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### Conjectures of Theology.

"All doctrines relating to the creation of the world, the government of man by superior beings, and his destiny after death, are conjectures which have been given out as facts, handed down with many adornments by tradition, and accepted by posterity as 'revealed religion.'"—WINWOOD READE.

FROM time to time reports appear of the prosecution of palmists and fortune-tellers, whose offence seems to consist in the fact that they make conjectures as to the future, ostensibly in order to guide the actions, or to satisfy the curiosity, of their clients. It is true they do so for payment, and it is also true that professional theologians, who make conjectures as to the future which are not more reliable, receive payment for *their* services. The palmists and fortune-tellers disavow any intention to "deceive and impose" in the meaning of the Act, just as we suppose the priests would protest that they are acting honestly and in good faith in regard to their prognostications. Surely it is a gross piece of inconsistency on the part of Christians to make what is pretty much the same offence punishable in one class of cases, and perfectly legitimate in another.

What do theologians know about the destiny of man after death more than palmists may predict as to his fortune whilst living? As a matter of fact, the palmist or fortune-teller has more data to go upon to enable a shrewd guess to be made, because from individual observation and adroit questions he may elicit enough upon which to risk conjectures that occasionally come somewhere near the mark. There is, furthermore, the fact that he may base these conjectures as to one individual on his knowledge of what has happened, under like conditions, to others; which is quite impossible to the theologian, who has no knowledge of what has happened to any man after death, except that he crumbles to dust. We decline to accept as evidence anything drawn from any set of "sacred books," because that is hearsay and not knowledge, and is most unreliable hearsay too. Spiritualists assert that they have direct information, and, in fact, absolute knowledge; but their statements are discredited by the vast proportion of theological teachers and their followers, who are therefore reduced to reliance on mere speculation.

The origin or the eternity of the universe, its government by any superior beings, and the possibility of a future life for man, are problems insoluble by our finite faculties, are enveloped in impenetrable mystery, and are deep matters of surmise, about which certainly the theologian knows no more than any other man. Swinburne, in one of his poems, apostrophises thus:—

Friend, who knows if death, indeed, have life,  
or life have death for goal,  
Day nor night can tell us, nor may seas declare  
nor skies unroll  
What has been from everlasting,  
Or if aught shall always be.

Still, the theologian is not to be deterred from teaching—as if it were a matter of absolute certainty and something within the range of his own knowledge, and about which there can be no possibility of doubt—that the universe was created and is governed by God, and that man will live hereafter. Even these general statements, bold as they are, do not represent the extent of his presumption. He has a plenitude of detail in regard to all the secrets of the universe. Nothing is hidden from him. He can tell us a vast variety of things not only about the unhistorical past, but the everlasting future.

Then it is that the falsity of theological pretensions is made clear, for the priests of Christendom and of the world at large are in attitudes of most violent antagonism. They disagree upon nearly every point; their teachings are absolutely irreconcilable; and they discount to an amusing degree each other's claims to credence.

Where so much contradiction prevails about what are supposed to be eternal verities, it is obvious that certainty does not exist. Clearly these theological dogmatists of our own country and of other climes are at variance simply because there is no actual knowledge to form the basis of their multifarious and conflicting doctrines. They are indulging in mere conjecture, in fanciful theories and imaginary details.

Conjectures upon the great problems indicated are not blamable in themselves, though human limitations necessarily render them incapable of verification. Perhaps, in some senses, these speculations are not entirely idle and fruitless. They lift the mind from the petty incidents of life, and expand it in the contemplation of the marvels of time and space. Priesthoods may be formed for the exclusive study of these mysteries, though their members might often be better employed, for meditation on the Unknowable is not the main object and aim of life. What Freethinkers *do* object to is the domination of the unproductive priestly caste. For ages they have taken the civilised, and some parts of the uncivilised, world into their grasp; have deluded them with base and malefic superstitions; have robbed them of freedom of thought and independence of action; have elevated themselves to positions which have often been higher than those of kings; and have surrounded themselves with an air of sanctity, dignity, and authority as if, indeed, they were the very salt of the earth. All this on the basis of mere conjectures! Further, they have persecuted with relentless persistency and unexampled cruelty all who have in times past exposed their false and baseless claims.

In the present day these people, who live on surmise and conjecture, and who have built upon their fancies colossal institutions, have discovered that their powers of persecution are practically past, and that a spirit of enlightenment has sprung up which will in time dispose of their occupation altogether. Still, in this country, under modified conditions and the cloak of educational aims, the sacerdotal class contrive to make their influence felt, more or less disadvantageously to the community. They still command a connection with the State, and cajole subsidies from the national exchequer. Throughout the country they, and other priests not of the State Church, have, within the present month, endeavored to capture the control of the public elementary schools. It is safe to say that there would be no limit to clerical aggression in every direction if it were not for the restraining influence of their merely nominal supporters, and most of all the strenuous opposition of Freethought.

FRANCIS NEALE.



