemporaries suffered for heresy. Dolet was burnt, Des Perriers was driven to suicide, Marot

was a half-starved wanderer in Piedmont. Rabelais may be excused for not wishing to be "saved by fire." His sense of humor always prevented him from becoming a fanatic.

It has been said that Rabelais despised women. He did not write till an age when the passion of youth had consumed itself to ashes. Passion was killed in Rabelais by that hateful system of monkery which has filled Christendom with unspeakable horrors. Poor Rabelais! A whole half of humanity absent from his mind. Love, the central fire of the universe, the source of all human joys and sympathies, the bond of society, appears, in the accursed monastic system in which he was trained, as corruption and depravity. The damnable discipline surrounded Rabelais from the time he wore a child's frock till he was a man of forty, and the best side of his nature was strangled. He never loved, never even thought of loving. He had no more respect for women than a eunuch in an eastern seraglio. Nay more, there had even been crushed out of him that love for his mother which characterises every Frenchman worthy of the name. Alone among French writers he has no filial piety. As the old galley-slave may be known by the dragging foot, on which was once the fetter, so when the unlovely years have eaten away manhood, imprisoned with its blind instincts and objectless passions, the ex-monk is known by his sexless mind. Thrice, poor Rabelais! The monkish devils spoiled his life. The robe he wore was to him like a bodily deformity, corrupting his mind, narrowing his views. Originally, his nature must have been lofty and beautiful—witness those exquisite chapters in which he describes the monks of Thelema, whose motto was "Liberty." His death was unexpected. We may picture the rage of the Christians when their old enemy, now almost within their pious clutches, slipped quietly out of their eager hands. The great lying Catholic Church never forgets, and priests never forgive. It was well for the old man that his life was not prolonged. Rabelais went further than contempt for the trappings of Christianity. He rejected it altogether. There cannot be the slightest doubt that Rabelais was a Freethinker. He hoped to cure the evil of religion by spreading knowledge, by bringing priestcraft into contempt, by widening the boundaries of thought. He *knew* as much as any man of his time. He was acquainted with the book of the world, and not merely with the world of books. He studied science and practised medicine. He knew practically everything there was to be known. His life was spent in the pursuit of knowledge. Liberty was Rabelais's sovereign specific for the ills of his time. He found his contemporaries tied and bound with chains of their own manufacture. His purpose was to break their fetters and set them free.

MIMNERMUS.

Advice to Agnostics.

KEEP CHILDREN OUT OF CHURCH AND SUNDAY SCHOOL.—Should parents who are Infidels, Unbelievers, or Atheists send their children to Sunday-schools and churches to give them the benefit of Christian education?

PARENTS who do not believe the Bible to be an inspired book should not teach their children that it is. They should be absolutely honest. Hypocrisy is not a virtue, and, as a rule, lies are less valuable than facts.

An unbeliever should not allow the mind of his child to be deformed, stunted, and shrivelled by superstition. He should not allow the child's imagination to be polluted. Nothing is more outrageous than to take advantage of the helplessness of childhood to sow in the brain the seeds of falsehood, to imprison the soul in the dungeon of fear, to teach dimpled infancy the infamous dogma of eternal pain—filling life with the glow and glare of hell.

No unbeliever should allow his child to be tortured in the orthodox inquisitions. He should defend the mind from attack as he would the body. He should recognise the rights of the soul. In the orthodox Sunday-schools children are taught that it is a duty to believe, that evidence is not essential, that faith is independent of facts, and that religion is superior to reason. They are taught not to use their natural sense, not to tell what

they really think, not to entertain a doubt, not to ask wicked questions, but to accept and believe what their teachers say. In this way the minds of the children are invaded, corrupted, and conquered. Would an educated man send his child to a school in which Newton's statement in regard to the attraction of gravitation was denied, in which the law of falling bodies, as given by Galileo, was ridiculed, Kepler's three laws declared to be idiotic, and the rotary motion of the earth held to be utterly absurd?

Why, then, should an intelligent man allow his child to be taught the geology and astronomy of the Bible? Children should be taught to seek for the truth—to be honest, kind, generous, merciful, and just. They should be taught to love liberty and to live to the ideal.

