

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XX.—No. 45.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 1900.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

The Morals of the Primitive Christians.

VERY few minds can resist the effect of reiteration. You have only got to state a thing with sufficient energy often enough, and somebody is certain to believe it. There is, of course, a great deal that we have to take on trust, because we have not the power, or the time, or the inclination, to investigate every single opinion that is presented to us. Consequently, every now and again we have a rude awakening, and we find that something we had received in perfect good faith is really without a particle of evidence to support it. There are certain statements continually being met with among controversial theologians that are so frequently put forward with such complete assurance that very few think of questioning them; and thus they are received as acknowledged facts even by well-educated people. For instance, we are perpetually hearing about the high moral character of the early Christians, and the beautiful pattern they set to their heathen neighbors; and there has thus grown up a widespread notion that these early Christians really were very good, and the other inhabitants of the Roman Empire incorrigibly bad. But, in the first place, the more we know about the heathen world, the more we are compelled to recognise that the majority of the people who lived in it were quite as right-feeling and as right-living as the majority of the people who exist now. There were bad public men then, as there are now; and the despots of that period were often just as wicked as Christian despots have been. But when we come to some record which gives a picture of the life, aspirations, and manners of ordinary men, such as we have, for instance, in the celebrated Letters of Seneca, it is clear that the mass of mankind in those times went through life with the same integrity, blamelessness, honor, and rectitude that we expect to find in a respectable community of the present day. It may be argued that some of the Greek and Latin imaginative literature is of so improper a character that it is necessary to reserve it for the education of the aristocracy; but it must also be remembered that we likewise have, from the same period, the far more important philosophical works of such teachers as Plato and Aristotle, who organised the study of ethics and laid the foundation of European moral ideas. In fact, the ancient world is grossly and systematically libelled for the mere purpose of making it the foil for the alleged Christian virtues.

Where, however, shall we find any evidence of these virtues? All the information we possess about the primitive Christians is contained in the books of the New Testament; and, therefore, the moral conduct of the primitive Church must be judged from those documents. The Gospels, of course, relate exclusively to Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples: primitive Christianity commencing with the Acts of the Apostles. It is evident, however, that Acts gives us no ground for ascribing extraordinary virtues to the early converts. Only one quality of theirs is noticed, and that is their almsgiving. We are left quite in the dark as to their other peculiarities. We must, therefore, turn to the Epistles of St. Paul. Paul is very fond of vituperating the Gentiles—that is to say, the ordinary population of the Mediterranean countries—and he is never tired of asserting that every heathen man is a thief, and every heathen woman a harlot. It is, therefore, interesting to observe what he has to tell us about his own converts. The picture he draws is not at all inviting.

Instead of the united, happy, loving Christian fraternities familiar to modern fiction, we read of "envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, and tumults"; and Paul is continually referring to the slanders directed against himself by his co-religionists. But there are other more serious charges. It is needless to say that the believing brethren were unblushing liars. That fact is patent to everyone who considers the mass of forged apocryphal literature which emanated from them. Paul himself was perpetually afraid that epistles might be fabricated in his name, and was careful to authenticate those he sent out. "The salutation of me, Paul, with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle, so I write" (2 Thess. iii. 17; see also the conclusions to 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Colossians). He exhorts his converts to abandon their notorious habits of falsehood. "Lie not one to another," he says, in Col. iii. 9. "Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor," he writes in Eph. iv. 25. But it is to be feared that the personal example of the apostle was not a good one. Truthfulness has always been a secondary matter to professors of religion; and Paul himself says: "If the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory, why yet am I also judged a sinner?"

We learn, further, that the sexual morality of the primitive Christians was not of a high character. This is hardly to be wondered at. The thoughts and language of their teachers are continually running on such subjects; and it is well known that the mind is the principal exciting cause in such matters. Many close observers have pointed out that religious excitement is invariably accompanied by sexual excitement. The improprieties of the early Reformers were the constant theme of Catholic denunciation. The Anabaptists went to even greater lengths. And in the present century we have had the Shakers, Free-lovers, and other minor sects, whose weaknesses have lain in the same direction. In the early days of Methodism lapses from the paths of virtue were numerous; and the rise of the Salvation Army was signalled by similar phenomena, not to mention the frequent later cases in the newspapers. The fifth and sixth chapters of 1 Corinthians should be closely studied in estimating the moral characteristics of the primitive Christians. Paul specifically indicates that one of the Corinthian brethren was openly living with his father's wife, a thing "as is not so much as named among the Gentiles." The apostle's indignation is increased by the fact that this scandal was regarded with the utmost complacency by the other converts. He finds it necessary to warn the congregation to have nothing to do with any brother that is "a fornicator, or covetous, or a drunkard, or an extortioner"; thus fully admitting that recognised members of the Christian community indulged in all these vices. St. Paul goes on to complain that the converts brought vexatious suits against one another in the law courts. He tells them that they ought to suffer wrong and fraud at one another's hands, rather than go to law with one another. "Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren." It is, therefore, not surprising to learn from Eph. iv. 28 that some of the virtuous primitive Christians were professional robbers, to whom it was necessary for the Apostle to say: "Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor."

Paul also finds serious fault with the way in which the Corinthian converts conducted their *agapæ*. It appears that in these feasts everyone brought his own victuals and wine, and ate and drank them himself; so

that the poorer members went away hungry, and the better-provided went away drunk. The apostle justly reproves the gluttonous brethren "whose God is their belly" (Phil. iii. 20), and says: "Let all be done in decency and order" (1 Cor. xiv. 40).

The directions given to Timothy for the choosing of bishops and deacons (1 Tim. iii. 1-12) are also significant. The bishop should be a man "not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre." The deacon is allowed to tittle a little more; but he must be "grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre." The obvious inference, of course, is that the majority of the primitive brethren were wine-bibbing, deceitful, and avaricious persons, whom the Apostle did not care to see entrusted with office.

So far we have only referred to the brethren. The sisters of the community, when not addicted to vicious courses, seem to have been a vain, empty-headed lot. The apostle has to warn them to attire themselves in sober apparel, "not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array" (1 Tim. ii. 9). When they were married, their husbands were supposed to keep them in order; but Paul complains that the young widows "learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also, and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (1 Tim. v. 13).

Consequently the great and shining virtues of the primitive Christians exist only in the religious imagination. They are conspicuous by their absence in the Epistles of St. Paul, where the moral character of the early converts is shown up in the most glaring fashion; and we can only suppose that those who proclaim the virtue of the primitive Church have never taken the trouble to study the evidence for themselves.

CHILPERIC.

Who is the Rogue?

WITH SOMETHING ABOUT TACITUS.

A FEW weeks ago I had occasion to refer a correspondent to my brochure entitled *The Sign of the Cross*, which is "a candid criticism," and a very careful one too, of Mr. Wilson Barrett's well-known play. In that little work I dealt at considerable length with the question of the famous "Christ" passage in the *Annals* of Tacitus, about which my correspondent seemed to be interested. I was soon favored with a reply to the effect that my correspondent had read my brochure, and did not think much of it. He remarked incidentally that it contained error, anachronism, and falsification. But he did not indicate these things, and I invited him to do so, as I make no pretension to infallibility, and am always ready to learn. At the same time I warned him against losing his temper—a failing to which controversialists, and particularly Christian controversialists, are unfortunately too liable. Well, my invitation has been accepted. This correspondent sends me another letter for insertion in the *Freethinker*. My readers will presently have an opportunity of perusing it. I wish to say, first, that it is written as if to tempt the recipient to throw it into the waste-basket; and, secondly, that it affects the old familiar air of suspicion of the fairness of Freethought editors. In this case, however, these orthodox virtues are both wasted. Had I been annoyed—which I am not, for this correspondent hardly reaches to the level of my disdain—I should still have inserted his letter, for he has fallen into the trap I laid for him in that bland invitation; as a Cromwellian Puritan would say, the Lord hath delivered him into my hands; and I have no objection whatever to my readers seeing him in that position.

And now for my correspondent's letter. Here it is exactly as he wrote it—grammar, graces, and all:—

74 Victoria-road,
West Kilburn, N.W.

Oct. 29, 1900.

SIR,—I note reference to my letter in answers to correspondents. As to "loss of temper," there seems to be a lack of discrimination in so attributing my strictures. Acquirement of knowledge by intuition, and its denial does not necessarily erase it from the pages of moral philosophy or metaphysics.

I am like yourself (and without the uncertainty, or softening influence of "apparently") willing to learn. One could not possibly forget, having perused but a few of your (general term) publications, that "assertion is not proof." But to this proof:—

Two falsifications.

Falsification 1.—Where in Lardner's works shall I find his "admission" that "learned men were not agreed that this Suetonius passage related to Christ" (p. 39 your pamphlet).

Falsification 2.—Where in Lardner's works shall I find "that this Suetonius passage related to CHRIST."

P.S.—If my memory serves are these not in the "Diegesis," that infamous production of Taylor's.

Anachronism.—You make it appear by your remarks on Paul's visit to Rome that it was *subsequent* to the persecution. What proof have you that this was the case. (See pp. 37-38—end and top of p.)

Error 1.—"The *Annals* of Tacitus was first printed..... 1468-1470" (p. 39). You will here do good service if you can show how this can be, when as a fact the *Annals* (not a PART of them) first saw the light as a *completed* work in 1515 (the ed. of Beroaldus) not 1468 or 1470.

Error 2.—"Poggio forged them." Then kindly inform me as to his connection with the Codex Mediceus Prior *discovered* by Arcimboldus.

In conclusion I trust you will insert, if you insert it at all, the *whole* of this in your paper, not in scraps, in ansrs. "To Correspondents," and thus let your readers judge between us. They I take it, are also open to learn. Excuse my supplementing error 1 by 2.

I am, Sir, yrs,
W. H. NASH.

I proceed at once to deal with the two "falsifications." This is an ugly word, by the way; it involves deliberate fraud. When we hear that a man has *falsified* his accounts, we expect soon to hear that he is on the treadmill. My correspondent does not seem to appreciate the gravity of the expression. Instead of trying to prove me guilty of falsification, he puts me a question as if I were in the witness-box, whereas the assumption is that I am standing in the dock. You cannot charge a man with a crime, and then appeal to him for evidence of his guilt. My correspondent has no right to interrogate me at all. Instead of asking me where Lardner says what I assert, he should have denied that Lardner says anything of the kind. Then, if I could not produce the passage, I should be a convicted falsifier. However, as my correspondent does not understand his own duty, and as he is fishing for information, I will oblige him with what will serve the present turn. If he will go to the British Museum, or to some Public Library which contains a copy of the Kippis edition of Lardner in ten volumes (1829), and open the first volume, he will find what he seeks. It is at the end of the eleventh Chapter of the first Book, at the top of page 260. "It is disputed by learned men," are Lardner's words, "whether, by Chrestus, Suetonius means Jesus Christ." So much for "falsification" number one.

"Falsification" number two reads like a joke; and a rather disreputable joke too, for the words placed within quotation marks do not occur in my pamphlet, and are a sheer invention of my correspondent's. I never said that Lardner affirmed the Suetonius passage as relating to Christ. It did not lie in my way to do so. I am therefore under no obligation to prove what I never asserted, or even hinted. Still, I am willing to oblige my correspondent in his search for useful information. If he turns to the sixth volume of Lardner's works, he will find on page 642, under the head of "Testimonies of Ancient Heathens," that the Suetonius passage is treated as referring to Christ. Suetonius wrote that Claudius "banished the Jews from Rome, who were continually making disturbances, Chrestus being their leader." This is Lardner's rendering. And he comments upon it as follows:—

Some learned men are not satisfied that this relates to the Christians; but it is well known that our Savior was sometimes called Chrestus by heathen people. And it is not impossible that the Jewish enmity against those of their own country, or others who had embraced Christianity, might produce some disputes and disturbances which came to the Emperor's knowledge. This seems to be the meaning of Suetonius, that there were disturbances among the Jews and others at Rome, upon occasion of Christ and his followers."

