

THE Freethinker

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Theology and Geology.

THE name of Geneva calls up three ideas—theology, gin, and watches. The city used to provide western Europe with religion; it now provides it with time-keepers. Standing upon the bridge, the traveller sees before him the water of the lake in the loveliest shades of blue. Right and left rise steep banks, covered with vineyards; and behind them, on the one side, are the white peaks of Mont Blanc, on the other the dark ridges of the Jura. Three hundred years ago Calvin saw this landscape. Looked at it with the dull, unappreciative eyes of the theologian; and saw not its significance, saw not its lessons. For theology is a barren study which explains nothing and teaches nothing. Ask the theologian about the origin of yonder mountains, and you will find that he has not yet soared above the puerile mud-pie theory. He will tell you that the "creator" at the moment of creation piled up these rocks, partly to amuse himself like some gigantic baby, partly to impress mankind with the spectacle of his omnipotence. The Mohammedan will tell you that the creator made the earth a flat disk, and then threw the mountains upon it to steady it. Neither of these paltry theorists is aware that the structure of mountains entirely disproves his theory, if he only took the trouble to look at it. For the strata of mountains consist of precisely the same elements as the strata of plains, and were laid under the same conditions. The mountains are simply parts of the plain which have reached their present level by the persistent action of blind natural forces. Mountain, lake, and all, are the product of natural causes. If Calvinism itself is the product of natural causes. If John Calvin had not suffered from indigestion, we should never have heard of Calvinism. If he had been a healthy man, he would probably have been an Atheist. He had a brother who did not suffer from gastric troubles; and that brother narrowly escaped burial without the rites of the Church. The forces of nature, unguided and unlimited, produce all we see around us. If you wander by the seashore and pick up a pebble, perfectly round and beautifully polished, you do not invoke a supernatural being to account for it. Even the theologian nowadays admits that the "creator" did not fashion that pebble upon a lathe, but is content to refer its form and polish to the fact that it has been rolled among the other pebbles for long years by the action of the waves and tides. If we go along the bed of a stream, and observe that the flatter pebbles in it are arranged like the tiles of a house, with the ends pointing in the direction of the flow of the water so that the pebble is not easily washed out of its place, it is evident that the "creator" has not laid out the stream bed, but that the pebbles have been rolled down by the water until they have at last assumed a position in which the stream has little or no power over them. If we turn from pebbles to more complex matters, we shall still find that they owe their present appearance to the surrounding natural forces; or, to use the language of modern science, the condition of everything is determined by its history and its environment.

It is not yet a century and a half since people began to seriously investigate the problem of the origin of mountains. The first observers, still dominated by the idea of a *deus ex machinâ*, supposed that mountains were thrust up from beneath by volcanic agency; and in proof of this they pointed to the fact that their central cores and highest summits consist of plutonic rocks.

But if these central cores had been burst up in a molten condition like lava it would naturally have baked and solidified and modified the other rocks through which it passed; whereas it is not found that such is the case, and, in fact, there are many phenomena which go to prove that these central plutonic cores of the Alps reached their present elevation as masses of solid rock many ages after their formation. During the last sixty years, therefore, geologists have more and more regarded mountains as due to the various strata having been thrown into folds by side pressure, not to any force acting from below. This may seem an astonishing hypothesis; but it is a perfectly natural thing. When an apple is fresh its skin is filled out, and is smooth and shining; but when an apple is dried its surface is wrinkled into hills and valleys. These hills are not due to any force existing in the interior of the fruit. The fact is that, in drying, the apple has become smaller, and the surface has to accommodate itself to a lesser space, which it can only do by falling into wrinkles. Similarly, we can understand that, as the earth gets cooler and cooler, it tends to shrink in size; and, therefore, as the surface contracts, certain parts get thrust up by an irresistible force. This contraction of the earth's crust has been going on for ages, and the consequence is that layers of deposit thousands of feet in thickness have become contorted, crushed, and twisted, in forms familiar to geologists; and, where the direction of pressure has been favorable, mountains have been forced up. These mountains have had their summits attacked and abraded by atmospheric agencies, and layer after layer removed, until, at the present day, all except the plutonic core has been worn away. Thus Mont Blanc, which at present stands 15,000 feet high, must have had 15,000 feet of strata worn off its top before the present masses of gneiss showed themselves upon the surface. Mountains, therefore, are merely the remains of old wrinkles upon the crust of the earth; and we can well understand that the same forces are still at work, and fresh mountains are rising. As we stand upon this bridge at Geneva, though everything looks solid and feels stable, Mont Saleve, to the left of us, is slowly rising, those long ridges of the Jura are being gradually forced upwards, and Geneva is being elevated heavenwards. These forces have been acting for millenniums, and will act for ages more; for the laws of nature follow out their courses in entire indifference to the futile dreams of theologians, and without caring whether John Calvin's miserable soul was predestined or elected. "Revelations" tell us nothing of the earth's history. The Pentateuch speaks of the "everlasting hills," the Hebrew prophet of "everlasting mountains." The "inspired" writers were not aware that hills and mountains are far from everlasting; they left it for the infidel scientists of the nineteenth century to trace the birth and the death of hills; for the history of the earth cannot be learnt by thumping of pulpits, but only by the study of nature.

Calvin saw, as we do, that there are no villages upon the Jura range. He probably knew, as we do, that there are no villages because there is no water. The rain falls upon the just and the unjust, and it also falls upon the Jura mountains. But owing to the geologic conditions the summits of the Jura are disintegrated by the gradual pressure which is urging them upwards, and so the rainwater sinks in, only appearing in springs at the base. The same cause gives constant trouble to the French railway engineers, for no tunnels are safe in those mountains, as the traveller at Bellegarde can see for himself.

Calvin saw the blue lake of Geneva, and thought it

presented the same appearance as it did at the "creation." Little he knew that the lake was geologically recent, and that the history of the locality before the formation of the lake was to be traced by the educated eye. It was not until men disregarded the assertions of ignorant theologians that they found out anything which was worth knowing. While theology was weaving its ropes of sand nothing could be learned, nothing could be proved. We are only just emerging out of the fogs of superstition, and catching gleams of the sunshine of nature. Chillon Castle at one end of the lake has been a prison for men's bodies; Geneva city, at the other end, a prison for men's minds.

CHILPERIC.

Christianity and Mythology.

Christianity and Mythology. By JOHN M. ROBERTSON. (London: Watts & Co.)

"AN author," said Coleridge in the preface of *Aids to Reflection*, "has three points to settle: to what sort his work belongs, for what description of readers it is intended, and the specific end, or object, which it is to answer." Mr. Robertson has settled the first and third points, but he has paid little regard to the second. His book would have been far more effective, and therefore useful, if he had kept some particular class of readers in mind. After all, one writes to be read, and different circles of intelligence, or at least of information and receptivity, should be differently addressed. What is too prolix for experts may be too terse for the comparatively ignorant. When an Ingersoll writes he is able to express himself with universal suitability; but that is because he deals only with principles and ideas, and because he has a consummate command of lucid language with a natural gift of style. It is quite another case when a writer has to argue recondite questions and present a vast body of facts and illustrations. The importance then arises of settling Coleridge's third point—of deciding who are to be addressed. This has to be done upon the platform, where a speaker can perceive whether he is being followed and understood. But a worker in the literature of information, particularly, is always in more or less danger of forgetting to put himself, so to speak, in the place of his readers. What is clear enough to him, because he knows all about it, may not be so to them, for the opposite reason. Long familiarity may enable him to weigh the facts as well as count them, and it is easy for him to overlook the truth that most of his readers do not enjoy the same advantage. We venture to say that the general reader, who has some acquaintance with the subject, will find Mr. Robertson's book rather difficult; on the other hand, we think it is too minute and diffuse for those who have made the subject a special study.

We have another criticism to offer. Mr. Robertson would be none the worse for a little "reverence" in his composition. There is something comical, occasionally, in his lordly treatment of his predecessors and superiors. He seems to know precisely where everyone is right, and where everyone is wrong; and his praise, censure, or correction is commonly administered without a shadow of diffidence. We are far from saying that Mr. Robertson is conceited; in the ordinary sense of the word, we should unhesitatingly say he is not so. But he seems to us to be conceited of his opinion; in this resembling a greater Scotsman, the late Thomas Carlyle. Of course it is hard to suppress a strong constitutional tendency, but the more it is kept under the more Mr. Robertson gains in persuasiveness. Infallibility is good business in the Catholic Church, but a most unamiable foible in one who makes no claim to inspiration.

It is a pity, too, that Mr. Robertson's writing is generally so unmelodious. Printing is a mechanical thing. The spoken word is primary. However quickly we read, the ear is always more or less active behind the eye. Flaubert held that the supreme test of style was whether the composition would bear reading aloud. The application of that test to Mr. Robertson's writing would sometimes result in sheer violence to the organs of speech. In this respect, nearly every author he quotes from is an improvement upon himself. Now

and then he is quite slipshod. Such an expression as, "he did much to clear up the scientific ground as far as he did go," could easily be mended by a schoolboy. It is not that Mr. Robertson is incapable of doing better. He is very capable if he only takes the pains. Perhaps the truth is that he writes too much, and has a too facile pen, with the result that his sentences stand as they first occur to him, instead of being turned over in his mind in the interest of clarity and elegance. It should never be forgotten that easy reading is hard writing; and there is a world of truth in the reply of a certain scribe, who, on being told that something he had written was too long, said that he had not time enough to make it shorter.

Having got rid of the unpleasant part of our task, we hasten to say that Mr. Robertson deserves very great credit for the learning, industry, candor, courage, and penetrating intelligence, which he displays in this book. It is a work that few men could have accomplished. That he has done it is a distinction. That he has done it so well entitles him to something more than the respect—to the gratitude, of Freethinkers.

Mr. Robertson expresses the fear, in his Preamble, that his own book, like others less drastic, will gain but a cold reception. Ecclesiastical defence, he says, represents at bottom the "organisation of an economic interest." Learned divines—there are still a few—will not answer what they do not wish the public to read. His book should appeal to "serious and open-minded laymen."

"Unfortunately the open-minded laity are in large part satisfied to think that traditionalism is discredited, and so take up an attitude of indifference to works which any longer join issue with it. None the less, those who realise the precariousness of modern gains in the battle against the tyranny of the past must continue the campaign, so doing what they can to save the optimists from, it may be, a rude awakening."

We are glad to see Mr. Robertson taking his forceful share in continuing the campaign. The service of every soldier of Freethought is as requisite as ever. Christianity is a huge vested interest, in full possession of the field by inheritance from the ignorant and superstitious past. It still controls education, and thus manufactures supporters. And the great mass of the indifferentists, who do not go to church or chapel, read very little but trash, and would hardly count in any life-and-death struggle between the forces of progress and reaction.

The first part of Mr. Robertson's book is, in some respects, a masterly account of the Progress of Mythology. The second part deals with Christ and Krishna, and pretty thoroughly (we think) establishes that the Hindu myth was in no way borrowed from the Christian story, being in its essence the older of the two. A laborious confutation of Western pretensions was perhaps necessary, and Mr. Robertson has done it once for all. Christianity itself has been the great borrower. Having been "manufactured within historic times," as Mr. Robertson observes, its processes can be traced, and we can see how it selected its material from the common stock of oriental mythology. Otherwise, the "borrowing" argument might be pressed unduly. The material environment is essentially always the same, and human imagination has its laws as well as human reason; hence the mythology of the race, in certain stages of its development, has a wonderful, but after all a very natural, similarity.