Why, then, should an unbeliever—an infidel—send his child to an orthodox Sunday-school, where he is taught that he has no right to seek for the truth, no right to be mentally honest, and that he will be damned for an honest doubt; where he is taught that God was ferocious, revengeful, heartless as a wild beast; that he drowned millions of his children; that he ordered wars of extermination, and told his soldiers to kill grey-haired and trembling age, mothers and children, and to assassinate with the sword of war the babes unborn?

Why should an unbeliever in the Bible send his child to an orthodox Sunday-school, where he is taught that God was in favor of slavery, and told the Jews to buy of the heathen, and that they should be their bondmen and bondwomen for ever—when he is taught that God upheld polygamy and the degradation of women?

Why should an "unbeliever," who believes in the uniformity of nature—in the unbroken and unbreakable chain of cause and effect—allow his child to be taught that miracles have been performed; that men have gone bodily to heaven; that millions have been miraculously fed with manna and quails; that fire has refused to burn the clothes and flesh of men; that iron has been made to float; that the earth and moon have been stopped, and that the earth has not only been stopped, but made to turn the other way; that devils inhabit the bodies of men and women; that diseases have been cured with words, and that the dead, with a touch, have been made to live again?

The thoughtful man knows that there is not the slightest evidence that these miracles ever were performed. Why should he allow his children to be stuffed with these foolish and impossible falsehoods?

Why should he give his lambs to the care and keeping of the wolves and hyenas of superstition?

Children should be taught only what somebody knows. Guesses should not be palmed off on them as demonstrated facts. If a Christian lived in Constantinople, he would not send his children to the mosque to be taught that Mohammed was a prophet of God, and that the Koran is an inspired book. Why? Because he does not believe in Mohammed or the Koran? That is reason enough. So an Agnostic, living in New York, should not allow his children to be taught that the Bible is an inspired book. I use the word "Agnostic" because I prefer it to the word "Atheist."

As a matter of fact, no one knows that God exists, and no one knows that God does not exist. To my mind, there is no evidence that God exists—that this world is governed by a being of infinite goodness, wisdom, and power—but I do not pretend to know. What I do insist upon is that children should not be poisoned, should not be taken advantage of; that they should be treated fairly, honestly; that they should be allowed to develop from the inside instead of being crammed from the outside; that they should be taught to reason, not to believe; to think, to investigate, and to use their senses, their minds.

Would a Catholic send his children to school to be taught that Catholicism is superstition, and that science is the only savior of mankind?

Why, then, should a free and sensible believer in science, in the naturalness of the universe, send his child to a Catholic school?

Nothing could be more irrational, foolish, and absurd.

My advice to all Agnostics is to keep their children from the orthodox Sunday-schools, from the orthodox churches, from the poison of the pulpits.

Teach your children the facts you know. If you do not know, say so. Be as honest as you are ignorant.

Do all you can to develop their minds to the end that they may live useful and happy lives.

Strangle the serpent of superstition that crawls and hisses about the cradle. Keep your children from the augurs, the sooth-sayers, the medicine-men, the priests of the supernatural. Tell them that all religions have been made by folks, and that all the "sacred books" were written by ignorant men.

Teach them that the world is natural. Teach them to be absolutely honest. Do not send them where they will contract diseases of the mind—the leprosy of the soul. Let us do all we can to make them intelligent.

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Correspondence.

ORTHODOX ABUSE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Kindly allow me a few words suggested by your notice in this week's *Freethinker*, of the Christian opposition at your Demonstration in Victoria Park on Sunday, August 19. "Personalities" were certainly indulged in, and if they were "foul" the speakers considered they were dealing with a foul subject. For they had a "case," which was to condemn an article on "Morality" (?) appearing in this month's *Truthseeker*, a journal circulated at your meetings, and evidently countenanced by your society; and no doubt the condemnation, hearty and passionate as it was, appeared like "abuse" to those who approved of the article criticised.

Let me say at once how much I deprecate the sarcasm and ill-feeling so frequently shown on each side. The Christians forget their Christian charity, and the Secularists the reason which should control all discussion. I say this in all kindness. I believe all thought should be free; but why should Free-thought run counter to all established, lawful ideas of morality? And why should Christians—who consider man a responsible being—condemn his Freethought, without which he cannot be responsible? If the parties would only meet in friendly discussion, each side would find much that was good in the other. Mr. Cohen, in his able article on "The Progress of Secularism," regrets that many who do not agree with the Christian theology, yet accord the Christians their support. They do this because of the good that is inherent in true Christianity, and they do not support Freethought because of the latitude in morality countenanced by many leaders of Freethought. Keep thought free by all means, but also keep it pure.