So much for "falsification" number two. It is twin

brother to "falsification" number one. My correspondent accused me of flat roguery. Instead of trying to prove it, he took to asking questions. Well, I have answered them; and I have proved that he himself is either a rogue or a jackass. His impudent reference to Taylor's *Diagnosis* is a suggestion that I had not read Lardner at first hand. But it is *he* who has not read Lardner. I begin to think he is some conceited Christian Evidence talker, who has collected a lot of second-hand scraps of learning, and thinks these sufficient to justify his standing forth as a perfect pundit.

Now for the "anachronism." I clear it away with one sweep of my pen. I do not know whether Paul visited Rome—"visits" is good, seeing that he went there a *prisoner*—before or after the alleged holocaust of the Christians by Nero. And nobody else knows either. Orthodox chronology, here as elsewhere, is purely arbitrary. But the precise date of Paul's "visit" to Rome makes no difference whatever to my argument. Mr. Barrett had put forward as history the statement that Nero gave liberty of worship to all his subjects but the Christians; and I pointed out, in reply, that when Paul went to Rome in custody he was allowed to preach Christianity every day under the very nose of his janitor—according to the statement of the primitive Christians themselves in the Acts of the Apostles.

And now for the "errors." I will take number two first, to get it out of the way. I did not assert, in my pamphlet, that Poggio forged the *Annals* of Tacitus. What I said was that Mr. W. R. Ross (a brother of the famous astronomer) had written a learned book to prove that position. "I do not desire," I said, "to take a side in this controversy. I do not know that I am entitled to." What I did question was "the authenticity of the particular passage which relates the persecution of the Christians by Nero." My argument on that point had no reference whatever to Poggio. If the *Annals* was forged by him, there is no need of argument at all, for the "Christ" passage falls, in that case, with the rest of the work. It is no part of my duty, therefore, to "inform" anyone as to Poggio's "connection" with the MS. of the first six books of the *Annals* that were "discovered" by Angelo Arcomboldi—for I suppose that is what my correspondent is rather circuitously referring to. It is enough to say that Mr. Ross's theory of Poggio's forgery of a manuscript "discovered" long after his death will be found in the fourth book of *Tacitus and Bracciolini*.

"Error" number one, which I take last, is founded upon the statement in my *brochure* that "The *Annals* of Tacitus was first printed at Venice between 1468 and 1470." This is true of the last six books of the *Annals*, and as these included the passage I was dealing with, and were also "discovered" by Poggio, I did not think it necessary, or even advisable, to open up another question which was far beyond the scope of my argument. Had I adopted Mr. Ross's theory I should have been obliged to discuss that question too. But I did not adopt it. Nor did I reject it. I merely mentioned it, and then passed on to my own argument, in which it was not involved.

Let me now ask my correspondent what he means by saying that the *Annals* of Tacitus "first saw the light as a completed work in 1515." Has he ever read the *Annals* himself? Is he second-hand here also? As a matter of fact, the *Annals* is (or are, if you please) not a completed work even now. The fifth book is incomplete; the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth books are missing; so is the conclusion of the sixteenth book; and there are slight interruptions in the text as it stands. On the whole, then, I incline to the belief that my correspondent has no first-hand knowledge of this subject. In that case, he was very foolish to challenge a writer in my position. No doubt I have many faults, and I have been accused of many more; but there is one of which I was never guilty. I never scamped a bit of work, I never made a second-hand reference, I never quoted from a book I had not read, and I never wrote on any subject without taking the trouble to obtain ample information upon it. Those who want to detect my weakness must look in other directions.

But let me not end with a personal note. Suppose my critic had made out any of his points, or even all of them, he would still have only found needles without

seeing the haystack. What Lardner, or any other man, says is merely incidental. Questions have to be decided on the facts; unless we prefer the truth of authority to the authority of truth. Nor does it make the slightest difference to the authenticity or otherwise of the "Christ" passage in the *Annals* of Tacitus, whether the books as we have them were first published in the fifteenth or the sixteenth century. The ground of controversy lies behind the earliest possible date. It was that ground which I traversed in my argument in the *Sign of the Cross*; and it is upon that ground that I should be answered, and if possible confuted. But I am sorry to say it is the general practice of orthodox disputants to seize upon all points but the essential one. A notable instance of this weakness or dishonesty may be found in Bishop Lightfoot's labored reply to the author of *Supernatural Religion*. My critic belongs to much smaller fry, but in his little way he exhibits the very same characteristics.

G. W. FOOTE.

Secular Progress at Home and Abroad.

THE following familiar, but expressive, words from the pen of Thomas Paine will bear repeating here: "The world is my country, mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion." These words indicate the true spirit of altruism and the real principle of the brotherhood of man. They represent the philosophy of Secularism and the policy of Freethought propaganda. With Freethinkers humanity is higher than nationality, and to them the welfare of mankind is of more importance than the distinction of races. If the term "religion" is accepted at all, it should be understood to mean something very different from that which the Churches teach under that name. In the language of Dr. Kalisch, the religion of the future "must renounce uncertain traditions, imaginary narratives, and lifeless ceremonies; but it must, on the other hand, foster the purest and highest virtues of the human heart, and must lead to an active life of devotion, love, self-control, and cheerful sacrifice.....Henceforth, therefore, we do not desire a religion of fear, which is the fruit of delusion, but of love, which flows from intelligence; not a religion of vigor, which breeds servitude, but of joy, which bears witness of the freedom of the mind and heart; not a religion of contention, which persecutes others by the haughty presumption of infallibility, but of peace, which respects all honest convictions if they can but show works of charity and unselfish devotions." To such a religion as is here described Secularists can have no objection, for it was this "binding" principle that Paine proclaimed in the memorable words quoted above.

It must be exceedingly gratifying to all true friends of Freethought to see the rapid advancement that has recently been made in the Secular movement both at home and abroad. It is frequently asked by superficial observers, Where are the visible results of Freethought advocacy? My answer is, in the general decline of theological dominancy, and the practical acceptance of Secular views throughout the civilised world. The Church, once the supreme dictator of popular opinion, has now to adapt itself to the secular requirements of the age, to abandon many of its former strongholds, and to make mundane affairs its primary consideration. In this country the clergy dare not attempt to defend in public debate religious views which a few decades ago were thought to be invulnerable. The only semblance of oral defence of Christianity is now, with few exceptions, left to ignorant and vulgar exponents, who know no more of the real nature of the faith they disgrace than they do of its history. They have no regard either for the logic of facts or the courtesy of controversy. While this evident decline in Christian propaganda has been steadily going on, Secular forces have been consolidated, and Freethought advocacy has been greatly extended.

The establishment by Mr. Foote of the Secular Society, Limited, and the Twentieth Century Fund has enabled work to be done that previously was impossible to accomplish. Such Freethought demonstrations as the one which recently took place in the Town Hall at Birmingham is a new departure in our propaganda, and cannot but have a useful result in disseminating

a knowledge of our principles. It is decided to have other demonstrations, both in the English provinces and in Scotland, so far as the funds of the Society will permit. Mr. Cohen and myself have been engaged by the Board of Directors of the Secular Society, Limited, and by the Executive of the N. S. S., for a six months' mission in all parts of the country. Our duty will be to expound Secular principles in districts where hitherto, through the want of means, little has been heard of them.

It is more than ever important to observe discretion in our advocacy. While, no doubt, it will be necessary to continue to blend the destructive and constructive in our platform work, the scientific and general educational requirements of modern life must not be lost sight of. Personally, I prefer expatiating upon the practical teachings of Secularism rather than upon the speculations associated with Atheism. Not, be it observed, that I object to the term Atheist, for it correctly represents the attitude of my mind towards what is called the "God question." Moreover, I thoroughly endorse the words of Mr. George Jacob Holyoake when he said that Atheism is a "wholesome term. It is a defiant militant word. There is a ring of decision about it. There is no cringing in it. It keeps no terms with superstition. It makes war, and means it. It carries you away from the noisome word-jugglery of the conventional pulpits, and brings you face to face with nature." Such is Mr. Holyoake's defence of the use of the word Atheism, as given in the very book which he recently stated that he desires to be judged by after his death—which, it is to be hoped, is still a long way off.

Still, Atheist as I am, it appears to me there are not now the same reasons for dealing with the various beliefs in God as obtained in former days. If he exist, only a few persons trouble to any serious extent about him. The supernatural has become practically a silent member. My desire, therefore, is to deal with issues that affect our daily lives, and, above all, to show the necessity for Secularism, and its superiority over any of the supernatural religions of the world. We want to demonstrate to our opponents that, after a fair trial, theology has failed to regenerate mankind; that there are thousands of sincere searchers for truth who cannot believe the teachings of Christianity; that it is a service to man for him to receive new truths as they are revealed by the light of science and general knowledge; that the rising generation should be protected from the snares of priestcraft, and be taught the advantages of self-reliance and obedience to the laws of nature; that woman should be placed in a position wherein she could vindicate her own rights and dignity; that to live a moral life is the highest duty of us all; and, finally, that reason, aided by experience, is the best known guide in the formation of character. To inculcate the truths here indicated is the mission of the Secular advocate; and it is encouraging to know that the progress which is being made in this direction is beyond all doubt.

But it is not only at home where this advancement is seen; it is also apparent abroad. Mr. William Heaford, in his recent report in these columns of the Paris Freethought Congress, gave particulars of the testimony of the delegates who had assembled from all parts of France and Belgium, as to the spread of Freethought in their respective districts. We have also gathered in the American Freethought papers, as well as from private sources, of the extensive preparations now being made for the Congress which is to assemble in Cincinnati at the latter part of the present month. Of course, the Freethinkers of Great Britain wish the Congress all possible success, and many of us would like to be present at the gathering. Personally, it would afford me much pleasure to once more visit my American friends, but I find that at the present time it is impossible. Some few months since Mr. and Mrs. Levi, who probably are the most active workers in the Secular movement in Cincinnati, were in this country, and I enjoyed much of their very agreeable society. While referring to America, perhaps I may be excused for stating that during their stay with us they gave me a pressing invitation to attend their Congress. That was entirely unofficial, and, of course, nothing decisive was arrived at, although I assured them that I should

be delighted to be with them. Soon after I read a notice in the American papers, written by Dr. Wilson, that I was coming, which, to say the least, was premature, as I had given no authority for such a positive announcement. The first *official* invitation I received was a few weeks since from Mr. Levi and the Secretary of the American Union. The latter invited me to attend the Congress "as its guest, and deliver one or more addresses." To this I at once replied that, to my regret, I found it impossible to leave England this year. The matter is of no importance, except that I do not wish either my friend Mr. Levi or myself to be placed in a false position. I still hope to see the American friends again ere I "depart to be no more seen."

CHARLES WATTS.

The Clergy on Citizenship.

GIVEN a God of infinite wisdom, power, and love, creating and governing a world such as ours, what is the obvious conclusion concerning its condition to which one is driven? Clearly that the world is as he would have it to be. To decide otherwise is to question some of the characteristics with which he is credited. His wisdom foresaw, his power devised, his love permitted, all that has been, is, or will be. All the complex and manifold workings of natural forces must have formed part of the primal plan: he was free to create or abstain from creating; and, having endowed his deity with the above-named attributes, the Theist is logically driven to assent to the above-drawn conclusion.