The third part of Mr. Robertson's book, on the Gospel Myths, is in our opinion the most important, as it is the best written. It is really a strong and thorough piece of work. After a severe criticism—severe in the sense of being courageous and exhaustive—the view is reached that "there is simply nothing left which can entitle anyone to a belief in any tangible personality behind the name" of Jesus. Mr. Robertson holds that the Christ of the New Testament is as mythical as the other legendary founders of religious institutions. After going over the ordinary ground of the Gospel story—or rather stories—he devotes a special division to the Myths of Doctrine, thus carrying the war into the enemy's last citadel. Mr. Matthew Arnold dismissed all the supernaturalism of the Gospels, and staked everything on the teaching of Jesus. Mr. Robertson deals with this carefully, and argues that the sayings

are as mythical as the life. The Sermon on the Mount, for instance, besides being "extremely unfit for oral communication to a popular audience," is demonstrably as much a collection from Jewish and other Eastern ethics as the Lord's Prayer is a *cento* from the prayers current amongst the people of Israel. Mr. Robertson's conclusion is this:—

"The Christian cult is literally the work of many generations; and though it may be arguable that certain men, as Paul, were specially active in promoting the mere external acceptance of it, it is here maintained that there is no ground for ascribing any of its special doctrines, any section of its Gospels, to any man whose name has been preserved. Alike the worst and the best are the work of men who elude our search; and both alike are clearly within the power of many nameless men of the ancient civilisations."

We might suggest that a parallel—not exactly close, but close enough—may be found in the history of the great Christian cathedrals. There are legends about their erection, but we do not know who built them. They are monuments of the skill, and zeal, and labor of nameless workers, probably through several generations. Christian story and Christian doctrine were built up in the same way. The identity of the builders is unknown; they worked under the impulse of certain ideas, and were probably careless about celebrating themselves to posterity; and such names as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are legendary afterthoughts, which were found serviceable in giving an historic air to what was merely a patchwork of fiction.

We repeat that the final section of Mr. Robertson's book is an extremely valuable piece of work. It is replete with information, its method is admirable, its composition is flowing and lucid. The writer grasps his subject and interests his readers. He walks firmly and confidently on comparatively fresh ground. We have unqualified admiration for this part of his performance. If his book contained nothing else, this alone would entitle it to a distinguished place in the literature of Freethought.

G. W. FOOTE.

Belief, not Inquiry.

WHATEVER professed Christians may say to the contrary, there is no doubt in my mind that the majority favor blind belief in their teachings rather than patient investigation into the truth and value of what they seek to inculcate. It must not be overlooked that, while Secularism encourages the fullest untrammelled investigation into the claims of all religions, Christianity is opposed to the free examination of the credentials of that which they term "the one thing needful." The basis of the Christian faith is belief, not inquiry. Orthodox Christians can consistently say, in the words of Bacon, "We love better to believe than to examine." The language of the New Testament is, "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel"; those "that believe are justified from all things"; "Believe on Christ, and thou shalt be saved"; "For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." St. Paul prayed that he "may be delivered from them that do not believe." He designated unbelievers as "proud, knowing nothing, but dotting about questions and strife of words.....from such withdraw thyself." "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Surely it cannot reasonably be contended that such teachings as these can in any way favor free inquiry. They have been relied upon for centuries by professed Christians to justify the ostracism they show to unbelievers, and the tortures and death inflicted upon heretics.

The free pursuit of truth has been productive of so many advantages to the human race that whatever tends to limit its operations should be condemned as inimical to general progress. Unfettered inquiry is so essential and valuable to individual and national advancement that to some it may appear as a waste of time to offer arguments in its defence. But, as James Napier Bailey truly wrote:—

"Though there are few hardy enough to deny the abstract right of man to inquire after truth, there have

not been wanting persons who, at different times and in various countries, have endeavored to prevent certain classes of mankind from exercising this privilege. The tyrant has immured in a dungeon the political philosopher who has dared to expose the corruption of courts, and to impart information to the people respecting the maladministration of political affairs. The priest has denounced, anathematized, and incarcerated the man of science who has had the presumption to think for himself respecting matters of fact, and the boldness to make the results of his inquiries known to the world. And, copying the example of the tyrant and the priest, many persons in what are called the lower walks of life have endeavored to impede the progress of knowledge by throwing obstacles in the way of those who have determined to seek it at all hazards."

Unfortunately, such retarding influences are not yet altogether extinct, and, but for the power of Freethought, no doubt the same evils would now be more prevalent than they are. It is through relying upon the dictates of reason rather than following the impulse of blind faith that we owe the exemption which obtains from priestly interference with, and from theological power over, the free exercise of our mental faculties. The great obstacle to the acquirement of truth has been Christian bigotry. Buckle wrote: "Real knowledge, the knowledge on which all civilisation is based, solely consists in an acquaintance with the relations which things and ideas bear to each other, and to themselves; in other words, in an acquaintance with physical and mental laws." The history of the orthodox religion proves that the object and aim of its advocates have been too frequently to discourage and prevent the acquisition and dissemination of this knowledge.

It has been contended by some that reason is fallible, and, therefore, not a trustworthy guide in religious matters. If this were so, it would disparage the value of that faculty which Christians erroneously boast God has given to man above all other creatures. Of course, it is not here contended that all men are guided by reason. If they were, there would not be so many victims of superstition in our midst. Ignorance, bigotry, and prejudice may, and do, hide truth from the light of reason, as sure as a defect in the eye obscures the recognition of the true light of nature. This will account, in some degree, for the fact that, with many persons, reason is no factor in forming and maintaining their religious views, while with the same persons this faculty is of the greatest service in their business pursuits. It is granted that some men are incapable of properly weighing evidence and forming a sound judgment upon religious belief. Hence they are apt to form a low estimate of the greatest faculty which should adorn the animal kingdom. Besides, if reason be, as some assert, "a divine gift," those who use it should be deemed the noblest of our race. It is not overlooked that many persons urge that it is not the province of reason to be the judge of "divine things"; the Bible, it is alleged, supplies that function. The first statement is probably true, for reason has failed to throw any light upon the nature of those much-talked-of "divine things." But the last allegation, if true, casts a grave reflection upon the supposed giver of reason. If Revelation is our sole guide upon religious subjects, then it can be of little service to those whose reason cannot comprehend it, and also to those who have never seen nor heard of it.

To me it appears absolutely absurd to appeal to incredible evidence to prove an incredible doctrine. To prove anything implies a process of thought with a view of discovering that which is reasonable. The promise of heaven or the threat of hell is not evidence of the truth of any doctrine. If such promises and threats sometimes influence the minds of believers, is it not what we should call, if applied in secular affairs, bribery and intimidation? Such means may lead to a confession of faith, but they afford no proof of the truth of what is professed. It, therefore, appears inevitable that whoever accepts Christianity in the light of reason must perforce recognise the necessity of natural evidence similar in kind to that which determines the mind on other subjects. But would not this compel the rejection of the greater, and, from a Christian standpoint, the most important, part of Christianity—namely, the supernatural and the miraculous? Christianity teaches that, if we fail to believe, we are to be damned hereafter.

This makes all inquiry a farce, inasmuch as it determines that we have no choice in the matter. The decree of the New Testament is that all must believe one thing; therefore, a man cannot select even the religion he prefers, to say nothing of testing its truth. St. Paul's injunction to "prove all things" is of no value if it be true, as he states, that "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." This renders inquiry upon our part entirely useless, as the ability to arrive at any conclusion rests not with us, but with a God, we "being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." If this is Gospel truth, Christianity can be no friend to free inquiry. We know, however, that whatever reason pronounces to be false no Scripture and no Acts of Parliament can make true. All that threats and force can effect is to induce men to repeat, like parrots, articles of belief, and to act as hypocrites.

From what has here been said, it must not be inferred that I regard all who profess Christianity to be either destitute or incapable of logical deductions. I know many Christians who hold similar views to myself as to the process by which men arrive at beliefs and opinions. But it will be found, on strict examination, that theirs is an eclectic Christianity—that is, they accept only such parts as appear to them to be true. Such people consider that uniformity of opinion is not to be expected when probability is the only ground upon which a belief is based. The state of society most desirable is that in which the holding and avowal of all opinions shall be allowed, without any evil consequences accruing to those who entertain them. Such a condition of society we have not at present. Those who are acquainted with orthodox Christians have doubtless discovered that they hold the most imperious notions of their own views, while they deem the opinions of those who differ from them as beneath contempt. On all hands devout professors of Christianity deplore the state of mind of those who, after proving the grounds of their belief, fail to hold fast the Christian view. The Secular motto is justice and freedom for all in the pursuit of truth, and, therefore, in the words of Pope, I say:—

For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

CHARLES WATTS.

The Priest and the Child.

(Concluded from page 594.)

THE next reply made to such as object to the existing arrangements under which religious instruction is given in the public schools is that there is a special provision made for the protection of such objectors, in the shape of a conscience clause. Any parent is at liberty to withdraw his or her children from religious instruction by the method of filling up a printed form to that effect. This, it is often said, provides ample protection for the conscientious objector.

But, if the compromise is unjust, the conscience clause is both unjust and ridiculous. In the first place, the mere existence of the conscience clause is a practical surrender of the claim that some form of religious instruction is indispensable to the child's future welfare. If the duties of citizenship cannot be adequately discharged in the absence of religious beliefs, then every reason that will warrant the State teaching other matters will also warrant it teaching this. The presence of the conscience clause is a tacit admission that religious beliefs are not essential to the child's future welfare, and thus removes the only logical reason for making them part and parcel of the school curriculum.

The matter of a conscience clause is peculiarly objectionable in the case of Voluntary schools. Here the avowed reason for the opening of the schools is that, in the opinion of their managers, education is robbed of its chief value if divorced from religion. Yet they are willing to hang up a conscience clause, to convert the school into a purely secular establishment for five-sixths of the school time, to confine the religious instruction to a brief period at the beginning and end

of the school time—thus, on their own showing, rendering their schools inefficient—and all for the purpose of earning the Government grant. If they were really and honestly consistent, Voluntary school managers would refuse to hang up the conscience clause, and forfeit the grant; but that, perhaps, is too much to expect. And we, the public, while admitting the educational inferiority of the Voluntary schools, yet, as John Morley said, "permit the clergy and their patrons to bribe us with a fraction of voluntary subscription to allow them to prevent a certain number of children from being well instructed..... We sell the chances of the young for the thirty or more pieces of silver of the system which is absurdly called Voluntary."*

In the next place, the conscience clause, even if a legitimate device, is largely inoperative. Whether the fear be rightly or wrongly based, and there is only too much cause for believing that in many cases the fear is justified, it is yet a fact that large numbers of parents do object to withdrawing their children from religious instruction, because they are of opinion that such a step will make their school life irksome and obnoxious—not always as the result of any action of the teachers, but often because of the petty tyranny that children know so well to exert one towards the other. But even if this were not so, the conscience clause does not, and cannot, satisfy the demands of the most elementary principles of religious equality or of social justice. To compel all classes of non-Christians to pay towards the teaching of Christianity is bad enough, but to imagine that the injustice is abolished by the simple expedient of saying, "We insist on your paying towards this religion being taught, but we are gracious enough to allow you to do without it if you are so inclined," reveals a depth of stupidity or knavery which reflects little credit upon such as speak in this manner. Churchmen might with equal logic retort on the Dissenters who object to Church rates: "Well, but you need not come to church unless you like." What is objected to is not only getting the religion, but also having to pay for it. We have no intention of questioning the right of parents to give their children whatever religious instruction seems to them best; only we submit that along with the right to teach it goes the duty of paying for it. As things stand at present, Christian parents not only claim the right of selecting the religion, but also that of compelling all others to contribute to its support.