I am glad to find that in your admirable paper on "Shakespeare" you express very different opinions about marriage to those held in the *Truthseeker*.
R. J. MARKHAM.
176 Richmond-road, Dalston, N.E., August 29.

[This correspondent is under a serious delusion. The journal he refers to is not "countenanced" by the National Secular Society; neither is it *discountenanced*. No one but the conductor and the writers is responsible for what appears in its columns. To suppose that the N. S. S. is responsible for the *opinions* of every writer in every journal sold at its Branch meetings is simply ridiculous.—EDITOR.]

DOGS IN HEAVEN.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The parsons want to know whether there are dogs in heaven. I know of one there, on the authority of Eusebius, I think. There was a holy dog of Valladolid, who used to slide along on his haunches to receive the holy sacrament, and guarded the graves of the saints in the churchyard against defilement by other dogs. He was canonized by the Bishop of Rome, and "his soul is with Jesus," says the legend. Many miracles were wrought at his tomb, which is in the parish church of San Andres, near Valladolid. And did not St. Anthony's pig enter heaven with him?

C. W. HECKETHORN.

"My dear, you have been very naughty; you must ask God to make you a good child," said a fond mother, on bidding her little girl good-night. The next morning the child announced: "Mamma, I asked God last night to make me a good child, and he answered me." "How did he answer you?" "Why, he said, 'Great Scott! I know many little girls worse than you are!'"

Let no man think that sudden, in a minute,
All is accomplished and the work is done;
Though with thine earliest dawn thou should'st begin it,
Scarce were it ended with thy setting sun.

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.): Re-open September 16.

CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, C. Watts.

WEST LONDON BRANCH ("Victory," Newnham-street, Queen's-street, Edgware-road): September 11, at 9, Adjourned Committee meeting.

EAST LONDON BRANCH (Radical Club, 16 Durham-row, Stepney): September 14, at 8, Members' meeting.

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

STATION-ROAD (Camberwell): 11.30, E. Pack.

PECKHAM RYE: 3.15, E. Pack.

BROCKWELL PARK: 3.15, W. Heaford; 6.30, C. Cohen.

CLAPHAM COMMON: 3.15, C. Cohen.

CLERKENWELL GREEN: 11.30, C. Cohen.

FINSBURY PARK: 3.30, F. A. Davies.

VICTORIA PARK (near the Fountain): 3.15, R. P. Edwards.

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

KILBURN (corner of Victoria-road): 7.15, F. A. Davies.

HAMMERSMITH (outside the Lyric Opera House): 7.15, R. P. Edwards.

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

WEST HAM BRANCH (Stratford Grove): 7.30, W. Ramsey.

MILE END WASTE: 11.30, W. Heaford; 7.15, S. E. Easton. September 12, at 8.15, W. J. Ramsey.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, R. P. Edwards.

KINGSLAND (corner of Ridley-road): 11.30, S. E. Easton, "The Adventures of Samson."

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM: H. Percy Ward will lecture in the Bull Ring on Wednesday and Friday evenings at 8—weather permitting.

BRADFORD: H. Percy Ward will deliver two Freethought lectures. For time and place see local papers.

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 7, Half-yearly meeting—balance-sheet, auditors' report. Members only.

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): 12, G. Faulkner, "Buddhism"; 6.30, Social meeting in commemoration of Charles Bradlaugh.

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, Stanley Jones, Special lecture.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): Last excursion of season. Members and friends meet at 8.10 a.m. front of Victoria Station, and will leave by train at 8.28 for Cleethorpes.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, "Industrial Problems"; 7.45, Important business.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—September 9, m., Clerkenwell Green; a., Clapham Common. 14, Mile End Waste. 16, m., Stratford Grove; a., Victoria Park. 23, m., Ridley-road, Kingsland; a., Clapham Common.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, London, S.E.—September 9, m., Newington Reform Club. 16, m., Battersea; e., West Ham. 26, a., Victoria Park. October 7, a., Victoria Park.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall-Heath, Birmingham.—September 10, Debate at Bradford. 16, Birmingham. 24 and October 1, Debate in Birmingham. December 9, Glasgow.

F. A. DAVIES, 65 Lion-street, S.E.—September 9, Hyde Park; e., Kilburn. 16, Mile End; e., Hammersmith. 23, e., Stratford.

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