What, then, should be the correct attitude of the sincere believer striving to guide his life by his beliefs? Clearly to let the world alone, to submit to every injustice, bear patiently with all wrong, as being part of the ordained constitution of things, and trust to God to put them in a more comfortable condition in the future. It is nothing short of presumptuous for believers in deity to be constantly questioning his wisdom by suggestions as to how things might be better managed, to throw doubt upon his power by offering to lend a hand, or to indicate a suspicion of his fatherly love by providing for the needy and the unfortunate. Their attitude should be a passive one—but, needless to say, it is not; and it is exceedingly curious to watch the conflict between common sense and religious beliefs that goes on in the mind of the ordinary believer. However much he may *hope* to be a denizen of another world, he *is* a resident in this; and in the long run, and in the majority of cases, this life will secure the first place in his considerations. The result is that, while he may be loudly proclaiming the providence of God, he is often busily engaged in establishing a providence of man; and, while deprecating "mere human efforts," will treat as a religious visionary the one who trusts God far enough to leave the salvation of the world entirely in his hands.

Citizen Sunday—the day set apart by many of the London clergy for addresses dealing with the civic life of the Metropolis—gave us numerous examples of this happily illogical frame of mind, in the shape of sermons dealing with the Borough Council Elections. Much of the advice given was good enough in its way—that is, as good as advice can be that is intended to please all and hurt none. It is so simple to say that London ought to be clean and healthy and sober; that the housing question is a serious problem; or that fresh air, good food, and decent elbow-room are essential to the breeding of healthy, intelligent citizens. These are, after all, the mere commonplaces of pulpit, press, and platform, and, while suitable enough as decoration for an address, carry one a wonderfully little way in the search for causes or methods of cure.

Many of the clergy complained, as was only to be expected, of the apathy of people concerning the municipal life of their own city. People rush into extravagant enthusiasm over events that are occurring 7,000 miles off, but are strangely obtuse concerning the wrongs and injustices at their own doors—forgetting, as Lord Rosebery put it, that London as well as South Africa is a portion of the British Empire. The complaint is only too well grounded; but with whom does the responsibility for this condition of things

lie? It would be unfair to fix all the blame on the different Churches; but it is quite clear that they are responsible for a large part of the mental indifference and sluggishness that prevail. A system of religion cannot control the world to the extent that Christianity has controlled it, and for so lengthy a period, without incurring some responsibility for existing conditions. And when is further borne in mind the enormous power wielded by the Christian clergy during a large part of their reign, their responsibility for existing evils becomes still more manifest. When a clergyman's wife reminded Ruskin that the clergy were the only friends the poor had, his reply was that no more deadly charge could be brought against them than that; and he asked, reasonably enough, if they had "so smoothed their words and so sold their authority that, after twelve hundred years' entrusting of the Gospel to them, there is no man in England who will have mercy on the poor but they." The conclusion is unavoidable that, had but a tenth part of the energy that they have expended in cultivating a belief in supernaturalism been spent in inculcating a stern sense of social duty, we might long ere now have banished such injustices and miseries as are a blot on our civilisation and a threat to the future of the race.

The truth is that Christianity has been historically, and in its periods of power, inimical to sane social development. The attitude of the early Christians towards the social life of the Roman Empire is unmistakable. To them no man could be at the same time a staunch follower of Christ and a partaker in the civil administration of the Empire. They were in the world, but not of it. A list of the names of Christian leaders for some centuries shows us men who either withdrew absolutely from social and political life, or entered into it only for the purpose of introducing theological questions, ready to support any party and policy that made for the advancement of their religious opinions. The result was that theological disputes gradually replaced discussions of social aims and methods; the recluse, destitute of home ties and social obligations, acknowledging no country, and spurning even a home, became the ideal character placed before the people. The municipal spirit of old Rome sank lower and lower with each fresh encroachment of Christianity. Local senates disappeared, popular election was forgotten, political liberty died out, and the sense of social effort for social ends had to be re-created by after ages, in spite of the bitter opposition of the different religious organizations. A people are, after all, what their heredity and institutions make them; and the systematic policy of holding up before a people the future life as being of infinitely greater importance than this, the wasting of energy on religious services that cannot in their very nature instruct him as to the essential conditions of social well-being, the opposition shown to general scientific development, and the close alliance of the clergy with all orders of vested interests, have all co-operated to blunt feelings that should have been sedulously and carefully cultivated.

But the gem of the collection of addresses I have been reading is supplied by the Rev. Dr. Horton. He not only dwelt upon the evils existent in London, but he attempted, on religious grounds, to supply a reason for them. This is always a somewhat dangerous policy, and it is specially so in the hands of a man who, like Dr. Horton, seems much more at home in falling foul of Roman Catholics for calling Mary the Mother of God—which he himself must believe if he believes in the divinity of Jesus—than in any subject requiring careful and thoughtful handling. He set himself to answer the questions, "Why was the world permitted to contain so much injustice? Why were the weak thrust to the wall? Why were the houseless allowed to accumulate in the great city?" These are questions often asked—questions to which there are many replies, but no answers. That is, there are no answers that square with the preliminary Theistic hypothesis. The Theist cannot admit that pain is in itself an evil—a doctrine that Mr. Gladstone, in his book on Bishop Butler, described as "false, fearfully prevalent, and most dangerous," since that would be casting on his deity the blame for whatever evil exists; and so he is compelled to discover good in evil simply and solely because his Theistic belief demands that it shall be so.

Dr. Horton accordingly repeats the old answer to such questions, that all this suffering and injustice is permitted for our good. Injustice is permitted "in order to produce in men that highest of divine attributes—a heart of compassion." People were homeless "that there might be formed in [others] a great redemptive compassion.....it might be said that the suffering of London was permitted in order to develop the heart of pity." Now, here is a good, kind, cheerful doctrine to preach to people who are half-starved and homeless! They are suffering in order that others may have created a great "redemptive compassion" to help them. It is like a provincial employer who recently said that compelling his employees to work longer hours was equal to an advance in wages, since they did not have so much leisure time to spend the money they were getting. Might not the poor raise a reasonable protest against being tortured in order that a few others might be made pitiful and sympathetic? Might it not also be suggested that a little common sense and a full measure of justice would be far more effective than ever "a heart of pity" or a "redemptive compassion" is likely to be? It requires a religious preacher to suggest that over half a million people have been condemned by God to live under conditions that ruin them body and mind, and are robbed by the greed of capital and the lust of power, that over 50,000 little children are attending London's schools insufficiently fed, and all in order that other people may be made better by their suffering. If there is such a crime as blasphemy, it is surely here; if there is an opinion that outrages human reason and common decency, it is this.

A very little knowledge of psychology might have taught Dr. Horton better. Not only would it have taught him that the normal effect of suffering on the individual is depression, but also that the contemplation of it under normal conditions of life, instead of creating sympathy, destroys it. For suffering to do its work effectually in this direction, it must be the exception, not the rule. Even a fairly attentive reading of history might have shown the preacher that the ages that have exhibited least pity and least sympathy are those in which the suffering and injustice have been greatest.

Look at the matter for a moment from another point of view. Suffering is here in order to develop the natures of those who witness it. Then why seek to destroy it? If suffering and injustice are the conditions for the growth of sympathy, is it not likely that in destroying these conditions you will destroy that "highest Divine attribute—a heart of compassion," and leave human nature cold, pitiless, and unsympathetic? Logically, Dr. Horton should say to the new Borough Councils: "Whatever you do, do not seek to redress injustice or abolish misery. God has 'permitted' it for our benefit, to purify our natures, and raise us to the inestimable heights of moral fellowship with the Hampstead Congregational Church. Let us not take away from our descendants the conditions of their improvement, but retain suffering in our midst, if only for their benefit, much as the ancient Spartans are said to have made their slaves drunk for the education of their children."

Dr. Horton's theory presents the slum landlord and the sweater in quite a new light. These, it seems, are ornaments to society rather than a disgrace. They are the agents of God, in fact, sweating their employees and rack-renting their tenants for the moral improvement of the race, and as part of the divine plan of human government. It is terrible to think of what we might have been had God not "permitted" their presence also. Really, when we are erecting monuments to the nation's benefactors some room ought to be made for effigies of these much-maligned gentlemen, and their apologue might fitly be written by Dr. Horton.

In sober truth, I do not believe that any man has any faith in such apologies for suffering—not even Dr. Horton. I do not believe that any man can look round at the suffering and injustice in our midst, and then say with perfect honesty that it is good, or has been good, that the God he believes in should have allowed it. He may say it with his lips, but his actions give the lie to his words. For the very man who puts forward the plea will usually be found doing something to remove the suffering he is apologising for. Human

nature is fortunately superior to all theories of deity. That, at least, cannot for long see hundreds of thousands of people suffering, justly or unjustly, without doing something, however little, to remedy their lot.

C. COHEN.

Acid Drops.

THE Christian Allies, having killed a hundred Chinese for every murdered European, are still only at the beginning of their task of "vengeance." They have set up a Court of their own, and are trying Chinamen for acts alleged to have been committed in their own territory—which is against every rule of international law we ever heard of. This Court has passed sentence of death on "the officials of Paoting-fu convicted of responsibility for the murder of Europeans." And, in order to reconcile public opinion in England to this extraordinary procedure, the *Times* Peking correspondent says that "the evidence against these officials showed that one poor American lady, before being executed, was led naked through the city with her breasts cut off." Now, we know that all Asiatics are apt to be cruel, though hardly more so than American lynchers of negroes. But does any man in his right senses believe this extravagant story? Is it possible that a woman could undergo such a terrible surgical operation as having both her breasts amputated, and walk about immediately afterwards? According to this story, she was "led" through the city in this condition. This implies that she moved on her own feet, and we are bound to say that we do not believe a word of it. We venture to say that the "poor American lady" would in all probability have died on the spot if she had been mutilated in that fashion. The subsequent "execution" would have been not only unnecessary, but impossible.

How beautifully the Christian Powers are giving the Heathen Chinese their much-needed lesson in the higher principles of civilisation! A flood of light is thrown upon the process by the following letter, written by a German soldier, and translated by the Berlin correspondent of the *Daily News*: "To-day we had to hasten to the assistance of German sailors. We made sixteen Chinese prisoners, tied them together by their pigtailed, and took them with us in this state. Some brutal fellows rained blows on them most pitilessly, so that the blood flowed out of their bodies. It was awful. I was just standing on guard before the prisoners, but took no part in it, for I should not like to be responsible for such brutality. After dinner they were all condemned to be shot. I was commandeered to carry out the sentence. When they were marching to the place of execution, two of them ran away. Eight quite young Chinese were allowed to live; the other eight were shot. We had to take up our position from twelve to fifteen feet away from them, four of us before one Chinese. At the command 'Ready,' there was a regular whine for mercy. Then came 'Fire!' and each Chinaman was pierced by four bullets. They fell backwards into the grave which they themselves had had to dig beforehand. Thus ended the eight Chinese, and I shall never forget this Sunday, the 26th August, in Peking."

But there is worse than this to be recorded. One of the besieged party in the British Legation at Peking was the Rev. Arthur H. Smith, author of *Chinese Characteristics and Village Life in China*. This gentleman contributes to the *New York Outlook* a graphic account of the "retribution" inflicted upon the Chinese capital by the Allied Powers. And, as he holds that the Celestials are being justly punished, we may take his narrative to be accurate enough, especially when it tells against his own side. Well, this gentleman gives a lively account of the looting that went on. It seems that, although they are not at war with China, the Allied troops stole everything they could lay hands on, and committed much wanton destruction. That was bad enough, and mean enough too; but after the loot comes something far more sickening. Here are the Rev. A. H. Smith's own words: "Day after day long lines of mules may be seen loaded with the loot of silk-shops, cloth-shops, grain-shops, with anything and everything. The British policy is the most scientific; under it everything is turned into a common stock and sold for the benefit of the occupying army. The Russian plan is that of the Middle Ages, slightly modified by a veneer of Christianity, and is accompanied by the violation of women on a scale which leads to the suicide of hundreds of Chinese, till the wells are choked. The savagery of some of the Russian troops is simply barbaric; but there is no nation which can throw stones at another in this dreadful matter."