No one put the absurdity of a conscience clause, as designed to meet the injustice of religious instruction in the schools, more clearly than did Sir William Harcourt. Speaking in the House of Commons on March 10, 1870, he said:—

"I confess that this conscience clause has always seemed to me an imposture and a sham, and I believe that the day is tolerably near when it is about to be found out..... What is a conscience clause? You tell us, on the one hand, that religion is the basis of all education, and we accept that statement, and establish religious schools. You say that it is the greatest and most important of education, and then you give effect to your declaration by telling the children when they come to school: 'You must not fail to attend to reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography, but there is one subject which you may entirely neglect if you please. When religious instruction is about to be imparted, if you object to the teaching, you may go out and play marbles in the gutter.' It is now what it always has been—an irrational method of defending and propping up an indefensible system of denominational education. You choose to devote a certain portion of money raised from the public to the support of an educational system in which all cannot share, and you are consequently compelled, having begun by a political injustice, to cure it by a religious, or rather an irreligious, absurdity."

Clearly there is only one way to deal justly by all classes of the community, as well as to put a stop to the quarrelling and ill-feeling engendered by the present arrangement. And that is to keep the schools for their legitimate object, and the teacher to his legitimate task. We are not all interested in theological questions; we are all interested in seeing that each child gets, as far as lies in our power to secure it, a fair grasp of the rudiments of the information that the race has gradually acquired. And even those who are interested in theological questions might well pause and ask themselves

* *Struggle for National Education*, p. 123.

whether it is not straining the power that a parent wields over a child by forcing upon its mind as *facts* beliefs which even Christians will admit may be mistaken. A child does not discriminate between different sets of teachings; it accepts all with equal trustfulness; and it is surely an outrage upon its innocence and trustfulness to put before it, as upon exactly the same level of certitude, the existence of heaven and the antipodes, the doubtful stories of religious speculation, and the certainties of science or sociology.

It is not that we who are opposed to religious instruction in the public schools wish to impose upon others views that they do not believe in. To do so would be simply to change the position of the injured parties. We do not propose to teach children that Christian doctrines are either true or false. We say the public school is not the place in which to conduct an anti-Christian propaganda, and, for the same reason, it is not the place in which to teach Christian doctrines. What we would have is to leave such teaching, *pro* and *con.*, until the child is old enough to understand it—or, at least, if parents will have it, let it be taught at their own expense and under their own conditions. But while we are not agreed concerning theological subjects, we are all agreed as to the necessity of teaching children reading, writing, arithmetic, history, the first principles of science, etc.; and, therefore, it is our plain duty to restrict the school curriculum to that which *all* parties are agreed upon is necessary to the child's future welfare, and not to occupy the best half-hour or more of the school time—the period when the scholar's mind is clearest and brightest—with teachings with which a section only are in agreement.

In what has gone before I have restricted myself to a statement of the case against religious instruction in the public schools, which is quite independent of any particular view of Christianity, either for or against. On the grounds of social justice and of social expediency, I hold that there is ample reason for excluding the Bible from the schools. But it is obvious that an equally strong case may be drawn up, based upon the nature of the instruction given and the character of the book upon which it is based. That the Bible contains stories and phrases revolting to modern notions of decency, that the supernaturalism with which it is permeated is equally objectionable from a purely intellectual standpoint, are statements that few educated Christians even will care to deny. Of course, adults may apologise for these stories on the ground that such free expressions and such supernaturalism are common to all peoples in the earlier stages of their development, and the plea is sound enough so far as they are concerned. But children come under an altogether different category. They are not taught, nor would it be advisable to teach young children, all that they may learn concerning the Bible as they reach maturity. The Bible is before them in a place of superiority over all other books; they are taught that it is "God's word"; that it contains the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; while the real truth concerning the book has to be slowly learned in after years, often at the cost of pain and heartburning.

The late Dr. Martineau was not a man whom one can honestly say was an enemy to the Christian religion, or a friend to what is known as Secularism. Yet he was driven to the following statement concerning the influence of Bible-reading on children:—

"To parents, then, who would guard the moral purity of their child—who would not wish him to find access anywhere to impressions and premature knowledge of wrong, from which they would shield him in a novel or a tale; who would dread his contracting a sympathy with ferocious and intolerant passions; who would maintain his estimate of duty wisely graduated, and not suffer him to confound secondary with primary obligation.....who would mix no taint of selfishness with his morality, of ignoble despondency with his conceptions of life and death—will be cautious in their use of the ancient Scriptures, and permit no unregulated access to them within their house. Of course, there will be a clamour; but their duty is not to the bigot neighbor, but to the child at home."

The soundness of Dr. Martineau's contention would be further enforced by an examination of any of the Scripture syllabuses issued either in London or the provinces.

The whole are permeated with the miraculous, with the supernatural. One provincial syllabus that lies before me as I write simply bristles with miraculous stories—the feeding of the five thousand, the story of the demoniac boy, the raising of Lazarus, etc. Others are content to instruct the teachers to give the "leading facts in the life of our Lord," which either means teaching miracles that are discredited by modern thought, or it means nothing.

There is, as a matter of fact, no real reason for retaining the Bible in its present position in the public schools, save one—the interests of a class demand it. The fight of the clergy for the schools is the fight of a huge corporation struggling with all the energy of threatened vested interests to retain the only sure method of manufacturing clients. Let this be clearly understood by all. The contest between church and chapel is not an educational contest in any real sense of the word. It is a struggle between two rival forms of supernaturalism, either of which is willing to sacrifice the real welfare of the children in the interests of their organisation, both of which are equally objectionable to the non-believer, and either of which is willing to trample underfoot every principle of social justice, should occasion demand it.

How long is this iniquitous condition of things to obtain? We compel the teachers—a large number of whom would gladly drop the religious instruction altogether—to give instruction which many of them believe to be false or injurious; we force upon the child teachings the falsity of which it is bound to perceive as it reaches maturity, and which are admitted to be open to question even by those who believe in them; we inflict an injustice upon a large and growing section of the public; we commit an unpardonable offence against the innocence and truthfulness of the child, and all that the interests of church or chapel may be promoted. Is it not high time that we took a saner view of the educational problem? Is it not time to recognise that the teaching of fantastical religious utterances or theosophic doctrines is not education at all. It neither trains the mind nor does it inform it. It merely converts the brain into an intellectual lumber room that has to be cleared before useful work can be done. Let those who would have religious instruction have it by all means. But let it be at their own expense and in their own establishments. Let us keep it out of the public schools, and keep the child free from the designs of the priests of all denominations. Let there be at least one place where the jangling of the sects is silenced, one place where the child may learn the simple lessons of honesty, truthfulness, justice, where it may be taught the plain lessons of individual and social prosperity, freed from the presence of designing priests or deadening creeds.

C. COHEN.

Obituary.

It is my painful duty to record the death of Thomas Anderson, aged 65 years, late of New Springs, Ashbull, Wigan, Lancashire, who died at Heaton, Newcastle, on September 14. Deceased had recently been living at Sheepwash, near Morpeth, and was bringing his furniture to Heaton to reside there, when he unfortunately met with an accident by falling from the cart, which resulted in death. He was an ardent Freethinker, often travelling miles to attend lectures. His desire for a Secular burial was carried out by Mr. R. Mitchell reading the Secular Burial Service in an impressive manner to a large number of friends. Interment took place at Heaton Cemetery on September 18.—J. G. BARTRAM.

From the moment that religion seeks assistance from philosophy her downfall is unavoidable. She strives to defend herself, and always talks herself deeper into ruin. Religion, like all other absolutisms, may not justify herself. Prometheus is bound to the rock by a silent power. Æschylus represents the personification of brute force as not speaking a single word. It must be dumb.—*Heine*.

Life in itself is neither good nor evil; it is the place of good or evil according as you prepare it for them. And if you have lived one day, you have seen all; one day is equal to all other days. There is no other light, there is no other night.—*Montaigne*.

Acid Drops.

IVAN CIEN, secretary to the Chinese Minister in London, sent a capital letter to the London *Daily Mail* in reply to Mr. Julian Ralph's article on "All the Trouble in China." The *Mail* did not "like either the tone or the matter" of the Celestial's reply, which contained "many unnecessary sneers at Christianity." Poor dear Christians! How sensitive they are! How they writhe when a little—ever so little—of the sauce with which they dish the "heathen" is poured over themselves! Mr. Ralph described the way in which the ignorant Chinese scare away devils, partly by means of empty beer-bottles. Well, said the bland Celestial, supposing this is all true, are there not ignorant, superstitious people everywhere, and is not an empty beer-bottle "as good for keeping off devils as the largest bells ever erected in any tower"? A hit, a hit, a palpable hit! No wonder the *Mail* is wild.

The bland Celestial goes on to say that China contains nine times as many people as the United States, but they don't spend nine times 200,000,000 dollars a year in "propitiating their gods and devils." They do it just as effectively for less than half that sum. Good, thou bland Celestial, very good! You are too many for these Christians. They could do with half your cleverness.

Then the bland Celestial goes on to explain that the educated, intelligent people in China follow the teaching of the great Secular philosopher, Confucius. "Confucius," he says, "has taught us to respect our ancestors and leave the gods alone. Confucius teaches us to have nothing whatsoever to do with anyone who pretends to have any intercourse with the supernatural." We have amongst us, however, he says, a silly lot of people called Buddhists, who have "a religion almost identical with the Christian religion," and the trouble in China is just what would happen in England if Buddhist missionaries tried to supplant the Catholics and Protestants. "Suppose," he says, "a Chinese priest should come to England, and it should be known that every burglar, pick-pocket, and thief, by becoming a Buddhist, would become exempt from arrest by the police. Suppose that the introduction of a new faith into England should give the criminal classes license to ply their trade in London with complete immunity from the action of the laws. Would the English people submit to such a state of affairs?" Certainly not. Then why should the Chinese? Finally, the bland Celestial says that China wants our science, and wants to trade with us, but doesn't want our missionaries. What is more, she won't have them. And that is all there is in it.

Sir Robert Hart, whose name has figured so largely of late in connection with China and its troubles, was in early life connected with a Methodist New Connection Church in the county of Antrim. When the church celebrated its centenary a little time ago, he sent home a letter which has now been published. He recalls in it various features of the early services, including the singing of "that very pathetic tune":—

I'll creep before Him as a worm,
And see Him die for me.

The tune may have been pathetic, and so, in a sense, are the words. Is it not painful to think of the mean and grovelling spirit they represent? And this is Christianity!

Mr. Julian Ralph recently published a stinging criticism on missionary methods, entitled "Women who make trouble." He showed how in China "irritation began with antagonism to missionaries," and how women missionaries most of all contrived to stir up native ill-will. Now, a writer in the Evangelical weekly, *The News*, objects, from another point of view, to women being allowed to enter the mission field—at any rate, that of China.