### Marie Corelli and Jesus Christ.—III.

So far from being able to make a God talk in character, Marie Corelli cannot even make a clever woman do so. She does, indeed, succeed in making Angela Sovrani a very wonderful painter; but that is an easy performance, as the amazing artist has never to submit to the test of exhibiting. It is a different thing, however, when specimens have to undergo a scrutiny. Take the case of Sylvie Hermenstein, Princesse D'Agramont, a young, beautiful, accomplished, and gifted widow, who is evidently going to get married again before the novel ends—as she does, carrying over her great fortune as well as her lovely person to the comparatively needy Christian Socialist, Aubrey Leigh. This aristocratic lady has written "two witty novels"—of course under a *nom-de-plume*—and these have already "startled the world of Paris." Well, it takes a great deal in that line to "startle" the gay city. But if the lady startles Paris she does not startle us. For the most part her conversation is pretentious commonplace. She, or her creatrix, seems to think that posturing is originality; as the man stood on his head to get fresh views of the world. On a certain occasion, when she might be expected to say something particularly witty and startling, she treats us to the following observations, addressed (by the way) to her horse:—

"Good Rex! You and your kind never tell lies; and yet you are said to have no souls. Now I wonder why we, who are so mean and cunning and treacherous and hypocritical, should have immortal souls, while horses and dogs who are faithful and kind and honest should be supposed to have none."

This ancient and hackneyed reflection is not calculated to startle Paris. It is not even couched in felicitous language. And where on earth is the wit? Is it anything but downright, truculent vulgarity? The Psalmist said in his haste that all men were liars—perhaps after telling an unsuccessful falsehood himself; and Sylvie Hermenstein, or Marie Corelli, may declare, with an unphilosophical succession of epithets, that both men and women are mean, cunning, treacherous, and hypocritical. Branding them in this way, however, is not exactly witty. It savors less of Lucian than of Diogenes. It even reminds us of the village wit who boasted of his victory over an opponent in a public-house. "Why," he said, "I called him all the names I could think of, till he couldn't hold up his head." Princesse D'Agramont's wit appears to belong, essentially, to the same species.

Marie Corelli's crudity is conspicuously displayed in her account of Angela Sovrani's sketch of "A Servant of Christ, at the Madelene, Paris."

"Low, beetling brows,—a sensual cruel mouth with a loosely projecting under-lip,—eyes that appeared to be furtively watching each other across the thin bridge of nose,—a receding chin and a narrow cranium, combined with an expression which was hypocritically humble, yet sly,—this was the type Angela Sovrani had chosen to delineate, sparing nothing, softening no line, and introducing no redeeming point,—a type mercilessly true to life; the face of a priest."

Aubrey Leigh calls it "a painful truth, boldly declared." The clever and eloquent Abbé Verniaud quite agrees with the painter in her "estimate of the French priests." Even the great and good Cardinal Bonpré, who is shocked at the first sight of this masterpiece, soon rouses himself and calls it "a really great thing, designed greatly, and greatly executed."

Well now, even a Freethinking critic may tell Marie Corelli, who boasts of being a true Christian, that this is painting with a broom and a slop-pail. Give the Devil his due, says the proverb; and let us be just to priests. The average cleric is not quite so unprepossessing. Sometimes he is a curled and scented lady-killer; the kind of servant of the Lord that was in the mind of the rough old nobleman in King Henry the Eighth's time, who remarked that the king might keep priests from having wives, but he could not keep wives from having priests. We admit that the average priest is below the average member of other educated professions in intellect and force of character. That goes without saying in an age when Christianity is intellectually bankrupt; when its doctrines can only be defended by transparent

sophistry and puerile subterfuge. But the common "Servant of Christ" is not the decadent Caliban painted by Angela Sovrani. Such a wretch would be unable to hold the women in the Church for a single hour; and when *they* go, it is good-bye to the whole business. No, the average clergyman, poor fellow, gets his living in the way he does, because he has to live somehow. He is under the necessity of earning his bread. He means no harm to anybody, unless they fall foul of his trade. Then he protects himself, like a snake, a tiger, a rat, a cuttle-fish, or even a goose. The method depends on old inherited instincts and professional traditions. Otherwise he is willing to make himself useful and agreeable. On the whole, he is more a Mary Jane than a designing, desperate villain.

Marie Corelli displays a plentiful lack of knowledge about a good many matters. She is not bound to write on what she does not understand; but this is a scripturient age, and the ordinary lady novelist is ready to tackle almost anything. In one of her former novels, which we reviewed in the *Freethinker*, Marie Corelli undertook to lecture men of science on their duties and shortcomings, and she proved her fitness for the task by referring to atoms as though they could be seen under a microscope. There are also some interesting—perhaps we should say amusing—blunders in *The Master Christian*. France is censured for "having for a time put God out of her national institutions." This is true enough of the United States, for instance, but it is not true of France; for in that country the whole Christian priesthood is supported by the State. France has only put God out of her national institutions in the sense that she has turned the priest out of the elementary public schools. But the self-confidence of Marie Corelli as an international censor is not disturbed by such niceties. She works herself into a perfect fury of prophetic denunciation. She describes Paris as godless, rotten to the core, and doomed to destruction. "Her men are dissolute," we are told, "her women shameless, her youth of both sexes depraved, her laws are corrupt, her arts decadent, her religion dead." "France," we are told again, "is a decaying nation—her doom is sealed!" Evidently our lady novelist does not agree with the great Edmund Burke, who said he did not know how to draw up an indictment against a whole nation. She settles it in a few sweeping sentences; frames the indictment, finds a verdict of guilty, passes sentence, and cheerfully awaits its execution. It is probable, however, that she will have to wait a much longer time than she suspects. France is likely to outlive Marie Corelli, and Paris is likely to be found on the banks of the Seine some centuries after *The Master Christian* has disappeared in Time's wallet of "alms for oblivion."