We hope this does not mean that British soldiers have been guilty of outraging Chinese women. If they have, we can only express our horror and detestation, and dissociate ourselves as far as we can from the infamy. About the Russian soldiers, in any case, Mr. Smith is quite explicit.

They violated so many Chinese women that hundreds of Chinese men committed suicide to escape the memory of what had been inflicted upon their sisters, daughters, and wives. Just think of it! Imagine your own wife, daughter, or sister at the mercy of these beasts. And then recollect that Chinamen love their womenkind, and are sensitive about their honor, just as much as any Europeans.

These legions of the Holy Czar, these soldiers of Christ, who are there to avenge the death of some Christian missionaries, together with that of a comparative handful of other professed disciples of Jesus, are supposed to be demonstrating to the Chinese the superior morality of the Christian faith. And, in order to demonstrate this, they kill and steal wholesale, destroy historic and sacred things with absolute wantonness, and then proceed to rape hundreds—perhaps thousands—of innocent, inoffensive Chinese women. After this, we suppose, the conversion of China to Christianity will be a very easy matter. Such "evidences" of Christianity must be overwhelmingly persuasive.

What has Emperor William to say about this raping business? Are we to conclude from his silence—seeing how talkative he is—that the Chinese are to be treated to the bitter end as the Jews treated their defeated enemies? Is it to be unlimited bloodshed, unlimited spoil, and "to every man a damsel or two"?

Stephen Choppen, who hung himself the other day at Hadleigh, was a retired blacksmith, who used to forge the celebrated "witch bottles" for the wizard Murrell. These bottles contained blood, water, finger nails, hair, and pins. They were screwed up airtight and used as "charms" against witches. When heated they would usually burst, and this was thought to indicate that the witch's diabolical influence was destroyed. A nice bit of reading about England in the nineteenth century! Especially for an educated Chinaman, who hears so much over here about the superstition of his ignorant countrymen.

At one of the largest girls' schools in the South of England (we read) it was proposed that Mr. Leonard Merrick's last novel, *The Worldlings*, should be added to the library, but the proposal was defeated on account of the "impurity" of the title. Angels and ministers of grace defend us! What next? But we dare say the girls in that school are expected to read the Bible. There is no impurity in the title of that volume, but there is enough in its contents to sicken a dustman. We suppose this is what Jesus Christ meant by straining at gnats and swallowing camels.

Miss Marie Corelli declares, in *The Master Christian*, that most men hate superior women—like herself, we suppose; and that when a woman does any great thing in the world the men conspire to run her down, and rob her of the credit of her performance. This is very great nonsense, of course, and hardly worth a serious answer. We merely refer to it in connection with Sir Theodore Martin's proposal to have a bust of his late wife, a famous Shakespearean actress, placed in the Stratford-on-Avon Parish Church. That proposal has been defeated by Miss Marie Corelli, who raised a hue and cry against it, declaring that the bust of Lady Martin was going to be placed too near Shakespeare's, and that its presence there would be a perfect profanation. Perhaps it would be, though we don't quite know; for Shakespeare admired clever and beautiful women, and Helen Faucit was both. But how strange it is that Miss Marie Corelli, of all her sex, should be the one to raise this terrible outcry against another woman. Perhaps the place sought for Helen Faucit's bust ought to be reserved for Marie Corelli's. Not that this would have been Shakespeare's choice. As a poet, and as a man, he had a better taste. Were he alive again to-day he would not spend a minute over any book of Marie Corelli's. But how he would be delighted to see a great and beautiful actress impersonating one of his noblest female characters! He never had the opportunity of seeing this at his own theatre, for the female parts in that age were all played by boys.

Mr. Reader Harris, Q.C., and a leader of the Pentecostal League, has often stated that he was once "a confirmed Agnostic." We should be sorry, of course, to give him the lie on such a point. But we have never met with anyone who knew him while he was in that lost condition. However, he now tells an interviewer of the *Sunday School Chronicle* that he "saw a good deal of Mr. Bradlaugh, Mrs. Besant, and a large number of those who were connected with the Agnostic movement." Very likely he thinks so, but he is mistaken. Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant were never connected with any Agnostic movement. Mr. Bradlaugh, in particular, expressly repudiated the designation "Agnostic," and called himself an Atheist to the last conscious day of his life.

"I would like," Mr. Reader Harris says, "to bear my testimony to the splendid outward moral lives of many of those men whom I knew in those days. While I thank God

that the light has since come into my life, I nevertheless must confess that I learnt much from my early association and activity with some of those who have been cruelly maligned by the 'religious press,' those whom it would have been worth while their trying to understand."

This is, at any rate, a great improvement on the tone and attitude of the common "converted Freethinker," who spends most of his time in explaining what a filthy wicked lot he sojourned amongst until the Lord called him out of the darkness of Egypt to the light of the Promised Land. What these libellous fools never answer is this pertinent question:—How on earth were they attracted by a party consisting of liars, rogues, drunkards, profligates, and harlots?

This testimony of Mr. Reader Harris's is good enough on the face of it. Still, we hardly know what value can be attached to anything he says. He seems to have such a fine, romantic memory. Speaking the other day at Truro, according to the *West Briton*, he said that he once attended a great meeting presided over by Charles Bradlaugh, to hear an Agnostic lecturer; and during a pause in the proceedings an old lady in the audience moved a vote of confidence in Jesus Christ, which was seconded by another old lady, and carried. We daresay this is as true as Gospel. But it certainly is not a bit truer. We feel tempted to say that Mr. Reader Harris is the third old lady in the story. If he has the slightest regard for his own reputation, he will state when and where that meeting was held, and give the name of some newspaper in which the incident was reported. Anything of the kind, if it happened, would have been eagerly seized upon by the press in the locality. We do not suppose, however, that Mr. Harris cares enough for his own reputation, or for the truth either, to furnish the evidence which seems necessary. Perhaps the most charitable explanation is that "the pause in the proceedings," during which the two old ladies got their resolution through, was a subjective one. Mr. Reader Harris may have fallen asleep and dreamed the whole of that pious interlude.

Mr. Reader Harris also said that he could pick Atheists out of a mixed company by the shape of their heads. No doubt he would look at their bump of wonder. A small bump, or none at all, would indicate an Atheist; a moderate bump a Unitarian; a fair-sized bump a Churchman; a large bump a Nonconformist; and an extra big bump a disciple of Mr. Reader Harris.

"We can never," says the *Methodist Times*, "forget the awful significance of the fact that John Stuart Mill spoke of the sublimest passages of St. John as unintelligible jargon, and that Renan called the Epistle to the Ephesians *une épître banale*—a commonplace epistle." Poor *Methodist Times*, which cannot forget the awful significance. After all, the point is whether St. John *did* write unintelligible jargon, and whether St. Paul *did* pen a commonplace epistle. Both compositions are accessible for investigation, and it may turn out that the *Methodist Times* has simply been alarmed at the truth.

Whilst singing, "to the praise and glory of God," one of the psalms at the morning service in Wellington (Salop) Parish Church, John Breeze, county-court bailiff, fell dead in his pew.

Mr. Frank Bullen tells, says the *British Weekly*, how, on one of the South Sea Islands, he saw a missionary seated in a comfortable arm-chair smoking a cigar and reading a novel by Ouida, while on the table beside him stood a tumbler full of brandy and water! There is no reason to suppose that Mr. Bullen is yarning, though he is now writing for the *B. W.* a Christian serial, "With Christ at Sea."

Ian Maclaren has been sermonising on "Straightness." "Abraham," he says, "was the father of the faithful, and a noble type of religion; but Abraham lied to Pharaoh, just with that kind of lie which finds its shelter beneath the shadow of religion. He played upon words, saying that Sarah was his sister, which, in a sense, she was, but allowing Pharaoh to understand that she was not his wife, which, of course, she was. It was not a downright falsehood, but a guarded and calculated departure from the truth—a policy in which the religious conscience has shown itself an adept."

"There is a kind of man," Dr. Watson continues, "who will not drink, nor swear, who believes in the deity of Christ and the eternal punishment of the wicked, but who has no more idea of personal honor than a fox, and will do things at which a high-class man of the world would be aghast. We are inclined sometimes to think that, if a man be religious, he must be straightforward; and, if he be straightforward, he must be religious. But we have leaped too hastily to a conclusion, for there are people with a genuine sense of religion who are as crooked as a corkscrew, and there are people who

would never dream of calling themselves religious, but yet they are as straight as a die. As, for instance, Jacob in the one class, and in the other such a man as the Duke of Wellington among Englishmen, and Abraham Lincoln among Americans."

Perhaps the Lord never considered the possibility of earthquakes when he created the world. Or he may have thought them of trifling importance. All the same, a recent earthquake in Caracas, Venezuela, has caused twenty-five deaths. The President of Venezuela broke his leg by jumping from a second-floor window. The Lord might inquire into the matter and see what can be done.

Gradually the truth leaks out. Now we learn from a Christian account of *The Chinaman at Home*, published by a well-known Christian firm of publishers—Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton—some facts which have not hitherto been widely published. The Chinaman, with his positive worship of literary style, is, we learn, simply repelled by current translations of the Bible, which are absolutely without style, and, according to his notions, without sense. The author of *The Chinaman at Home* considers it a most misguided policy to identify Christianity with Western civilisation, the latter being regarded as pure barbarism.

The personal wealth of Pope Leo XIII. is estimated to exceed £4,000,000—a pretty considerable sum for a follower of Jesus Christ, who preached poverty, and enjoined his disciples to sell all and give to the poor. The official expenses of the Pope are all provided for; but the most extraordinary presents are made to him, either by will or during the life of the donors.

The following is a list of presents made to Leo XIII. since his accession:—Twenty-six tiaras ornamented with precious stones; 319 gold crosses set with brilliants and other stones; 1,200 cups in gold or silver; 81 rings, one of which, from the Sultan, is worth 100,000 francs; the largest diamond in the world, presented by the President of the Transvaal; 16 pastorals in gold and precious stones; 884 gold or silver stands for the Host; 7 gold or silver statues, about 1,000 objects of art, besides any quantity of money.

The "regular"—that is, the monastic—clergy in France have been piling up immense wealth during the past ten years, and they are using it against the life of the Republic. It is known that they own £40,000,000 worth of property, besides an incalculable amount which is held surreptitiously in evasion of the law. Is it any wonder, then, that the Government recognises the necessity of pulling down this power within the State? It is all very well for Englishmen to condemn such action in the name of "religious liberty." But the fact is, we had to deal with a similar danger hundreds of years ago, and when *mortmain* Acts proved inadequate we resorted to wholesale confiscation.

Another sidelight has been thrown on Roman Catholicism in France by the letter of the Bishop of Laval to the *Matin*, which shows the inherent incompatibility of the Church with the Republic. The prelate, a staunch Republican, says he will be master in his own diocese, and will have no "foreign" priests to dictate to him. The "foreign" ecclesiastic in question is Père Hamelin, member of a religious congregation founded in another diocese. The priest is rector of a college which is a hot-bed of Royalism. It is said the Bishop has placed the college under an interdict; if so, he has been guilty of an excess of authority which Rome will put right. Of one thing, however, we may be sure—the Government of Republican Defence will defend its episcopal champion to the end, and it is very probable that this Laval scandal will lead to considerable friction between France and the Holy See.

Professor Mackintosh is another preacher of the Gospel who says he has been *misreported*. He takes the *British Weekly* to task on some report of something which he was supposed to have said; but the *B. W.* doesn't seem inclined to put up with his bluff. Professor Mackintosh says: "I never said that the belief in miracles had been killed. I have always held and taught the opposite. What I said in my paper was that modern science makes such belief harder than it was to the indolent faith of a century ago, and that modern criticism may treat some miracle narratives as legendary." After all, is it of really vital importance what Professor Mackintosh said about miracles?