"I see," he says, "that the Protestant missions in Peking are re-organising their work. I have also noticed the predominance of women among the murdered missionaries. I think it is time for someone to make a protest against the presence of women in the mission field in China, with its sporadic outbursts of massacre and outrage. There is a form of martyrdom which no woman should seek, and no man help her to obtain, and risks which no enthusiasm justifies for a woman. Of the selfishness which brings women and little children into such places much might be said. But it behoves all the Churches to see that they offer their women-martyrs no such palm as this intolerable one."

Little Johnny Kensit is haunting Newcastle-on-Tyne during the sessions of the Church Congress. He is evidently more cocky than ever—which some of us thought impossible. His handbill is headed "Kensit Crusade in Newcastle." Underneath we read, "Protestantism before Party Politics." Yes, but Kensit before everything else. At the bottom of the handbill we read, "Protestants, Awake! Remember the Martyrs!" But this is not sufficiently precise. It does not

say whether the martyrs to be remembered are the Protestants burnt by Mary, the Catholics burnt by Elizabeth, or the Protestants and Catholics who were impartially burnt by Henry the Eighth. Perhaps little Johnny is only conversant with the Protestant martyrology, and fancies that everybody else's information is equally limited.

"We know what we are, we know not what we may be," says poor Ophelia. True, and life often looks strange when viewed in the opposite direction. Joseph Chamberlain was once a Sunday-school teacher.

Rev. Marcus Rainsford, a Church clergyman, says that when he was at Brixton Church the great Spurgeon would sometimes lunch with him on Sunday. Both were smokers, and Spurgeon would ask God to bless their evening services, putting down his cigar meanwhile, "so that it should not go out." What a touch! Dropping his cigar to address God Almighty, and making careful provision to resume smoking directly the Lord has done listening! Only Nonconformist piety is equal to these things.

Yarmouth Sabbatarianism found a fresh victim in Alfred Jay, a fruiterer, who was fined five shillings and costs for selling pippins on the Lord's Day. He explained that he merely sold some fruit to a poor excursionist, who wanted it for his half-a-dozen children. He told the bigots that he would do the same thing again, and that they were making themselves the laughing-stock of the world. Whereupon the chairman called upon the police to turn him out of court. Alfred Jay, who is no "jay" after all, planked down his fine, etc., and said, "I go with pleasure."

Palmists have been heavily fined at Bournemouth and Dewsbury. How is it, asks the writer of a certain leading article, that these far-seeing people cannot anticipate the visits of the police? A most pertinent question, which may be recommended to the attention of their dupes.

True to its superstitious traditions, the Roman Catholic Church offered strong opposition to the cremation of the body of the young man Molloy, who died of the plague at Glasgow. We read that the body still lies in a hermetically-sealed coffin in the mortuary. What is to become of it we are not informed. Perhaps the matter will be settled some time next century. Meanwhile the Roman Catholic Church may well congratulate itself on its power to over-ride common sense and social safety.

"God forgive me," wrote Richard Carter, an ex-schoolmaster, before committing suicide at Wimbledon. The jury found that he was temporarily insane. We should think so. The poor fellow was hopelessly in trouble, and it was a sign of insanity when he asked forgiveness of the God who had driven him to despair, or left him in it without the slightest assistance.

Rev. C. M. Sheldon, the *What Would Jesus Do?* man of God, who came over from Topeka to help the Christian Endeavorers in London, seems to have carried a drop in his eye all the time he was here. Perhaps it was because he is a teetotaler, and lives in a Prohibition city. He appears to have seen drunken people everywhere; he was insulted in cars, jostled on railway platforms, and forced off the sidewalk by drunkards. It is all very absurd, of course; but what accuracy can be expected from a silly dreamer like Mr. Sheldon; a dreamer, by the way, who still retains a keen eye for the main chance?

There is, at least, one Church of England clergyman who has a belief—indeed, an awe-stricken belief—in the existence of the personality of the devil. He "believes and trembles." This clerical fossil is the Rev. G. W. Butler, of Broad Mayne, who ventilates a grievous complaint in the *Record*. He seems almost afraid to mention the devil by name, but delicately alludes to him as the "enemy of God and man." And his complaint is that "an insult to high heaven" has been offered in the "profane title" familiarly given to the 14th Middlesex (Inns of Court) Volunteer Battalion—namely, "The Devil's Own."

One may well ask, where the devil does the "profanity" come in, in this free use of the devil's name? The rev. gentleman hopes that the colloquial title of the battalion—"so horrible and wicked"—has never received official sanction, as if these military nicknames ever did. How, he asks, could anyone approach the throne of a holy God with a prayer that he would prosper the warfare of a battalion with such an appellation? The *Record* adds a note unctuously hoping that someone will write to the War Office or to Lord Wolseley. Then there would, indeed, be some sulphurous language which we should like the rev. gentleman to hear.

The clergy make a great profession that their "high and holy calling" is to save souls. But they won't undertake the precious work unless they are paid—especially if the souls

to be saved are merely those of paupers. Kendal Board of Guardians have declined to accede to the Local Government Board's request to appoint a paid Anglican chaplain, on the ground that the inmates are free to attend any place of worship they like. Some Church members, we learn, used strong language in reference to the reluctance of the clergy to give voluntary service in the workhouse. Of course, it would involve only a trifling overtime that could be run in with their other work for which they receive stipends. But no; their valuable services, even to that extent, are not to be given "without money or without price."

The Bishop of Ripon says he is "tired of hearing the average clergy run down." Then why doesn't he induce them to brighten up? As some sort of answer to that question, he says he is arranging in his diocese for instruction, by means of lectures, to be given to the clergy in scientific and other questions. They want it.

The *Western Morning News* recently published a letter from a correspondent, who wrote: "In this town (Torquay) we have suffered during the past few years from the abject twaddle talked by the mission preachers in the pulpits of our churches during Advent and Lent, and at other times. So much so, indeed, that it now only suffices to be known that one of these gentlemen will occupy the place of one of our esteemed vicars to ensure a scanty congregation. Their sermons may usually be characterised as full of emptiness, illogical and disconnected rant, and of immoderate length."

Upon this no doubt well-deserved "slating" the *Church Gazette* observes: "Many people will fully sympathise with the griefs of Torquay, because the trouble is general rather than local."

What is described as a "regrettable" incident occurred in College Free Church, Glasgow, the other Sunday. It was only the "chucking out," by the minister's orders, of a beloved brother in Christ. It seems that the pastor took up into his pulpit some objectionable pamphlet that had been circulated on the Union question. He was commenting upon it, when a member of the congregation ejaculated: "That's not true!" The minister stated that, if he were interrupted in that way, he would call on his Kirk session members to eject the person. He repeated his assertion, and was met with the same statement, whereupon Dr. Reith called upon the session to "eject that man." The person proved to be an influential member of the church, who consented to leave quietly. He was joined by another gentleman, and both, with their families, walked out of the church.

The Free Churches are arranging a Simultaneous Mission, which is to exhibit the features of "new century revivalism," and is announced as a "grand assault on Indifference." Well, the indifference of the masses to the religion of the Free Church, or any other variety, will stand a good deal of assaulting. We learn from the *Christian World* that it is to be "a mission with an ethical rather than a purely theological basis. The day has gone by when lurid pictures of the wrath of God against rebels and luscious descriptions of the joys of heaven were the chief stock-in-trade of the successful missionary. Missions on that basis might be effective among the ignorant, who could be touched only by playing on the primitive sensations of the uncultured; but even with such people the effects were merely ephemeral, enduring only while the induced state of transient emotional excitement lasted. To-day, and with people who read and think, the appeal must be to the higher intellectual faculties rather than to the lower sensations."

And it will be just because an appeal is made to "the higher intellectual faculties" that the mission may be expected to prove a big failure. Christian missions are not to be conducted on these lines—at least, with any success.

The Rev. E. Cornwall-Jones, preaching at Pwllheli, said he felt that the supreme need of Wales to-day was an ethical revival—less of theology and more of rigorous morality. He witnessed something the other day which would have been impossible in England; he met a party of intoxicated working men who were singing the hymn, "Bydd myrdd o rhyfed-dodau." He would much rather have heard them singing some ribald music-hall chorus than outraging religion by such incongruous hymn-singing.

The celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the unity of Italy, with Rome as its capital, in spite of the opposition of the Vatican, was an immense success. Rain fell in the morning, and the clericals said it was "the finger of God." But the sun came out brilliantly in the afternoon. We suppose that was the finger of the Devil.

"No one visibly present but myself." That, according to a clergyman who writes to the *Church Times*, is the sum-total of the attendance at his performance of daily morning and evening prayers in his church. He qualifies the statement by saying that this "is the rule." The exceptions are

mainly when members of his own household are able to be present. Still, he glories in the fact that every day he attends at his church, and reads the morning and evening prayers, from the Lord's Prayer to the Third Collect, whether anyone is there to hear or not.

He begins this cheerful monologue entertainment by ringing the bell himself, then he dons his priestly raiment, faces the empty church, and solemnly proceeds with his appointed task. With delightful naivety, he says: "I do not feel at all lonely." He is not disconcerted by the fact that when he offers his priestly salutation, "The Lord be with you," no answering "And with thy spirit" reaches his bodily ears. The Lord is there, with attendant angels, and possibly the "spirits of just men made perfect." Truly, somewhat of a farce, with, alas, no takings at the door.

As all things are possible with the Lord, he may have no difficulty in interpreting the following, which is the chorus to "Climbing up the Golden Stairs" done into the Zulu language:—

Ngi ya kupukela ezulwini
Umqele wami upambi Kwami
Ngi hamb' eku eKanyeni
Ngi hamb' imini nohusuku
Ngiyu ku memeza nga mandhl' ouke.

Bishop Selwyn, it is said, one day seized a few minutes' much-needed sleep on the bench of a little roadside station in Derbyshire, en route for a confirmation. A lady of some social distinction, but terribly nervous, and her daughter were on their way to the same rite, the daughter as a confirmee. Running to the solitary porter, the lady implored him not to go away, as they were afraid to pass the drunken man on the platform. To this the porter replied in solemn tones: "If you please, my lady, it's the Lord Bishop!"

Ah, those were happy and holy days! If the *Times* newspaper was delivered at a house by post on Sunday morning, it would be laid aside; even the letters would not be read on Sunday, and all the meals were taken cold. Such was the state of things in the boyhood of the Bishop of Barrow, and he sighed over its disappearance at the recent Carlisle Diocesan Conference. One can imagine his look of pain when the Rev. C. T. Duesburg mentioned that nowadays at Barrow, on a fine Sunday afternoon, a thousand excursionists go by rail to the Lakes, and 4,000 or 5,000 go across the channel to Walney Island. May we not look for Divine vengeance on such terrible sin?

Many people have gone to sleep in church, and many more, no doubt, will continue doing so. But the most extraordinary sleep in a "sacred edifice" is that of a girl named Freeman, of Foleshill. She fell asleep in chapel the other Sunday, and all efforts to arouse her failed. She continued asleep for days afterwards, and, for aught we know, may be asleep now. Surely it must have been an exceptionally soporific sermon.

Says Mr. Joseph Hatton, in his *Cigarette Papers*: "There is talk of a movement to discontinue the Sunday band at Cromer next season; but it is to be hoped that common sense will continue to prevail against the tyranny of a miserable bigotry that by now should be as much out of date as the stocks and the thumbscrew."

The Rev. D. Stewart, of Hawick, is terribly distressed at the sale of Sunday newspapers in his town. He says it is "a desecration of the Sabbath, and dishonoring to God." His real trouble, however, is jealousy—pure jealousy. He cannot bear to think that the sermons of the weekly newspaper should prove more interesting than his own.

Bury Nonconformists, says the *Umpire*, are disturbed at what they call "the growing disregard for the Sabbath" manifested by some of the local shopkeepers. So they ask the churches and schools to deal with the subject in a special manner. This means, presumably, that congregations and scholars will be instructed in the kind and gentle art of doing all they can to prevent a few small tradesmen from turning an honest penny on Sundays. Nonconformists working to compel others to conform to their views is a pretty paradox.

A new light has been thrown on the falling off in Sunday-school attendance. It is suggested that the summer treats have not proved satisfactory of late years to the juveniles. Like their elders, they expect to be rewarded for their piety—otherwise they are "not taking any now, thank you."

Religious mania has indirectly been the cause of a tragedy at Sir Edgar Brehm's Sussex residence, Bramlands, Woodmancote. One of Sir Edgar's guests—Mrs. Bertha Seymour Dowling—shot herself on the lawn in front of the house. The only assignable cause is that her husband was confined in a private lunatic asylum suffering from religious mania.

The nauseous cant of British clerics in connection with the Transvaal war is finely satirised in a little book called *Songs of the War*, by Mr. A. St. John Adcock, which has just been published. Here are two stanzas:—

Lord of the conquered land we gain,
Lord of the foe our hands have slain!
Glory to Thee amidst the dead
That Thou hast still Thy people led,
And shattered thus, O Lord benign!
This people that was also Thine.

Lord of our silence and our speech!
While to Thy throne our hymns upreach,
Surely each blackening wound that gapes,
Here in these broken human shapes,
Mouths but its praise of all Thy powers!—
Thou wert their God no less than ours.

A notorious character of the sanctified type recently organised in Southwark a mothers' excursion professedly in connection with St. George's Church. Some thirty-three mothers were taken in by the swindle, paying 3s. each, and then having to provide everything for themselves. He promised to take them into our lord's house. The magistrate's clerk inquired whether he meant the residence of a lord or a church. Witness: He said a lord's house. The Stipendiary: Did he take you into a big house? Witness: He took us into a public-house. It was further said that he asked them to pretend to be Roman Catholics for two hours. Unfortunately there did not appear to be enough evidence to convict, and the canting humbug was discharged.

The insanity of religion has been illustrated anew in Rochester, N.Y. A band of persons styling themselves Gospel Workers, and irreverently spoken of as "Holy Rollers," has been camping out at Cobb's Hill, just south of the city line, for several days. They have about twenty-five tents under the trees, and a large tent on a slope is stretched over the platform. The theory of the sect is that each person has more or less of the Devil in him, and that the way to get rid of this evil spirit is to roll it out. When their prayers have not succeeded in eradicating the Devil and his works, they throw themselves upon the ground and roll about until they are exhausted. On Friday night the emotions of the "Rollers" were aroused to a very high pitch. A young woman who has taught school, and is a graduate of one of the normal schools, became frenzied. The meeting broke up, and the "Rollers" had to restrain her by force from doing herself bodily harm. She was taken to one of the tents and fastened with ropes. She is religiously insane, and reported to be in a serious condition.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Edward Spencer, a prominent farmer, of Trenton, New Jersey, takes the Bible view of his authority over his wife. A court of justice has fined and imprisoned him for whipping her; but he will carry the case to the higher courts, with a view to establishing St. Paul's doctrine that "the husband is the head of the wife." The most curious feature of the case is Mrs. Spencer's admission that according to the Bible her husband was bound to castigate her. Her complaint is that he went beyond the bounds of moderation.

Father Reiss, of St. Liborius Church, St. Louis, U.S.A., has taken a leaf out of St. Paul's book. The great apostle was "down" on women who wore short hair. He liked to see it long, and he turned his own taste into a divine ordinance. Father Reiss, however, does not aspire to be a ladies' hairdresser. He is concerned about their raiment. During the hot weather even the lady members of his own church have been wearing network shirtwaists. This fashion he regards as distinctly immodest, and he declares that he will stop it, even if he has to refuse the sacraments to the female culprits. Well, we believe he will lose in this struggle. The clergy have always been very busy over the tuckers-and-petticoats question, but the ladies have always had their own way in the end. Besides, why should a Catholic priest bother his head about such matters? He is sworn to celibacy and chastity, and is as much out of the running as a eunuch.

"The demand for Miss Marie Corelli's new romance, *The Master Christian*," her publishers advertise, "is unabated. One hundred thousand copies were printed before publication, a number by far the largest on record. It is evident that even this enormous number will be quite insufficient to satisfy the public demands, and a new edition of 25,000 is being prepared. Such a success is unparalleled in the history of fiction." Very likely. But there are various kinds of "success," and Messrs. Methuen and Co. are no doubt speaking commercially. Perhaps they know as well as we do, if they cannot afford to say so, that a great sale is not the necessary sign of a great book. Notoriety is not even popularity. Miss Marie Corelli will, we hope, pardon us for reminding her that the Jesus Christ whom she worships (and exploits) did not get £6,000 for any or all of his compositions.

Judged by the standard of her publishers, he was a most miserable failure. The Jewish mob howled at him, his own apostles forsook him and fled when he was arrested, and he died alone on the cross, except for the company of a couple of thieves. Evidently the "Christianity of Christ" pays a great deal better now than it did then.

A correspondent of the *Daily News* says that Mr. Sankey composed a certain hymn tune "as the Holy Spirit gave it to him." This is surely a new theory of musical composition. If the Holy Spirit gave that tune to Mr. Sankey, it must have been a double and treble distilled Holy Spirit that gave Beethoven one of his sonatas, or Wagner one of his Lohengrin or Tannhauser movements, or Chopin his haunting funeral march, or Mozart the lovely airs of his operas. Perhaps it was the opposite party, Old Nicholas, who gave tunes to Offenbach and Sullivan. On the whole, however, we fancy that neither the Holy Spirit nor Old Nicholas had anything to do with the matter. Sankey's tunes, in any case, are hardly worthy of either party.

Willesden has a population of 128,000. Civil marriage is, of course, legal there as it is elsewhere, but those who want to enter into the holy bonds of matrimony that way experience much difficulty. They have to travel three miles to Hendon, and on arriving there they find that the ceremony has to be performed in the *workhouse*. This is one of those pretty little tricks by which people are jockeyed into getting married in a church, and it is worthy of the religionists who give it their countenance.

If the accounts of Russian barbarities in China are true, or one tenth part true, it is perfectly clear that these Christian brutes are the vilest hypocrites on earth. They are doing deliberately, and in cold blood, the very thing which the "Allies," including Russia, are bent on punishing the Chinese for doing under the influence of a passionate fanaticism, and on a much smaller scale. Scores of hamlets in flames, men butchered by the thousand, women and children cut to pieces; such, according to report, is the Christian method of avenging the martyrdom of a few missionaries. "I came not to send peace, but a sword."

The Cowboys and the Preacher.

In the early days of Garden City district, in South-west Kansas, I was camped one night, sleeping under my buggy, in Kearney county, south of Hartland. There were five of us in the party. We were all sleeping, and our campfire had died down, when one of our number was awakened by a cowboy, who wanted to know where the big preacher was. I was pointed out, and awakened by a shake of his foot. He asked: "Are you a preacher?"

"I am," I replied.

"Well, hustle out; we want you to come to our camp and give us a chapter of the everlasting."

"I will be down in the morning," I replied.

He pointed his gun at me, and said: "You will come now."

I immediately answered: "All right."

I hurried out, and followed him nearly a mile away to a camp where I found his comrades were waiting.

"Well, boys, what do you want?" I asked.

"The best you have in the shop, and we want it short and sweet, and in old Methodist style," answered the leader.

"Then sit down," I said, "and, as I cannot, you must sing."

They sang with great vigor, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul." When I prayed, I coupled prayer with watching, believing that, under the circumstances, the two should go together. I then preached them a sermon from Revelation iii. 20, entitled "The Ladder to Glory." I have often used an hour on this sermon; but, as the boys wanted it short, I gave it to them in about twelve minutes, and then bade them good-night and started for camp.

"Hold on, come back here." They all seemed to speak at once. "We never let a preacher go off in that style; Pete, you take up the collection."

And Pete seemed to understand his work as steward, and turned me over eleven dollars.—*Rev. A. P. George.*

Betwixt Vice and Virtue.

Why, then, eternal punishment for the temporary offences of so frail a creature as man?.....Heaven and hell suppose two distinct species of men—the good and the bad; but the greatest part of mankind float betwixt vice and virtue. Were one to go round the world with the intention of giving a good supper to the righteous and a sound drubbing to the wicked, he would frequently be embarrassed in his choice, and would find the merits and demerits of most men and women scarcely amount to the value of either.—*David Hume.*

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 30, Glasgow.
 October 7, Manchester; 14, Athenæum Hall; 21, Birmingham; 28, Leicester.

To Correspondents.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS.—September 30, Athenæum Hall. October 7, Athenæum Hall; 9 and 10, debate at Bolton; 14 (Sunday), Bolton; 21, Birmingham; 23, 24, 25, and 28 (Sunday), Glasgow and districts. 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.

G. J. WARREN (E. London Branch) thanks A. E. Embleton for a parcel of clothing for distribution.

S. BURGON, a lady Freethinker, writes:—"I am sending you £1 towards the Twentieth Century Fund. If I were a millionaire, you should not want for funds. I earnestly hope you may live to a good old age, for the sake of your wife and family, and no less for your own sake and the good of the cause you have so much at heart. I am also taking another Share in the Freethought Publishing Company, and am sending remittance in full for same to the Secretary." We like to read such letters as this. We should also be glad if all Freethinkers were as liberal, proportionately, as this correspondent.

H. W. JONES.—The *Freethinker* advertisement scale is printed every week on the ninth page, at the end of answers to correspondents.

FREETHOUGHT TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND.—J. Hughes, 10s. 6d.; S. Burgon, £1; F. Rogers, 5s.; G. Harlow, £2.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

G. PARSONS and W. G. GILES.—Please note that Lecture Notices, and all other things meant for the *Freethinker*, should be sent direct to the editor, not to Miss Vance.

F. P. STERRY, 2 Briar-road, Twickenham, a member of the Camberwell Branch, thinks that a Branch might be formed to do good work in his locality, and would be glad to hear from Freethinkers there who are willing to co-operate.

M. E. PEGG.—Reply will be sent shortly.

H. LEWIS.—We do not think you understand Christianity. You pick out a few texts that please you, and call that the religion of Jesus Christ. We have no quarrel with your own sentiments.

E. R. WOODWARD.—We are glad to hear that Mr. Wilmot's experiment on Clapham Common has been so far successful, and that Mr. Cohen had a large and friendly audience there on Sunday.

F. J. GOULD.—All right. Mr. Foote will send along subjects in good time.

T. H. DUKE, M. BROWN, and others, are notified that their Shilling Week subscriptions will be acknowledged next week, and their letters noticed.