"The oldest comic paper in Australia," we learn, "is now edited by a Sunday-school teacher." So we had supposed. We read it (professionally) every week. Let us add, to prevent misconception, that "the oldest, etc.," is not the *Sydney Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* is a serious paper—as serious as the *Pink 'Un*; and Mr. Archibald is not a Sunday-school teacher—not regularly.—*Topical Times*.

The Rev. A. E. Barnes-Lawrence seems to be one of those Gospel-persons who, in the most contradictory kind of way, are always complaining about the stage, and yet are always hanging about it. He moved, at the Rochester Diocesan Conference: "That the moral condition of the modern stage urgently calls for the notice and action of Christian people." He said that the attitude of Christians in regard to the stage had completely changed since the days of the primitive Church. To-day thousands of professedly Christian people attended the theatre, clergymen were to be found night after night at the play, an English Bishop had written the introduction to a stage manager's dramatic novel, and actors and actresses were advertised as giving an entertainment on behalf of a Church society. The *Times*, in a recent leader, pointed out that they had had upon the stage a great deal too much of the woman with a past, and too many of her, and that the leading doctrine of the new woman school was that the thing worth living for and working for was the free discussion of unsavoury subjects by men and women. Mr. Beerbohm Tree had written to the *Times* apologetically, to the effect that it was not the business of the drama to preach. If that Conference were to do nothing more than to pledge itself to a policy of abstinence from the theatre until things mended, it would be one of the longest steps ever taken by the Church for the reform of the stage.

Suppose the whole Rochester Diocesan Conference stayed away from the theatre, how would that reform the stage? Besides, there is a shrewd suspicion that it is not so much the stage as the Church which needs reforming.

The following is an extract from a sermon on the Atonement, preached by the chaplain in Christ Church, Bankipore: "This doctrine of Atonement by blood, as formulated in the Latin Church, was a return to the latest and most corrupt form of the old paganism. 'It was the bloody sacrificial rites of the East which belong to the latest phase of paganism; it was the ghastly performance of the Taurobolim which shaped the Christian belief. The worshipper stood in a pit below a perforated platform, and was drenched from head to foot in the shower-bath of the blood that gushed from the slaughtered bull above.' This horrible ritual was held to be a ransom from all guilt and a pledge of blessedness both in this world and the world to come. As the worshipper, reeking and dripping with this sanguine torrent, passed out through the crowd, others pressed about him, to win some share by a touch or stain in the magic potency of that atoning rite."

Many of our well-known hymns are responsible for keeping alive this horrible and sanguinary view of the Atonement. So Christians sing in harmony with this old Pagan rite:—

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

An irreverent workman caused no end of trouble for the congregation of, and the contractor who built, the New Trinity Methodist Church at Third and Guthrie-streets, Louisville, Kentucky. In the south-west corner of the new edifice, back of the pulpit, is the pipe organ. Over the organ is an arch and a dome. In this dome is frescoed an open Bible. This work was done some weeks ago with great care and trouble. Across the face of the Bible were frescoed, according to directions, the words: "Pax Vobiscum." But when the congregation inspected the new church, or surveyed from their pews the organ and the dome above, they noticed under "Pax Vobiscum" another inscription. One member provided himself with a pair of glasses and turned them on the inscription. To his horror he read: "This was done in a hell of a rush." This inscription was right across the face of the Bible.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

The Rev. W. Harold Davies, Baptist minister, of Swansea, has left his church and joined the Unitarians. He says that he could have stopped in his church, and gone on preaching liberal sermons, like some of his ministerial brethren, who believe pretty much as he does; but he did not think it honest to pursue such a course, and he determined to stand out in the open on the ground of his own actual belief. This is honorable, of course, and we tender the reverend gentleman our best respects. At the same time, we venture to suggest that his present talk about God and Christ is as superstitious in its way as the other doctrines he has discarded. Perhaps he will go farther in the future.

"Give to everyone that asketh," said Jesus Christ. But his followers don't do business in that way. The vicar and wardens of Kirk Michael, Isle of Man, for instance, advertise that they have £250 to lend on "good security." We suppose they also want good interest. When they find a suitable

borrower, the vicar ought to preach a special sermon on "What would Jesus Do?"

There is a rumpus at Sydney. Lord Beauchamp, the Governor, was present in his official robes at the dedication of a Roman Catholic Cathedral. Bishop Wellington, who preached the sermon, left out a strong anti-Protestant passage, which the Governor might have resented by walking out of the place. But he published the sermon afterwards with the omitted passage restored, and the Protestants have been holding indignation meetings against poor Lord Beauchamp. We hope it will be a lesson to him for the future. Ecclesiastics are prone to such little dodges, and the best policy of responsible statesmen is to keep clear of them altogether.

Professor Rhees, in his *Life of Jesus of Nazareth*, deals in this way with the story of the Temptation: "It is not idle curiosity which inquires whence the evangelists got the story of the temptation of Jesus. Even if the whole transaction took place on the plane of outer-sensuous life, and Jesus was bodily carried to Jerusalem and to the mountain top, there is no probability that any witnesses were at hand who could tell the tale. But the fact that, in any case, the vision of the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time (Luke iv. 5) could have been spiritually only, since no mountain, however high (Matt. iv. 8), could give, physically, that wide sweep of view, suggests that the whole account tells in pictorial language an intensely real, inner experience of Jesus."

At the Stranraer Sheriff Court, last week, the State Church minister of Portpatrick pleaded "Guilty" to a charge of assaulting the son of the Free Church minister, and was fined £1, with the option of seven days' imprisonment. It was stated that the son of the accused and the complainer had quarrelled the previous day, and the son of the Auld Kirk got the worst of the argument. Accused, who afterwards expressed regret for his action, met his son's victor in a railway carriage and thrashed him with a stick.

The latest word of wisdom from the Law Courts is, says the *Topical Times*, Mr. Sprague's explanation that the *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette* and the *Christian World* are not one and the same paper. In saying this we are sure that Mr. Sprague was merely anticipating a judicial question as to whether they were in any way identified. We often mistake the one for the other ourselves.

A clandestine distillery has been discovered in the Catholic seminary at Le Mans. An inspector disguised himself as a cooper, and asked at the seminary if they had any casks for sale. He was taken into the cellar and allowed to examine the premises. Half an hour later he returned with a police officer, and the still, which he had found hidden in the cellar, was confiscated. The still is believed to have been placed in the cellar without the knowledge of the superior of the seminary.

According to a current story about the Bishop of London, he was once listening to a long-winded, prosy speech, and, turning to a fellow-sufferer, he asked: "Do you know that speaker?" "No," was the answer. "I do," said the Bishop; "he speaks under many aliases, but his name is Thomas Rot."

We hope this story is true. It enables us to think more kindly of the Bishop of London. It shows he is, after all, a human being. The most urbane and fastidious man is sometimes tempted to exclaim "Rot!" And we think none the worse of him for the exclamation. Normal speech is unequal to certain occasions. Nothing but good, hot, vigorous slang will then serve the turn.

Questioning.

Oh, solve me Life's riddle, I pray ye,
The torturing ancient enigma,
O'er which full many a brain had long puzzled.
Old heads in hieroglyph-marked mitres,
Heads in turbans and caps medieval,
Wig-covered pates, and a thousand others,
Sweating, wearying heads of mortals,
Tell me what signifies *Man*?
Whence came he hither? Where goes he hence?
Who dwells there on high in the radiant planets?
The billows are murmuring their murmur unceasing,
Wild blows the wind, the dark clouds are fleeting,
The stars are still gleaming, so calmly and cold,
And a fool awaits an answer.

—Heinrich Heine.

The claims of morality to our allegiance, so far as its precepts are solidly established, rest on the same positive base as our faith in the truth of physical laws.—*John Morley*.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, November 11, Secular Hall, 61 New Church-road, Camberwell; 7.30, "Marie Corelli and Jesus Christ."

To Correspondents.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS.—November 11, Athenæum Hall.—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.

T. DUNBAR.—Pleased to hear that your newsagent in the Lillie-road, Fulham, displays our weekly contents-sheet "with good results." This is one of the best ways of promoting our circulation. Accept our thanks.

G. J. WARREN.—Very pleased to receive your manly letter. The N. S. S. Executive knows that you are busy with public duties, and will always reckon you as "present in the spirit" when you cannot attend in the flesh. Come now and then, as you are able.

W. COX.—A paragraph was already in type, otherwise yours would have been inserted. We are glad to hear that Mr. Watts had such good meetings at Liverpool on Sunday, but sorry to hear that you were again prevented from charging for admission. Will the police never mind their own business?

F. COCKS.—No doubt something could be done at Walthamstow. We will keep the matter in mind. Will you try to ascertain what halls are available for lectures?

F. W. L.—The subject is one that arouses so much hot feeling that we prefer to "let it slide." Thanks all the same.

F. E. WILLIS.—Sorry, but not surprised, to hear that the Birmingham papers are boycotting Mr. Ward's candidature.

J. SAID.—Under consideration.

R. LEWIS.—We have no authority to state whether Sir Robert Ball is a Freethinker or not. You must judge for yourself, as we do. We fancy he is a good way off orthodoxy.

J. PARTRIDGE.—Really no thanks are needed. Mr. Foote was happy to be able to speak on behalf of Mr. Ward's candidature. Glad to see you are all working hard for his success.

P. B. B.—Schopenhauer's essay on the Freedom of the Will has not, to our knowledge, been translated into English. There is a good (and cheap) French translation, if that would assist you.

J. WOODS.—We have little interest in the Christian family quarrel between Mr. George Wise and the Liverpool Ritualists.

AN OCTOGENARIAN FREETHINKER, who subscribes £2 2s. to the Freethought Twentieth Century Fund, has been a Freethinker for sixty-five years, is as loyal to the cause as ever, and takes unabated interest in it. He read Mr. Holyoake's *Reasoner* and Charles Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*, and now reads the *Freethinker*. "I admire," he says, "not only its editorial articles, but also the valuable contributions of C. Watts, C. Cohen, and others, whose excellent writings aid in making the *Freethinker* the lucid and progressive journal it is."

A. G. BARKER.—Neither do we forget Frank Hugh O'Donnell's disgusting behavior to Charles Bradlaugh when the giant was fighting for his seat in the House of Commons. We have no belief whatever in the man, and can only conclude that he has some end to serve by his present action. Sorry we cannot oblige you with the "B. V." pamphlets you are seeking.

FREETHOUGHT TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND.—J. Attley, £1; An Octogenarian Freethinker of sixty-five years' standing, £2 2s.; The Turnbull Family (Glasgow), 13s. 6d.

SHILLING WEEK.—Mr. Cayford, 3s.; We Three, 10s.; T. H., 1s.; T. J., 2s.; J. Davis, 1s.; H. Gage, 2s.; J. O. Restall, 1s.; F. Cocks, 2s. Correction.—T. Vine, 2s. (last week), should have been 2s. 6d.

A. J. HOOPER wishes to say he is very pleased with the photographic work done by Mr. George Cross, whose advertisement will be found in our business pages.

YOUNG FREETHINKER.—Received and under consideration.

W. P. BALL.—Thanks for your serviceable cuttings.

A. G. LYE.—We answered your letter by post, as the case seemed urgent. It is not illegal to charge for seats at Sunday lectures. Mr. Justice Collins's judgment—the latest on the question—was to the effect that some free seats, however few, were a sufficient compliance with the old Act of George III. This should be pressed upon the attention of the lessees and proprietors of halls when they have any misgivings. For our own part, we have always believed that we could defeat a prosecution if there were no free seats. We defied the police at Hull and at Portsmouth, and in each case they backed down. But we have never thought it politic to disclose what would be our plan of campaign, for the game is not one to be played with the cards upon the table.