H. R. CLIFTON.—See answer to E. R. Woodward. Pleased to hear the supply of literature will be arranged to equal the demand at future meetings. Also glad that you are interesting yourself in the work.

W. H. W. asks us to send a *Freethinker* contents-sheet to his newsagent, which shall of course be done. "I not only," this correspondent says, "buy an extra copy myself, but have persuaded my newsagent to put a copy of the paper in his window, promising to take it myself if unsold. By this means he has made a new customer, and now promises to expose a bill."

J. G. BARTRAM.—Excellent work. We tender you our best thanks.

F. RYAN.—Received with thanks, and will appear in our next issue.

RECEIVED.—Public Opinion—Two Worlds—Free Society—Truth-seeker (New York)—Crescent—Yorkshire Evening Post—The Ethical World—Birmingham Daily Mail—Birmingham Daily Gazette.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Special.

FREETHOUGHT TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND.

Shilling Week.

THE first week in October will be a "Shilling Week" in aid of the Freethought Twentieth Century Fund. During that period I expect to receive one shilling (or more) from hundreds—I would fain hope thousands—of Freethinkers in all parts of the country. All the envelopes will be opened with my own hands, and all letters accompanying the postal orders (or cheques) will be carefully read. A good many subscribers will doubtless, as on previous occasions, take the opportunity of saying whatever happens to be on their minds. I am really anxious to know what they are thinking, and to see what suggestions they have to make.

This time I hope there will be very few laggards. Let all act together. Let every one feel that his fellow Freethinkers are doing something, in common with himself, during that particular week. This alone should be a stimulus and an inspiration.

The poorest can send one shilling. Others can send several shillings. If all do their best, we shall raise an amount of which the party may be proud. Never mind how little you can send. Send it. Numbers tell. Drops enough will make an ocean.

Probably most of those who have promised certain contributions towards the Fund will forward their remittances during the same first week in October.

Now then for a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together—as they say at sea; and we shall get our craft into good, deep, navigable water.

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

THERE was another fine meeting at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday evening, when Mr. Foote lectured on "Does Death End Us?" The lecture was a long one, but was followed to the end with unflagging interest. A few questions were afterwards asked and answered. One gentleman in the audience, a visitor from Exeter, came up to shake hands with Mr. Foote at the close of the proceedings. "I am one of your converts," he said, "and I thought you would like to know that I am satisfied by experience of the soundness of the views you have been expressing. I lost my boy a little while ago," he continued, and his face winced and his voice trembled as he spoke, "but I found your Secular philosophy sustaining." He felt the blow, but he bore up under it, and translated love for the dead into service to the living. This is the only true philosophy of bereavement, and it was good to hear such testimony from one who has only been a Secularist for three or four years.

Mr. Foote delivers three lectures to-day (Sept. 30) in the Secular Hall, Brunswick-street, Glasgow; in the morning at 11.30 on "The Christian Powers and China," in the afternoon at 2.30 on "Marie Corelli and Jesus Christ," and in the evening at 6.30 on "Does Death End Us?" It is to be hoped that the local Freethinkers will do their best to prevent the excitement of the parliamentary elections from injuring these meetings. Mr. Foote was to have lectured on week-nights in surrounding towns, but those meetings have been abandoned. He will, therefore, return to London on Monday, and be on the spot to deal with "Shilling Week" correspondence.

Last Sunday evening Mr. Charles Watts had, we are informed, another capital audience at the Secular Hall, Camberwell. His lecture was received with repeated and enthusiastic applause, and at the conclusion he received quite an ovation. Mr. Watts wishes us to state that he was much pleased to see some of his American friends present, and to receive the gratifying message they brought from his co-workers on the other side of the Atlantic. During the evening Mr. B. Hyatt gave two excellent recitations with great elocutionary power.

This evening, Sunday, September 30, Mr. Watts lectures, for the first time this season, at the Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, London, W., taking for his subject "A Secularist's Challenge to the Clergy." Probably an interesting discussion will follow the lecture.

The *South London Press* gave a brief report of Mr. Watts's lecture on "The Defeat of the Cross" at Camberwell, noting that he had "lost none of his old eloquence," that he held his audience firmly for more than an hour, and that his speech was "punctuated with frequent applause."

Mr. A. B. Moss had a fine audience in Victoria Park on Sunday, when he lectured on "Bradlaugh and Ingersoll." We hear that several old Bradlaughians were in the crowd.

The International Freethought Congress at Paris took place on September 16, and lasted during four days. Messrs. Heaford and Rogers, our two Vice-Presidents, attended as delegates from the N. S. S., and were most cordially received by every section present. The Congress was, in point of numbers and enthusiasm, a vast success, and the evidence it afforded of the widespread and militant character of the Freethought movement abroad was very striking. Representatives were present from Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and Belgium, and from numerous Freethought groups throughout the whole extent of France. Nothing impressed our delegates more than the earnestness and intelligence of the very capable men—some of whom are orators of the first water—who are engaged on the continent in lecturing, writing, and organising on behalf of Freethought. A detailed account of the Conference will appear in our next.

The West Ham Branch regrets the resignation of its secretary, Mr. Vetterlein, and has passed a hearty vote of thanks for the able manner in which he has discharged his duties. The new secretary is Mr. W. G. Giles, 17 Folkestone-road, West Ham.

A letter from Mr. Joseph Symes will be found on another page of this week's *Freethinker*. We received with it a private letter, in reply to the one we wrote to our old friend and colleague after the N. S. S. Conference. "I am still deaf," he says, "as the result of the murderous attack upon me last December. In all other respects I am as well as ever. For many months I found my platform memory unreliable—or I thought it so. Three Sundays ago I recommenced to speak without notes, and found no difficulty. I am within five months of sixty, but I am as able as ever to work, and never enjoyed better health. I am not conscious of any falling off, and no one has yet suggested anything of the kind, as far as I know. I certainly shall do my best to visit England next year, and shall regret it if unable to do so. I am not discontented or unhappy here, but should very much like to see you all again. But everything depends upon my being able to get a substitute." Mr. Symes suggests that one of our "young men" should go out on a trip to Melbourne. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. However, we shall give our best attention to the matter very shortly. Meanwhile, it is pleasant to note that Mr. Symes is making steady progress again at the Secular Hall.

The Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch is taking advantage of the presence of the Church Congress. Special *Freethinker* handbills, supplied by the Freethought Publishing Company, are being freely distributed; and the city is being placarded with *Freethinker* contents-sheets, bearing the names and addresses of local newsagents of whom the paper can be obtained. Copies of Mr. Cohen's tract on *What is the Use of the Clergy?* are also being widely circulated. A supply of Mr. Foote's *Bible Blunders* was also desired; but, unfortunately, it was out of print. We congratulate the Newcastle Branch on its enterprise, and Mr. Bartram particularly on the zeal with which he is working.

Freethinkers are earnestly appealed to not to forget the claims of the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited. This enterprise is vital to the movement, and must not be neglected for any other object. We should be sorry to believe that Freethinkers are less zealous than Christians in the support—the material support—of their own cause; but

we are constrained to say that a good many of them, who can afford to do so, have not yet vouchsafed any assistance to this Company. We beg them to do so, if they mean to, without unnecessary delay. More working capital is needed to render the enterprise thoroughly effective, and we hope a considerable number of fresh Shares will be taken up between now and Christmas. The earlier, of course, the better. An Application Form will be found on the last page of this week's *Freethinker*.

Some misunderstanding seems to exist with regard to the trial scheme of concentration upon London that was published in our last issue. This scheme—which was set forth in very plain language—is not intended to be anything but supplemental to existing agencies. Its object is to develop the Freethought movement in a special way. It is certainly not meant to save Branches the trouble of providing for their own maintenance. Nor is it contemplated that Branches shall claim for nothing the services of lecturers engaged under this scheme. Such a cause would tend to the pauperisation of the present societies. We may add that the scheme does not come into operation until November.

As Others See Us.

SOME orthodox souls are converted to Rationalism by philosophy and science, some by ethical appeal, some by the Higher Criticism (i.e., skilful literary analysis of the Hebrew and Christian documents), and some by Mr. Foote's method of banter, anecdote, and scorn. Mr. Foote is an easy master of this method. Nobody can beat him in his particular style of satire and scathing bluntness. He handles the heavy cudgel with all the refined cleverness of the fencing master, and his strong, biting English is softened and polished by the facility and graces of the scholar. Sometimes, it may be, he uses the knuckle-duster when a scourge of small cords would suffice. But every active mind must be allowed to choose its own kinds of emphasis and enforcement. Mr. Foote has a way of his own, and, with the weapons of his selection, nobody can do more effective execution. Mr. Foote's special knack of commingling learning with satire is illustrated by his introductory disquisition to the essay on Balaam's Ass:—

"Classical scholars and students of modern literature know how the ass has been treated by poets and romancers. The stolid animal has generally been made the subject of comedy. Drunken and impotent Silenus, in the Pagan mythology, joins in the processions of Bacchus on a sober ass, and the patient animal staggers beneath the heavy burden of a fat-paunched, tipsy god. Apuleius and Lucian transform the hero of their common story into an ass, and in that shape he encounters the most surprising experiences. Voltaire makes an ass play a wonderful part in his *Pucelle*. And in all these cases it is worth noticing how the profane wits remember the ass's relation to Priapian mysteries, from his fabled interruption of the garden-god's attempt on the nymph Lotis downward, and assign to him marvellous amatory adventures. Erasmus, in his *Praise of Folly*, does not forget the ass, with whom he compares the majority of men for stupidity, obstinacy, and lubricity; nor is the noble animal forgotten by Rabelais, who cracks many a joke and points many a witticism at his expense. Our own genial humorist, Charles Lamb, confesses, however, to a deep tenderness for Neddy, and dwells with delight on the protection which his thick hide affords against the cruel usage of man. Sterne, in his *Sentimental Journey*, has a chapter entitled 'The Dead Ass,' wherein the animal is lifted into the sphere of pathos; and, lastly, Coleridge has some very pious musings on an ass, wherein the animal is lifted into the sphere of religion."

We lay stress on this characteristic of Mr. Foote's writing, because it is only a superficial judgment which regards him as nothing but a mocker. His sarcasm is well backed by erudition, and, if he had elected to exercise his wit on less popular ground, he would have made a brilliant academic.

With ridicule and contempt Mr. Foote strides over the discredited legends of Creation, the Fall, Flood, Babel, Lot's wife, the Ark ("God in a Box"), Jonah, and a few New Testament myths, such as the Virgin Mother, Resurrection, etc. His attitude may be typified by the little story he interjects in his criticism of the Ten-Plagues legend:—"When a Sunday-school teacher was telling the scholars how God slew all the first-born in Egypt, a little boy asked: 'Please, sir, what did he do when they were twins?'" This is the sort of aside which one never expects in the grave treatises of the Higher Critics. But it hits the mark with a popular audience, and is often more useful in laying bare the historical weakness of Bible narrative than the arguments of the Germans.

—F. J. Gould, in "Literary Guide."

There is as yet no culture, no method of progress known to men, that is so rich and complete as that which is ministered by a truly great friendship.—Phillips Brooks.

The Gift of Unreason.

In one of the most admired of his prose writings, James Russell Lowell inquires: "Have we feebly taken it for granted that the distinction of man is reason? Never was there a more fatal misconception. It is in the gift of unreason that we are unenviably distinguished from the brutes whose nobler privilege of instinct saves them from our blunders and our crimes." Surely when we look around we must realise how much of truth there is in this somewhat cynical observation. Everywhere we perceive the evil effects of that "gift of unreason" of which Lowell writes. Mankind seems bent on exhibiting its madness, and dispelling the illusion, cherished by itself, that the human race is distinguished by rational faculties which are exclusively its own.

If, indeed, we are so differentiated, how comes it that the exercise of reason through all the æons has eventuated in such meagre results? Considering the period man has existed on the earth, the inconsiderable progress he has made must overwhelm us with chagrin, if not with despair. The survey that a man may make of the world, and its advancement in the limits of his own lifetime, is full of bitterest disappointment. Things move so slowly towards the longed-for goal that its eventual achievement seems almost impossible. There is so much of the "throwing back" of which scientists speak that our efforts seem mostly of the Sisyphus order. If we ask, "Watchman, what of the night?" is not the answer full of gloom? "Stormy and dark" is the outlook. The morrow may be bright, but when will it come?

But a little time ago, and were we not anticipating a speedy and uninterrupted run of peace, prosperity, universal amity, and reform? How ruthlessly have all these hopes been shattered in the last two years? Once more have we been thrust down the hill which, with so much labor, but still with hope, we had painfully climbed. War conducted on deadly modern principles, and Eastern savagery and massacre conceivable only as occurring two or three centuries ago, have given the lie to our vain boastings and checked our optimistic ideas. Surely we are the recipients of the fatal gift of unreason as distinguished from the nobler privilege of instinct, which preserves the brutes from our blunders and our crimes?

In the world of thought, too, how sluggish is the onward movement. How little cause for congratulation presents itself. How often unreason steps in, retarding the progress of truth, obstructing the spread of rational ideas, and even undoing, as it were in a moment, the work which has been the intellectual effort of generations. Reformers—but for some innate, unquenchable spirit of perseverance for which they can hardly account themselves—might well give up their work and let established things still hold the sway. Why should they suffer a perpetual martyrdom of effort and self-sacrifice when the headway made is so easily lost? The seductions of *laissez faire* seem irresistible. "It is, after all, so much better to be stupid and walk in the old laid-out, well-trimmed paths than to wander after the desires of your own heart and your own eyes over the blue hills. True, there are glorious vistas to explore, and streams of living silver to bathe in, and wild horses to catch by the mane; but you are in a chartless land, without stars and compass. Ah, it is perilous to throw over the old surveyors."* And pioneering of the heroic sort seems often fruitless as well as perilous. The world is so hard to change that the advocate of new and unpopular ideas may well pause at times to consider whether, after all, his most strenuous efforts are not in a large degree wasted. Unreason is mighty, and seems often likely to prevail.

The adherents of Freethought, but more especially its advocates, have had bitter experience of the difficulties of removing established error, rotten as it may be at its core. Can we honestly assure ourselves that we have, up to the present, made as much progress as we might have reasonably expected? Clearly not. Rationalism is a long way short of the prevalence that we might have fondly hoped it would by this time have

gained. The battle must go on very much longer before it becomes us to talk even privately, to ourselves, of victory. The Christian faith, which is one of the most prominent embodiments of Unreason, is still with us. No doubt it is a "grey faith, stealing to its doom." But it manages, all the same, to put on a bold, not to say insolent, front. Could we imagine a greater insult to reason than this mass of incredible doctrines, ridiculous rites and ceremonies, impracticable teachings, false views of life, and baseless assertions as to destiny? It is a monument of irrationality, fortunately crumbling at its base. Can there be any spectacle more provocative of ridicule than its scores of conflicting sects, with their utterly irreconcilable creeds? Or a more arrogant usurpation of authority than that which is made by the Romish Church and the so-called Church of England? The former has never hesitated to contemn and cast aside Reason—has done so openly, unblushingly, systematically, with every possible means of casuistry, coercion, and suppression at her command. Is it not melancholy to think of the vast numbers of poor deluded people who have surrendered their reason at her blood-stained altar? A witty writer once remarked: "If your eye offends you, pluck it out; if your reason offends you, become a Roman Catholic."

The Established Church of England seems to have had her fair share of the gift of Unreason. For a long time she has consisted mainly of two factions, who have been squabbling and abusing each other like two street viragoes, over the most trumpery questions of ritual. The present General Election has afforded them an opportunity to carry their squabble into the political arena, and most amusing it is to watch the way in which the English Church Union on the one hand, and the Church Association on the other, are whipping up their respective supporters, and trying to arouse public feeling on questions about which the great mass of the population do not care the toss up of a brass farthing.

Amidst all this hubbub of unreason, the Freethinker may congratulate himself that he stands aloof from at least the divisional strife. Theology in the bulk he is impelled, by the nature of his principles and his desire for human progress, to assail as vigorously as he may; and if at times the work of demolition is retarded, and the outlook is not as encouraging as he might wish it to be, there is always the satisfaction for him which arises from a consciousness of duty honestly discharged.

FRANCIS NEALE.

Pseudo-Science.

"'God has many visitors to-day,' said I to a friend last Sunday, as I beheld the crowds thronging towards the churches. 'They are paying farewell visits,' replied my incredulous friend."—*Heine*.

ONE cannot help feeling that the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Ripon, with all his gifts for reconciling opposites, missed a chance by not specifically alluding in his recent interview to "Christian Science." The gospel, according to Mary Baker Glover Eddy, is not hid under a bushel. It has been spread abroad, and bids fair to rival the older evangel of Jesus Christ. The newest of new Bibles, *Christian Science: A Key to the Scriptures*, of which the American lady-savior is the author, appeared in 1866, and is now in its 155th edition. It was enthusiastically received by thousands of half-educated religious men and women, reverent of learning, quite unable to discriminate it from its fraudulent imitation. And Mrs. Eddy, quite as indiscriminating as any of them, was admirably equipped by a nodding acquaintance with theology, metaphysics, and a scientific vocabulary, and the gift of a tenacious memory, to give them the thing they long for. Words were Mrs. Eddy's sole stock-in-trade. Her pomp of court, her priesthood—words, mere words! Five hundred pages of them in her book. To a reader familiar with the sober use of metaphysical and scientific terms, her explanations and her definitions are delirious jargon. They are the bastard offspring of a riotous imagination playing, in the light of half-grasped ideas from Hegel, or Berkeley, Spinoza, or Spencer, upon

* I. Zangwill, in *Dreamers of the Ghetto*.

resonant polysyllables. For example, here is a— definition:—

“Matter, mythology, mortality; another name for mortal mind; illusion; intelligence, substance, and life in non-intelligence and mortality; life resulting in death, and death in life; sensation in the sensationless; mind originating in matter; the opposite of truth; the opposite of God; that of which immortal mind takes no cognisance; that which mortal mind sees, feels, tastes, and smells in belief.”

The author of this farrago of nonsense has been appropriately hailed as a teacher “second only to” Christ. It was proper, therefore, that she should regard matter, mythology, and mortality as synonyms. Even the Lord Bishop of Ripon could put this lady savior right on such a point.

On another page of this “divine revelation” we read that

“the metaphysics of Christian science prove the rule by inversion.”

For example:—

“There is no pain in Truth, and there [is no truth in pain.”

Mrs. Eddy regrets that ontology receives less attention than physiology, and relates the following improving anecdotes, worthy of Baron Munchausen or the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes:—

“It is related that a father, anxious to try such an experiment, plunged his infant babe, only a few hours old, into water for several minutes, and repeated this operation daily, until the child could remain under water twenty minutes, moving and playing without harm, like a fish. Parents should remember this, and so learn how to develop their children properly on dry land.”

“Angels and ministers of grace defend us!” What, in the name of common sense, does Mrs. Eddy suppose ontology to mean? It was fitting such a teacher should give to her disciples a form of prayer and a confession of faith which bears a marked resemblance to the Lord's Prayer. The new high priestess struts in borrowed plumes, and charges 300 dollars for a dozen lessons. We set out in a spirit of inquiry to make a serious examination of the claims made by Mrs. Eddy and other apostles of the new light, and to assay the evidences on which they are based.

But this nonsensical system makes us giddy; for, of all the strange, frantic, and incomprehensible books which have emanated from the imagination of religious maniacs, this book is one of the very worst. It is even worse than the ravings of Joanna Southcott. We have now got a “Bible” with a vengeance. *The Forty Coming Wonders* of the Prophet Baxter is shrinking modesty itself compared with this effusion of Mrs. Eddy. This American Bible fairly takes the breath away. No other less colloquial phrase can so well describe the effect of claims so far transcending sanity. History offers many parallels to this mad Christian “science.” In the early ages of Christianity credulous fools believed that handkerchiefs and relics had the power of curing disease, and that fevers were amenable to a loud voice.

In the Middle Ages the Moravians and Waldenses made the cure of disease in answer to prayer an article of faith. George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, professed to cure by the same means. The Jumpers, the Shakers, the Jerkers, the Mormons, the Methodists, and, in our own day, the Peculiar People, allege such Divine interpositions. The Pietist movement in Germany and the Great Lying Catholic Church claim an abundance of prodigies. Of the many historical cases of alleged cures, one of the most picturesque is the grace believed by many generations to reside in royal hands laid upon the scrofulous. Evelyn graphically describes the operation as it might be witnessed in his own day:—

“His Majesty sitting under his state in the Banqueting House, the Chirurgeons cause the sick to be brought or led up to the Throne, where, they kneeling, the King strokes their faces or cheeks with both his hands at once, at which instant a Chaplaine in his formalities said: ‘He put his hands on them and healed them.’ This is said to everyone in particular. When they have all been touched they come up againe in the same order; and the other Chaplaine kneeling, and having angel-gold strung on white ribbon on his arms, delivers them one by one to his Majesty, who puts them about the necks of the

touched as they passe, whilst the first Chaplaine repeats: ‘That is the true light who came into the world’.....”

Any one of the royal flunkeys could have touched as efficaciously for the “evil,” provided he wore the royal clothes and had a sufficiently impressive manner.

The latest and subtlest form assumed by this pseudo-science is the gospel according to Mrs. Eddy. “Christian Science” is a temporary incarnation of irrational thoughts which have been dragged from the dustbins of departed ignorance. The special form with which this Yankee messiah endured them has only a pathological interest. One reels back from the insane heights of Christian “Science” to the beautiful simplicity of a rational system like Secularism, suited to the requirements of our age, and freed from the absurd anachronisms of pre-scientific times.

MIMNERMUS.

Our Bazaar at Leicester.