RECEIVED.—Secular Thought—Liberator—Two Worlds—Truthseeker (New York)—Freidenker—Ethical World—Nottingham Express—Truthseeker (Bradford)—Isle of Man Times—Blue Grass Blade—Edinburgh Evening News—Birmingham Gazette—Cambria Daily News—Torch of Reason—West Briton—Lucifer—Public Opinion—Boston Investigator.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

THERE was a crowded audience at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday evening in spite of the wet, disagreeable weather. Mr. Foote lectured on "New Testament Superstitions," and the subject lent itself naturally to a good deal of comical treatment, although the serious element was not overlooked. Few audiences could ever have put more laughter into an hour's sitting; and sometimes the lecturer himself was visibly tempted to join in the hilarity, but he kept a straight face by an effort of self-restraint. A few questions were asked at the close, but no one accepted the chairman's invitation of discussion. The gentleman who boasted at Hyde Park in an earlier part of the day that he was going to "smash" Mr. Foote found discretion the better part of his valor, and did not put in an appearance.

Mr. Foote lectures this evening (Nov. 11) at the Secular Hall, Camberwell. His subject will be "Marie Corelli and Jesus Christ." As he (G. W. F., not J. C.) has not lectured at Camberwell for some time, and the subject is an attractive one, there will doubtless be a large audience on this occasion.

Mr. Charles Watts had three capital audiences last Sunday at Liverpool. Friends came from surrounding districts, and also from Manchester and Chester. Mr. Watts was in his best form, and roused the meetings to a high pitch of enthusiasm. Mr. Hamwood presided morning and afternoon, and Mr. Small in the evening. Mr. Watts lectures at the Athenæum Hall this evening (Nov. 11), taking for his subject "The Death of Jehovah."

"Where are the Christians?" is the heading of a long descriptive report in the Birmingham *Weekly Mercury* of Mr. Foote's lecture in the Town Hall on "Marie Corelli and Jesus Christ." Evidently the reporter tried to be fair, although he had to be careful in a Church and Tory paper. It is noticed that at the close of the lecture "some feeble, well-meaning folk asked futile questions, the replies to which were far more damaging to the cause of the questioners than anything the lecturer had said." Also that Mr. Foote was received with "storms of applause, well-sustained and long-continued." On the whole, it is rather strange that liberality to Freethinkers should be avoided by the so-called Liberal papers and left to a journal like the *Mercury*. We think we ought to congratulate the editor upon his intellectual hospitality, and the reporter upon the admirable manner in which he fulfilled his duty. He certainly wields a dexterous pen.

It has been very difficult to procure halls for the "Concentration Scheme" in London. Indeed, the metropolis is, in this respect, far more unfavorable to Freethought than most provincial towns. The greatest difficulty of all was to obtain a hall in East London for Sunday evening lectures. At length, however, the large hall of the Aldgate Baths has been secured for four Sunday evenings—November 18 and 25, and December 2 and 9. There are chairs, we believe, to seat 500 people. Full details will be given in next week's *Freethinker*. Meanwhile the East London "saints" should make a note of this arrangement, and spread the news of it amongst their friends in the locality.

A course of week-night lectures has also been arranged to be delivered in the Wellington Hall, Upper-street, Islington, on the evenings of November 12 and 26, and December 3 and 10. Full details of this course will also appear in our next issue. We may add at once, however, that Mr. C. Watts and Mr. C. Cohen, who are definitely engaged for six months under this Scheme, will take part in all these courses of lectures. Mr. Foote will co-operate to the best of his power. He will take one Sunday evening in East London and one week-night at Islington. Down at West Ham, where the Town Hall is being engaged for two week-nights, he proposes to give one lecture himself, and then to go down with Messrs. Watts and Cohen, and other speakers, to hold a Freethought Demonstration. Halls are being sought after in other parts of London. Friends who know of any good places that are available are invited to communicate with us, or with Miss Vance, as soon as possible.

As the first of the Wellington Hall course of lectures is fixed for next Monday (November 12), and the time for

advertising it is therefore very limited, it is to be hoped that the Secularists in the neighborhood will do their best to give it publicity. Handbills of the whole course can be obtained from Miss Vance for distribution. Mr. Charles Watts is to be the first lecturer. The time is 8 o'clock, and the admission is free. Wellington Hall, by the way, is entered, not from Upper-street, but from Almeida-street.

Mr. C. Cohen delivers three lectures to-day (November 11) in far-north Aberdeen. No details have reached us from any quarter, but the local "Saints" will doubtless find some advertisement in the city.

Mr. A. B. Moss managed to gain a seat on the new Camberwell Borough Council. We congratulate him on his success. Last Sunday morning he addressed a large audience on Mile End Waste in favor of the School Board candidature of Mr. George Hewitt. Mr. Moss informs us that he regards Mr. Hewitt as a very able young man, who would make a very useful member of the School Board. Of course he is strongly in favor of "Secular Education."

Mr. G. J. Warren has gained a seat on the Stepney Borough Council, with the biggest vote yet recorded for him: in fact, he was at the head of the poll. Mr. James Neate, another N. S. S. vice-president, has gained a seat in his division. We congratulate them both—and their Councils on having them. We regret to note that Mr. Victor Roger failed, with other Progressives, in Lambeth.

The Camberwell Branch held its annual meeting on Sunday morning. Mr. Victor Roger was re-elected president, Mr. Herbert vice-president, and Mr. Wilmot secretary. The last was highly complimented on his services to the Branch. Mr. Woodward kindly undertook to act as assistant-secretary. It was resolved that a South London Secular Federation should be formed, in order to assist Freethought propaganda in the various districts during the winter.

Mr. H. Quelch, the well-known Social Democrat, is a candidate in the East Lambeth Division for a seat on the new London School Board. He makes a special feature of "Secular Education" in his program, and we hope he will receive the support of the local Freethinkers. They may not all be able to see eye to eye with him on every point, but this one point is *all-important*.

Mr. J. Allanson Picton, writing to Mr. F. J. Gould, who is trying to win a seat on the new Leicester School Board, points out that the Nonconformists, by having their own views of the Bible endowed in the schools, have destroyed their objection to State endowments of religion. "If there is no other candidate taking your line on this question," Mr. Picton says, "and had I a vote, I should plump for you."

A member of the West Ham Branch was riding on a bus from Stationers' Hall Court to Liverpool-street, when a sanctimonious passenger handed the conductor a couple of tracts—"one for you and one for the driver." The conductor looked at his prize and smiled. He had seen that sort of thing before. The member of the W. H. B. thereupon handed the conductor two "specimen" copies of the *Freethinker* which he had just obtained from Miss Vance. To the horror of an old lady who sat in the opposite corner, the conductor plunged into our "Old Dowie" article, and so enjoyed it that he said he would pass it on to some friends.

We have lost sight for some time of that clever little lady, Mrs. Louisa Samson, who will be remembered by some of the frequenters of the Hall of Science. Mrs. Samson, we hear, was the "Agnostic lady" who enlivened the St. James's Hall meeting at which "Professor" Atkinson expected to have a sort of faith-healing match with Old Dowie. Mrs. Samson remarked that both these faith-healers were at one in pretending to divine assistance—which she ventured to doubt. There were loud cries of "Chair!" but she gained time to throw in her bombshell and see it explode.

"The records of 'Old Boys,'" says Katherine Carson, in the *Temple Magazine*, for November, in an account of the Royal Caledonian Asylum, "include several who have distinguished themselves in the world of art and literature. Charles Mackay, the well-known poet and journalist, father to the late Eric Mackay, the poet, was a Caledonian boy. James Thomson, the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*, received his education in the school. The Army and the Navy have been recruited from the school, and Caledonian boys have served in nearly every famous Scottish regiment.

Secular Thought (Toronto) reaches us fitfully. We have just received three numbers together, all dated September. We hope this means that Editor Ellis has sold out, and found it difficult to send us copies. One of the numbers reproduces Mr. Gould's "Talk About Heaven" from our columns. From another number we note with pleasure that the Toronto Secular Society still holds Sunday evening meetings.

The *Life and Letters* of the late Professor Huxley, edited by his son, Mr. Leonard Huxley, is not a book intended for the mob. It is published in two volumes at 30s. net. We have not been favored with a copy for review, although ours is the only Freethought journal in England with anything like a good circulation. Nevertheless, we shall give our readers a view of the contents of these bulky and expensive volumes, and we are now looking through them in pursuit of that object.

The *Secular Almanack* for 1901, issued by the Executive of the National Secular Society, and edited by Mr. Foote, will be on sale next week. In addition to the Calendar and detailed information respecting Freethought Organisations at Home and Abroad, this issue includes special articles by Messrs. Foote, Watts, Cohen, Moss, and Heaford, and "Chilperic" and "Mimnermus." Freethinkers should place their orders for this publication at once. It is well worth the small price of threepence, and any profit realised by the sale will accrue to the N. S. S.

Editor Charles C. Moore, of the *Blue Grass Blade*, Lexington, Kentucky, has successfully resisted the attempt at putting him in prison again. His enemies charged him with sending obscene matter through the mails, being afraid to charge him with "blasphemy." Mr. Moore has proved that what he printed was *not* obscene, and has won his case in court, to the satisfaction of his friends and the dismay of his bigoted and hypocritical opponents.

Shilling Week, or Shilling Month, as it turned out, is now practically over, and we propose to make a final statement about it next week. Meanwhile it may be noted that a second (and last) Shilling Week in aid of the Freethought Twentieth Century Fund is fixed for the first seven days in the new year.

Freethinkers might bear in mind that the Freethought Publishing Company does not seek to confine its business to its own publications. It is ready to execute orders for all kinds of advanced literature. Freethinkers who are obtaining this class of books, by post or otherwise, should try the experiment of placing their orders with the Company. Such action on their part would tend to counteract the "respectable" boycott.

Beware of China.

MR. G. W. FOOTE, President of the National Secular Society, lectured at the Leicester Secular Hall last Sunday morning, on "China and the Christian Powers." The feeling which was now banding the Chinese together against Europeans, said Mr. Foote, was what ought to be called patriotism, but we called it devilry. The Chinese were gradually being made into a military nation by the mere force of Christian aggression. Naturally the Chinese were peaceably inclined, but the instinct of self-preservation was throwing them back on military defence. In time they would possess powerful artillery, and millions of rifles and bayonets. They had a population of 400,000,000, and out of this number it was easy to raise an army of 20,000,000. Europeans were preparing a scourge for themselves. Militarism would be met by militarism. Perhaps, observed Mr. Foote, half sadly, half cynically, every nation on earth must be militarised before war could cease. The Powers would never be able to partition China; they could never make any practical impression on so vast an empire, and so numerous a population. "China," said an Oriental proverb, "was like the sea; it salts everything that passes into it."

Having thus warned his audience against the Yellow Terror, Mr. Foote declared that China not only merited fair-dealing, but even indulgence. This vast empire had come down from an immemorial past, protected by the strength of its conservatism. It was now face to face with civilisations of another type, and it was no easy task for her to range herself in harmony with these foreign forces. No doubt she would, in time, yield to that cosmopolitan movement which tended to open every country to the inhabitants of all other countries, for purposes of peaceable trade and transit and enlightened curiosity. But the process must not be violently hastened. They must be very callous or stupid who were indifferent to the possibility of throwing more than a quarter of the world's inhabitants (such was China's proportion) into political and social anarchy.

—*Leicester Guardian*, November 3, 1900.

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

Gaps in the Gospels.

"There is no task in the world so difficult as, with the materials available to us, to write a consistent and natural-seeming biography of Christ. In addition to the immense task of harmonising the sources and of filling their wide yawning gaps, there remains for the modern mind the almost insuperable problem of making a history which, at every point, touches the miraculous and transcendental, to work out as an actual historical reality."—*Christian World*, November 1, 1900.

PROFESSOR RHEES has written the seventh volume in the *Historical Series for Bible Students*, published by Smith, Elder, and Co. The above quotation forms part of the *Christian World* review of that book. It is not exactly Professor Rhees's view of the Gospels, and may disturb the confidence of his Bible-students if they read it. But the book itself is intended for embryo preachers of the Word, who will in time occupy the pulpit. The review is evidently intended for those who are not likely at any time to occupy the pew.

The *Christian World* statements are worth considering. They indicate a marvellous advance in general theological thought. Sometimes, after reading the weekly contributions of "J. B.," who is well known as the Rev. J. Brierley, a retired minister, it is difficult to understand how the journal which publishes them can continue to be the popular and influential representative of Christian thought that it is. The book review referred to is another evidence of the approach to advanced ideas which seems now to be the prevailing policy of the *C. W.*, as, indeed, it is of all religious journals that desire to keep abreast with the times.

Freethinkers have long ago declared that it was difficult to write a "consistent and natural-seeming biography of Christ." Renan tried it, but, with all his analytic skill, his surpassing elegance and charm of style, and his gentle, poetic treatment of absurd stories that never deserved it, he was called "Infidel" for his pains, and in bigoted circles is so denominated still. Strauss scarcely strived to present a "consistent and natural-seeming biography." He found that impossible, and devoted himself to accounting mythologically for the more striking features presented in the synoptic narratives. Evan Powell Meredith made a great effort to bring all the conflicting stories of the Evangelists into a coherent whole, but he ended, like many others, in presenting a thoroughly Freethought view of the "Prophet of Nazareth" as distinguished from any "consistent and natural-seeming" biography such as orthodox believers seem to desire.

Then there have been hundreds of religious writers who have tried to evolve from the chaos of the Gospels a consistent life of Christ. Dean Farrar is the latest, and, in spite of his plethora of words, his absolutely gratuitous assumptions, his rhetorical flourishes and periphrastic embellishments, he is, by the verdict of competent critics of his own Church, the greatest failure of all.

There is no "consistent and natural-seeming biography" of Christ, simply because the materials are not available. The pictures of Christ presented to the world by preachers, poets, painters, are mostly pure conjecture—mere fanciful creations, ostensibly built upon the Gospels, but adding many features not to be found in those fragmentary and irreconcilable stories in which there are so many "yawning gaps."

Just now there is much talk of missionary enterprise. Let us imagine a missionary approaching an educated Hindoo and saying: "I want you to believe in Christ. I cannot give you a consistent and natural-seeming biography of him. The materials are not available. I cannot harmonise the sources, nor fill up wide, yawning gaps. It is with us an insuperable problem how to make out an actual historical reality in regard to his advent and existence on earth. Our trouble is that the accounts we have touch at every point the miraculous and the transcendental. We are still trying to harmonise and fill up blank spaces. In the meantime, please believe in Christ; later on, we will mail you our revised versions of his history. To assist you, in the meantime, you may like to know that there are many people in our own Christian England, and in America and Australia, who are not at all assured that this Christ, of whom we speak, ever had any existence at all."

This is what should, in honesty, be told the native

heathen whom we propose to convert. But, of course, we never tell them. If we did, there would be an end to missionary enterprise—also to the surprise at Exeter Hall that missionaries are treated very badly in countries they invade with obviously lame stories, which must seem little less than frauds.

But we don't want to talk to the educated Hindoo—who could give us points in regard to many things—but to common-sense people in our own country. And to them we would propound certain queries. Suppose a God desired to convey his will to mankind. Would he do it in the way that parsons pretend he has? Would he behave so stupidly? We know that earthly testators, even assisted by lawyers, often leave wills which are open to be contested. If "God's" will was brought into the Probate Division of her Majesty's Courts of Justice, what would happen? The Law Courts would have to be so extended that they would cover the greater part of London.

Whatever God's will was, he was perfectly able to make it clear. He hasn't done so—that is made obvious by all the conflicting sects. His Gospel is full of "yawning gaps." There are insuperable problems in the way of making an actual historical reality out of the life of his Son. Let anyone read the four Gospels and ask himself if this, the meagre material that he finds there, adequately covers the ground. The synoptic accounts traverse very much the same story. They overlap; and they contradict each other to such an extent, indeed, that one is almost inclined to say the "truth is not in them." The Gospel of St. John, for example, presents an entirely different view of Christ to that of the other Evangelists. The four Gospels, even with the addendum of the Acts of the Apostles, give but a meagre and miserably inadequate account of Christ. We don't know what he was doing for a considerable part of the very short time he was supposed to be on earth. There are great gaps in the Gospels. It is too late now for them to be filled.

And now, if it is not blasphemous to do so, we would submit the following queries to the Almighty. "Why," we say to him, "if you had a gospel to give to mankind, a will to reveal, a religion to establish, if you wanted praise and prayer, knee-drill and belly-creeping, why didn't you arrange for it properly? Why are the Gospels, in which you offer us eternal life, so remarkable for their 'yawning gaps'? Why didn't we have more information about your Son? Why is the information that we have so conflicting? Why should it be an insuperable problem to make the story of your Son's existence 'an actual historical reality'? Why, if you had a Gospel for the world, did you delay publication? Many myriads died before you could have readers. And now nearly half the world knows nothing about you, and a great portion of the other half, knowing you, acts as if you were non-existent."

God has much to answer for. Cross-examined in the witness-box, he might disclose a great deal that we don't at present know, and some things which might be self-incriminating. All the same, when he proposed to give his will to mankind he might have made it clearer, and not have left so many "yawning gaps" in the biography of his son, and so many doubts as to what he himself really desires.

FRANCIS NEALE.

International Freethought Federation.

THE organ of this body will be launched next January, and will be edited at Brussels. Monsieur Léon Furnémont asks me to invite the support of English Freethinkers for this venture. Generous support has been given to the project in Belgium and France, and assistance is promised from Spain. May I appeal to our friends for subscriptions towards this end, in order to show practically our solidarity with continental Freethought?

Monsieur Furnémont is the Deputy for Charleroi, and will be the editor of the new paper. It will be published in French, and called *La Raison*. Shares may be taken at ten francs each (6s. 8d.). Mr. Hartmann, who has promised £4, has kindly consented to act as Treasurer. Contributions to *La Raison* Fund should be sent to Mr. Samuel Hartmann, Manchester Hotel, Aldersgate-street, E.C.

Literary contributions (in French) will appear from English Freethinkers.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

On "Liberal" Catholicism.

ONE of the farces of current literature is the spectacle—comparatively common in the last twenty or thirty years—of "eminent persons" ponderously arguing in the heavier reviews themes which nine out of ten intelligent Zulus would laugh over. This month an elderly gentleman will spin out twenty pages on "The Validity of Anglican Orders" or "The Theological Significance of the Reservation of the Sacraments," and next month another elderly gentleman will seriously spin out twenty pages to confute the first. Who the readers may be that are interested in this kind of thing it is not easy to say. There are philosophical, and even theological, controversies which are of vital and intellectual interest. But the common type of theological wrangle is farcically thin. Of this latter order, it must be confessed, was much of the late Professor Mivart's writing on theological matters. His intensely serious speculations about happiness in hell seemed to onlookers ludicrous in the extreme. The spectacle of a scientist of sober years wading through Latin tomes to prove that it was "permissible" to believe such-and-such concerning some pretended place or state about which no one, admittedly, knew anything whatever, was like a scene from an *opéra-bouffe*. Indeed, if one might put it so, Professor Mivart's theological excursions did more credit to his heart than his head. His heart felt the hideous brutality of the hell-doctrine, but it never seemed to have occurred to his reason that hell was a myth; he but tried to modify a horrible superstition in accordance with an innate humane feeling, without perceiving that the superstition in itself was baseless. And much the same falls to be said of the series of articles which brought him into public prominence shortly before his death. There was something positively pathetic in Professor Mivart proclaiming, with intense earnestness and an evident sense of novelty, propositions which were commonplaces with intelligent artisans in Richard Carlile's time. Professor Mivart, after a fairly long life, in which he mixed with men like Huxley, discovered in the year 1900 that there were discrepancies between the Bible and Science, and that the Bible was false in these respects. And it was even more pathetic to read that the intellectual and nervous convulsion following this discovery helped to accelerate the Professor's death.

But the articles of Dr. Mivart set up in the *Nineteenth Century* one of those controversies to which reference has been made. For, astonishing as it may seem, within the Catholic Church itself—the very embodiment, as it is, of dogmatic authority, and demanding the most absolute obedience of its adherents—within this Church, too, there are positively stirrings of intellectual life. So true is it, as has been said, that nothing on earth—and, with all its pretences, the Catholic Church is but of earth like the rest—nothing can resist the wild, living intellect of man. Cover a dogma up with ever so many coverings, guard it with ever so much care, defend it with ever so much "authority," and in the centre of your own household, amongst the trusted of your own hearth, men will be impelled by force of nature to examine, and some, defying all your coverings and your care and your authority, will have the courage to ask, *Is it true?*

Some impulse of this kind towards truth, towards the recognition of established facts which do not at present fit in with the Church's teaching, has shown itself latterly amongst some Catholics of note. Many, in fact most, of them stop short of Mivart's position. They only want "reform." Omniscience, having a desperately-important message to communicate to mankind, and having deputed an organisation in Rome to convey it, has yet allowed some abuses and scandals to gather round this organisation which must be removed.

In the July number of the *Nineteenth Century* this type of Catholic "liberal," as it is called, is represented by a Mr. R. E. Dell, late editor of the *Catholic Weekly Register*, who writes by way of reply to Mr. Wilfrid Ward. Mr. Ward is one of the self-constituted champions of Catholic orthodoxy, a defender of everything that is, as the best that can be. He is a fluent writer of his kind, and if it were dogmatically taught by the Church that the moon was made of green cheese, Mr. Ward is the type that would elaborately and lugubriously prove

that this must be so, and that the fact of the moon's being made of green cheese was essential to a proper recognition of the metaphysical laws of the subjective interdependence of the self-existent objective *ego*. I do not vouch that these are the exact verbal contrivances that would be employed, but I can vouch that they would be very like these. It is wonderful the awe and respect that can be won for the veriest nonsense if it is elaborately set forth with high-sounding words and learned-looking phrases.