SCARCELY a member of the Leicester Secular Society can be styled a militarist, but on Saturday last (September 22) we had many gay flags suspended across the beautiful hall which Mr. Larner Sugden built for us twenty years ago. Somebody had sent us some banners, adorned in the centres with portraits of Baden-Powell, Roberts, French, and White. There were such groans at the sight of these dignitaries that I had to make peace by covering them up with pictures of Robert Owen, Thomas Paine, G. J. Holyoake, and Mazzini. Our stalls blazed with more colors than the rainbow, and our varied commodities included clothing, Japanese ware, china, glass, pictures, mattresses, Indian clubs, fruit, Freethought books, and a “Vinegar Bible.” The Bazaar was opened by a series of speeches from Mr. William Wilber (President), Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Wright, Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, and Mr. Sydney Gimson. Music gave dulcet intervals to the stress of bargaining. Our side-shows had nothing of the vapid and nonsensical. One was devoted to a pretty company of dolls; a second to a fine model of a Midland engine; a third to a well-arranged collection of shells, crystals, etc. On the opening day we did business to the amount of over £50, and the sales proceeded with energy on Monday and Tuesday. The Leicester friends would like me to return thanks for the help afforded us by the columns of the *Freethinker*, and for the kind gifts forwarded to us by sympathisers in Newcastle, Bradford, Bristol, Birmingham, Oxford, Nottingham, Canterbury, Cheshire, Huntingdonshire, and London. These contributions have pleasantly illustrated the fellow-feeling among Rationalist thinkers and workers in various parts of the country. From one staunch Freethinker came two mats made with small pieces of cloth, and a letter-rack in which the shelves were composed of shells. Some extracts from the letter which accompanied these articles may amuse the general reader, as they amused us at the Bazaar opening ceremony:—

“I am sending you, with heartfelt pleasure, three homespun articles which may be described as follows:— I will take the two fancy mats first. As regards design, they may be styled ‘crazy’ work. This applies to the centre only, consisting of about 4lbs. of cloth cuttings selected from material that will not fray out at the edges, $\frac{3}{8}$ inches in width, by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, knitted on to a foundation of string. I must tell you here that one of my little girls, aged 13, was the worker so far as the knitting went. The finishing fell to the lot (of course, as a labor of love) of your humble servant, who, since the year 1845, had had some slight experience with his needle. Pardon my roundabout way of telling you I am a tailor. So much for the rugs. The letter-rack was made by my third son, George William Foote T., born August 15, 1883, the year that Mr. Foote, as he himself facetiously puts it, was ‘enjoying Her Majesty's hospitality in Holloway Jail’..... It may interest you to know that the little girl who knitted the rugs has gained a first-class scholarship for three years in the Simon Langton Schools, founded some centuries ago by the individual whose name they bear. The competition is very keen, and examination rather severe. The Mayor complimented her upon her abilities when she appeared before him as a final ceremony before taking her place in the schools. Bravo, say you. Ditto, say I. The daughter of an avowed Atheist winning a scholarship

founded by ecclesiastics! As G. W. F. often says, "We do move! Oh, shade of the saintly Simon, haunt us not!"

I am sure all the circle of the emancipated will join with me in wishing Miss T. success and happiness in her career. I was about to add more descriptive flourishes, but our friend, Mr. Chilperic Edwards, who is on a flying visit to Leicester, has called in as I write. So I hurry to catch the post, and then prepare for a chat with the accomplished author of *The Witness of Assyria*.

F. J. GOULD.

Judas.

"Judas was a common, selfish, muddle-headed, pilfering fellow. Helpless to understand Christ, he yet believed in Him much more than most of us do, had seen Him do miracles, thought He was quite strong enough to shift for Himself, and he, Judas, might as well make his own little bye-perquisites out of the affair."

Coming across this passage the other day in Ruskin's *Crown of Wild Olive*, I became sensible that it contained an idea that to me was a novel one. I put down the book, and seriously, and with a mind emptied of prejudice, began reflecting on the character of Judas Iscariot. I have not for some time given much attention to the work in which his acts are recorded, but at least I was conscious of a great discrepancy in the above account of him, and the idea left in my mind (and indolently retained) by the teaching of Christian parents, pastors, and masters.

Judas Iscariot! Why, the name reeked of infamy. All through the centuries of the Christian era has Judas been held up to execration as the basest of traitors and the most hardened of sinners, for whom there was no hope in this world or the next. With revived interest in the subject I looked up each Gospel in turn, to discover if reasons really existed that this man should be damned eternally. I was rather disappointed to find that, as in the case of other New Testament characters, the facts recorded with reference to Judas were really too meagre to justify any summing up of his personality.

Briefly the facts are these: He was one of the twelve Apostles. On one occasion he mildly demurred to what seemed to him a useless expenditure of costly material, and suggested that the value thereof could have been given to the poor. Any good and honest motive for this remark is repudiated, "because he was a thief"; no evidence, however, is brought forward to bolster up this gratuitous assertion. Then comes the so-called betrayal. He told the chief priests where Jesus could be found walking alone with his disciples, for which information they gave him thirty pieces of silver. Finally, on hearing Jesus was condemned to death, he flung back the money and went and hanged himself. This last act seems clearly enough to show that what has been stigmatised as a base crime was really only an error in judgment; but, before attempting to evoke a personality out of the above incidents in connection with Judas, I should like to interpolate a remark on the unnecessary outlay ascribed to the chief priests. Seeing that their victim was not given to lurking in caves or secret places, nor took any trouble to conceal his whereabouts, it was an elaborate and expensive way of effecting the capture. I am inclined to think the prophet Jeremiah was to blame for this. He was tiresome enough to say something about thirty pieces of silver, and the thing had to be worked in somehow.

But, taking the narrative as it stands, I came to the conclusion that the true Christian—that is to say (the term requires explanation), a believer in the divinity of Christ—should be the last person in the world to brand Judas as the worst of sinners. He, at least, should admit the likelihood that Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, a spectator of the miracles wrought by one claiming to be the Son of God, was really very far from thinking that, in accepting the thirty pieces of silver, he was actually delivering this divinity into the hands of man. With a belief in the supernatural powers of his Master, he must have laughed in his sleeve at having fooled the chief priests, who, blind and unbelieving, thought they had bought a God for thirty pieces of silver.

Of course, it was not nice of Judas to want to make capital out of his Master's divinity. But, then, it must be remembered, he was a poor man, and a simple one; yes, he must have been very simple, and with a fair share of the cunning that goes with simplicity. It is even possible that he prided himself on this same cunning, and was glad that it had not occurred to any other of the Twelve to make a little money so easily, and without really harming anyone. The desperate doing of himself to death proved how unforeseen was the catastrophe he had helped to bring about. It was not in order to avoid any personal calamity. His life and liberty and fortunes could suffer in no way from the crucifixion of Jesus. There is no other inference than that it was the resolve of a mind overcome by bewildered grief. But who has there ever been to express a little tender human sympathy

with the man in that dreadful moment of sudden disillusionment, when the paralysing spectacle of a captive and condemned Jesus obliterated the remembrance of the promised ultimate triumph over his enemies? Judas's senses received only a direct impression of what had happened, and he realised that, instead of a harmless financial speculation with a God with legions of angels at his command, he had betrayed a fellow-creature with whom he had been so closely associated. His was evidently not a superficial, emotional nature, that could, like Peter, find relief in a few salt tears. Heartbroken at the magnitude of his unconscious crime, he flung back the price of blood, and went and hanged himself.

All this, of course, from the Christian standpoint. The Agnostic would treat the whole subject in quite a different manner. The above remarks should, therefore, by rights, be inserted in a Christian periodical, when some true believer, who at the same time loves justice and mercy, might be moved to plead for a gentler judgment on the sins of Judas Iscariot. He, consistently believing in Biblical inspiration, could urge that, after all, the "betrayal" had to be—if not by Judas, then someone else—that it might come to pass which was written by the Prophets, inspired by the Ruler of the destinies of men.

The whole thing was a part of the scheme of Creation. The methods seem unjust, not to say cruel; but we poor mortals must not question the Divine intentions. It might, however, balance things a bit, and cause sweet love to bloom and blossom more sweetly on this sad earth, if we taught ourselves to pity rather than blame the foreordained criminals of destiny, who, in the dim dawn of Creation, had their parts assigned them by the great World's Stage Manager, whose ways, truly, are past finding out.

PRO-CHRISTIANUS.

Correspondence.

A VISIT TO ENGLAND.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I shall be glad if you will permit me to tender my heartiest thanks to yourself and my British friends for the very kind and gratifying course you took respecting myself at your last Conference. I can assure you that sympathy and goodwill such as I refer to is doubly valuable to one situated as I am—lonely as student, worker, and fighter to a degree you cannot realise.

If I can possibly get away without injury to my own work here, I am resolved to visit you next year. But I must find a substitute before I can think of leaving my own post of duty.

Wishing British Secularism the most unbounded success, and the greatest prosperity and happiness to its propagandists,

JOSEPH SYMES.

Melbourne, Victoria, August 21, 1900.

Questions for Christians.

What cardinal, what bishop, what priest raised his voice for the rights of men? What ecclesiastic, what nobleman took the side of the oppressed—of the peasant? Who denounced the frightful criminal code—the torture of suspected persons? What priest pleaded for the liberty of the citizen? What bishop pitied the victim of the rack? Is there the grave of a priest in France on which the lover of liberty would now drop a flower or a tear? Is there a tomb holding the ashes of a saint from which emerges one ray of light?—*Ingersoll*.

Deacon Goode—"They say your son has been very successful in the ministry." The Practical Man—"He has that." Deacon Goode—"Has he brought about a great many conversions?" The Practical Man—"I don't know anything about that. He has accepted three calls within eighteen months, and got a big raise each time."

Mrs. Wellington (Christian Scientist)—"Johnny, if you only knew how it pains me to have you disobey me." Johnny—"I thought you said there is no such thing as pain, ma. That's the reason I thought it wouldn't make any difference if I didn't do what you told me to."—*Boston Transcript*.

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SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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

LONDON.

THE ATHENÆUM HALL (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, C. Watts, "A Secularist's Challenge to the Clergy."
CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, C. Cohen, "Religious Instruction and the Coming School Board Election."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

STATION-ROAD (Camberwell): 11.30, F. A. Davies.
PECKHAM RYE: 3.15, R. P. Edwards.
BROCKWELL PARK: 3.15, C. Cohen.
CLAPHAM COMMON: 3.15, W. Heaford.
FINSBURY PARK: 3.30, A lecture.
VICTORIA PARK (near the Fountain): 3.15, E. White.
HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, R. P. Edwards.
KILBURN (corner of Victoria-road): 7.15, F. Schaller.
HAMMERSMITH (outside the Lyric Opera House): 7.15, R. P. Edwards.
MILE END WASTE: 11.30, C. Cohen; 7.15, S. E. Easton.
BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, R. P. Edwards.
KINGSLAND (corner of Ridley-road): 11.30, S. E. Easton.
WEST HAM BRANCH (Stratford Grove): 7.30, E. Leggatt.

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH: H. Percy Ward—11 (Bull Ring), "National Education"; 3 (Gosta Green), "National Education." Mr. Ward will lecture in the Bull Ring on Wednesday and Friday evenings at 8.
CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school; 7, Open discussion, "The Transvaal War: Is it Justifiable?"
LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, A lecture on "South Africa."
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE (1 Grainger-street): 3, Members' Monthly Meeting.
SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, "The General Election."

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—September 30, m., Mile End Waste; a., Brockwell Park; e., Camberwell Hall. October 7, Cardiff. 9, New Tredegar. 14, Pontypridd. 21, Birmingham. 28, Athenæum Hall. November 4, Glasgow. 11, Aberdeen.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, London, S.E.—October 7, a., Victoria Park.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall-Heath, Birmingham.—September 30, Birmingham. October 1, Debate in Birmingham. December 9, Glasgow.

F. A. DAVIES, 65 Lion-street, S.E.—September 30, m., Station-road.

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