Mr. Dell, who is presumably one of the "liberal Catholics," and one of the persons against whom Mr. Ward directs his homilies, furnishes in his article an interesting spectacle of the hopelessness of its author's position. Here is a summary of the state of affairs that obtains at the seat of Catholic authority:—

"In the *Life of Cardinal Manning*, and more particularly in his correspondence with Monsignor Talbot, Rome has been laid bare to the world as the centre of peculiarly petty intrigue, and that, in particular, in the immediate *entourage* of the Pope. Cardinal Newman has told us of the malaria that gathers round the Rock of Peter, the incapacity of the Roman authorities in dealing with England, and the crowd of sycophants to be found round about the Vatican. The existence and intrigues of the modern Ultramontane party are no secret; they can be studied by anyone in some of the books I have mentioned, and nowhere better than in the letters and other writings of its own adherents—that blustering band of Catholic bullies' was Montalembert's description of it."*

All this, of course, is indubitably true, though it is interesting to have a professed Catholic set it down. But Mr. Dell never stops to perceive the theological bearing of it all. Here, then, is the method by which a deity of infinite wisdom and power communicates with mankind! He works through an organisation torn by petty squabbles and low personal intrigues, broils over office, diplomatic bickerings over ecclesiastical spoils, and all the corruption that inevitably gathers round any office of power unchecked by external criticism. In what, on Mr. Dell's picture, does the Vatican differ from any other human organisation in the world? If he contends, to use Herbert Spencer's words in a similar argument against Christianity as a whole, that the Vatican's "likenesses to the rest [of human organisations] hide a transcendent unlikeness," then he may be met with Spencer's crushing answer:—

"For if these numerous parallelisms.....do not prove likeness of origin and development, then the implication is that a complete simulation of the natural by the supernatural has been deliberately devised to deceive those who examine critically what they are taught. Appearances have been arranged for the purpose of misleading sincere inquirers, that they may be eternally damned for seeking the truth."†

These words surely pithily demolish the halting absurdities of the "reforming" Catholic. The fact is that "liberal Catholicism" is the veriest intellectual foible, and we gravely doubt whether it ever existed other than on paper. For the very words embody a self-contradiction. Mr. Dell, if he pursues his reflections at all, must recognise the conclusion to which he moves. You cannot combine independent thinking with unquestioning obedience; the two are opposites. And, indeed, the fate of the so-called "liberal Catholics" of the past might furnish the "liberal Catholics" of the present with a lesson. It is claimed that Newman, Montalembert, and others of distinction, belonged to the school. The barrenness of their permanent achievement is ominous. With all their works, Mr. Dell can still paint the woful picture which his article discloses. The Christians are often given to quoting the text, in a purely academic way, that a man cannot serve God and Mammon; though it must be confessed that, in a purely practical way, many make a bold attempt, and do not, as far as can be judged, egregiously fail. But, whatever may be said of that text, there is an irrefutable truth that may be commended to Mr. Dell and his school: a man cannot serve Rome and Reason. A man cannot think and be a slave at the same time; and, in proportion as he begins to think, in proportion he ceases to be a slave. Liberal Catholicism is merely ordinary Catholicism in process of decomposition.

FREDERICK RYAN.

* *Nineteenth Century*, July, 1900, p. 128.

† *Principles of Sociology*, vol. iii., p. 36.

Sultan Solomon.

(Concluded from page 700.)

JOSEPHUS gives a ridiculous account of Solomon's temple. He speaks of its "Corinthian" architecture, although that order did not exist till centuries later. He tells us of 20,000 gold and 40,000 silver tables; 10,000 gold candlesticks; 60,000 large gold basins; 70,000 gold censers; 1,000 suits of sacerdotal raiment for the high priest, and 10,000 for his inferiors; and 200,000 trumpets for the Levites. But this extravagance is more than equalled by the Scripture. Reckoning the Jewish talent of gold, according to Cruden, as £7,200, and the silver talent as £450, it appears that David prepared £720,000,000 in gold and £450,000,000 in silver for the temple. Prideaux reckoned it as over £800,000,000, which exceeds the amount of our National Debt. All this was "saved" by one king of a small, infertile, and barbarous country, although Mongredien reckons that the total value of all the gold and silver in the British Isles barely amounts to £143,000,000! Dr. Farrar allows that David's savings amounted "on the very lowest computation to £120,000,000," and adds that "if the Jewish talent be meant" it amounted to "more than a billion pounds." Such figures are imaginary. Milman admits that they "pass all credibility." The mention of *darics*—coins named after Darius—shows that the fable was concocted many centuries afterwards.

Solomon's annual revenue is represented as 666 talents of gold, which Dr. Farrar reckons as about £5,000,000. This is trifling compared with David's revenue, according to the previous figures, but it is still excessive. A petty district of Asia Minor could not have yielded a greater revenue than the Romans derived from the whole of their Asiatic provinces.

Similar gasconade is found in the building of the temple. Over 180,000 men were employed on its construction for eleven years, seven years being occupied in its erection, and four years in preparations. Yet the temple itself was only 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high. "The actual building," says Dr. Farrar, "was of very small size"; indeed, "it was much smaller than many an English church."

Solomon presented his temple to the Lord as "a settled place for thee to abide in for ever." But the edifice soon disappeared, and the Lord had to seek fresh lodgings. Dr. Farrar calls it "the visible House of God, the place where His honor dwelt." We hope his honor liked it. But he must have had a callous nose to stand the "steaming putrescence" of the Temple Court, which the constant and plentiful sacrifices must have made like "a ghastly slaughter-house."

According to Scripture, this temple was the first ever erected by the Jews; but Dr. Robertson Smith says "there were temples among the Hebrews before the time of Solomon," and in point of size his "can hardly have surpassed them." Its architecture was purely Phœnician, and "for the general arrangements the temple of Hierapolis described by Lucian offers a complete parallel." Dr. Farrar makes the same admission, on the authority of architects like Fergusson and Robins. Such as it was, the Jews regarded it as the centre of the universe, just as the Greeks regarded the temple of Delphi as the navel (*omphalos*) of the world.

Seven years being spent on the temple, Solomon spent thirteen years on his own palace, which was a much larger structure; the reason being that Jahveh was a single gentleman, while Solomon had a large domestic establishment. He had seven hundred wives over the right shoulder, and three hundred over the left. According to the Canticles (vi. 8), they were "threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number." Every sensible man finds one wife sufficient, and Solomon must have been the wisest fool that ever lived. His harem was the largest on record, the second being that of Darius Codomanus, who had one wife and 329 concubines. Dr. Farrar, who makes very free with the word of God, supposes that "for seven hundred we should read seventy." But even this number would get Solomon in prison nowadays.

Solomon's seven hundred wives were all "princesses." Princesses must have been very cheap in that age, when one man could marry so many. Such a seraglio had to be jealously guarded. No wonder, then, that *eunuchs* made their appearance in Solomon's court. These degraded creatures are, we presume, a fresh evidence of his wisdom and humanity.

The Bible does not reprove Solomon for his polygamy. It only censures him because they were "strange women" who "turned away his heart." Had they been Jewesses, and had he not built altars for their foreign gods, he might have indulged his lust without stint. The God of Israel had no objection to polygamy. He allowed the Jews many wives, but only one god—namely, himself. That was the sole point on which he was savagely inexorable.

Solomon's harem and palaces were very costly to his people. Provision was made in the royal household, says Dr. Farrar, for "at least ten thousand persons." Milman says that "the people suffered deeply from the arbitrary exactions of the

king." The surviving natives of Palestine were treated worse than the Jews. They were the helots of the state, and their lives were made bitter with bondage. Solomon also surrounded himself with a mercenary bodyguard. The *Gibborim*, like the Roman *bravi*, were chiefly foreigners, and always ready to execute their master's despotic commands.

Solomon's wisdom, like his wealth, is apocryphal. The only sensible thing recorded of him in the Bible is his judgment in the case of the two mothers who claimed the same child. But a similar story is related of Buddha, and it may have been floating about in the east for millenniums.

Scripture says that "he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five." The next verse makes him a learned naturalist; and oriental tradition, improving on this, makes him hold confabulations with all sorts of animals. None of Solomon's "wisdom," however, has descended to posterity. Three books of the Old Testament are ascribed to him, but modern criticism has exploded his claim to their authorship. Dr. A. B. Davidson says it is "a mere conjecture" that he was "the father of didactic poetry among the Hebrews." Canon Cheyne also allows that "it is indeed a pure hypothesis that any Solomonic element survives in the Book of Proverbs." The Book of Ecclesiastes is a very late production. Even Luther, in his *Table Talk*, admitted that "Solomon did not write it himself." Grätz assigns it to the period of Herod the Great. Dean Plumptre places it between 240 and 181 B.C. Delitzsch, Ginsburg, Ewald, Keil, Tyler, Farrar, and Cheyne, like all other competent critics, agree that it was written after the Exile. Rabbi Kimchi ascribed it to Isaiah, and the Talmudical writers to Hezekiah. That Solomon wrote it, or any part of it, is universally denied. Nor did he write the Song of Solomon. Grätz, the Jewish historian, dates it no earlier than the second or third century before Christ, though Ewald carries it back within a century of Solomon's reign. Dr. Farrar accepts this date, but says it is "in the highest degree improbable that it was composed by Solomon himself." It contains some splendid poetry, though it is a curious song for the word of God. The imagery is voluptuous and sometimes lascivious. Our translation throws a veil over some of the original passages, and the headings of the chapters would persuade the reader that the amorous descriptions are mystical. But this is a pious imposture, against which Dr. Farrar protests as "absolutely shocking." According to Jerome, the Jews were forbidden to read this book until they were thirty. Christians, however, place it in the hands of their children as an incentive to modesty. Origen went so far as to say that "all the Scriptures are holy, but *this sublime song is the Holy of Holies*." Probably he said this before he castrated himself for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

Solomon died after reigning forty years, though Josephus says he reigned eighty years. For worshipping strange gods his kingdom was rent asunder after his death, and some have doubted whether he went to heaven. A Christian writer, Philippus, has written a discussion on the Damnation of Solomon. Dante, however, put him in Paradise, without reflecting that Solomon might be unhappy in a world where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage.

Here endeth the life of Solomon. His history is a tissue of romance; his wealth is apocryphal; his wisdom is legendary; and his morality is disgusting. Even Farrar is constrained to describe him as "like a painted tyrant or the figure of an idol in a gilded pageant—a king on whom we gaze as on a spectacle, but whom it is impossible to love."

—From "Bible Heroes," by G. W. FOOTE.

Better than the Chosen.

THE kingdom is within us, and the Law,
 One Moral Law, one universal Law;
 The one sure law, that truth is good,
 And evil evil, as with God with man;
 And that all evil must bring forth its kind;
 That God confounds not his own elements,
 Nor introverts the moral sense of man;
 Nor grieves, repents, nor tempts, nor hardens hearts,
 Nor sends forth lying spirits to betray.
 And once shall rise to noon some higher sense
 Than the vile, chosen Jews could ever dream,
 Than fear or hope, the slave's and Hebrew's thoughts,
 Base fear of pain or Jewish hope of gain,
 Than aught that can, or aught that would, rely
 On other's pains, on bloody sacrifice
 Of bulls or lambs or sacred innocence,
 Or the poor hunted scape-goat's agonies,
 Or the drear anguish and the dark, long deaths
 Of glorious victims to the demon Priest.

—T. J. Powys.

Beware, when speaking of other men, that thou dost not make them the subjects of praise or blame.—*Epictetus*.

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, Charles Watts, "The Death of Jehovah."

CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Marie Corelli and Jesus Christ."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell-road): 7, Herbert Rix, "A Persian Heroine."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, W. J. Ramsey.

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, R. P. Edwards; 3.30 and 7, J. W. Cox.

COUNTRY.

BELFAST ETHICAL SOCIETY (York-street Lecture Hall, 69 York-street): G. Gibson, "Rise and Fall of Religions."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH: 11, (Bull Ring), H. P. Ward, "Priestcraft and Education"; 7, (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street), W. E. Radcliffe.

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school; 7, H. T. Muggeridge, "The Great Confidence Trick."

COVENTRY (Assembly Rooms, West Orchard): H. Percy Ward—3, "Why I Dare Not be a Christian"; 7, "From Wesleyan Pulpit to Secular Platform."

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): 11, Discussion Class—Impromptu speeches; 6.30, A lecture.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, Miss L. A. Goyne, "The Life and Work of Grant Allen."

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, S. Reeves, "The Homes of the Workers." 100 lantern slides.

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, Stanley Jones, "Buddhism and Christianity."

NEWCASTLE (Westminster Hall, Picton-place): 7, Discussion between Messrs. Boyce and Mitchell on "Has Man a Soul?"

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): John Axe, A lecture or reading.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, "Pictures"; 7.30, A reading.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—November 11, Aberdeen.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall-Heath, Birmingham.—November 11, m., Birmingham; a. and e., Coventry. 18, Birmingham. 25, Sheffield. 26 and 27, Debate at Sheffield. December 9, Glasgow; 16, Liverpool.

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