This self-sufficient lady talks ignorant nonsense about Voltaire. She makes the boy Manuel—who is Jesus Christ, mind—call him "a prophet of evil." But that is only an opinion, and may pass for what it is worth. Cardinal Bonpré goes further. He speaks of Voltaire as one "who scoffed at God." So much for the lady's knowledge of the Patriarch of Ferney. She is ignorant of the fact that Voltaire was a Deist, that he wrote in favor of Theism, that he scolded his Atheistic friends like Diderot and D'Holbach, and that he even declared that if God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him.

Marie Corelli may be excused for not having read Voltaire, though she cannot be excused for boldly misrepresenting him in her ill-conditioned ignorance. But what excuse can she have for not having read the New Testament? She describes it as "a very small book" that "would not take you an hour to read." Good heavens! as the lady said when the ceiling fell. Why, the first book in the New Testament, the Gospel according to Matthew, could not be read intelligently in sixty minutes. And there are three other Gospels, and the Acts, and a lot of Epistles, and the wild and difficult book of Revelation. It would seem that Marie Corelli knows the New Testament as well as she knows Voltaire. She certainly quotes it at times, but the passages she reproduces are familiar ones, which she might have picked up in school or at church. Anyhow, the New Testament cannot be read in an hour; and as she says it can, she clearly does not know what she is talking about.



But it is time to bring this review to a close, and we have this to say in conclusion. There is only one way of following Christ, and that is by doing what he commanded. The average Christian follows him at a very respectful distance, and just keeps him in sight as a moving dot on the far horizon. Nor are effusive Christians like Hall Caine and Marie Corelli any better. They betray not the slightest intention of pursuing their Master's counsel of perfection. No one is likely to hear of their selling all they have and going snacks with the poor. Mr. Caine made thousands of pounds by his *Christian*, and he has bought a fine mansion with snug grounds in a beautiful part of the Isle of Man, where he carries his cross with exemplary composure. Miss Corelli is apparently going to make still more thousand of pounds by her *Master Christian*, and it is not whispered that she contemplates a great act of renunciation. She will probably stick to all she can get, and her publishers will arise and call her blessed. Yes, it is an easy thing to follow Christ in the modern fashion. He died upon the cross, and some of his loudest eulogists live upon the cross. And as they think of their sentimental mob of readers, they may well exclaim with the worthy Iago, "Thus do I ever make my fool my purse." G. W. FOOTE.

### A Substitute for Christianity.

IN suggesting a substitute for the inferior features of Christianity, it should be understood that we adopt the eclectic process—that is, while discarding those parts of the system which have been found to be incompatible with modern requirements, we desire to retain all that is useful in aiding human improvement. I do not suggest that Christianity should be suddenly banished from the world; many of its inculcations, borrowed as they were from the ancient philosophers, can be utilised to-day in regulating the secular affairs of life. When changes are being effected in the conceptions of truth and duty, a study of the slow process of evolution is preferable to the hasty transfer of belief from one thing to another. This is the method in operation at the present time in the realms of thought. Thus we find that many who preach in the name of Christianity have become teachers from their pulpits of truths that bear serviceable fruit in this world, independently of any consideration of a supposed future existence. Forsaking their old practice of urging the necessity of the belief in total depravity, the efficacy of the blood of the Lamb, and hell torments, these advanced preachers dwell upon the goodness and capabilities of human nature, the benefits of self-reliance, and the unreality of the Devil and his fiery abode. So far as this new method has been adopted, secular truths have been substituted for Christian fiction, and rational views of life have taken the place of absurd theological notions.

This marked progress is not the result of spasmodic changes, but is the inevitable consequence of the evolutionary process which is constantly going on around us. The general growth of rational ideas not only changes belief, but it remodels institutions and creates new thoughts as to the nature and destiny of man. We hear much about the attempt to rob people of the consolation of their religion. But, whatever Christians may say to the contrary, the truth is, a faith can only be really consoling while it is believed to be true. That fact, however, does not prevent our trying to convince those whom we think in error that they are so. If we succeed in doing this, there will be no sacrifice of consolation upon the part of those who give up what they have been brought to see is worthless. To change error for truth should not be regarded as a loss, but as a gain. Christians are not too considerate for the feelings of those whom they seek to entice to their ranks from other religions. Devotees of such faiths, if they are sincere in their profession, derive a consolation from their beliefs; but Christians do their best to deprive them of it all the same. Real peace of mind can be secured only through accepting that which is true. Moreover, it is the sincerity of belief and fidelity to what it inculcates that afford genuine consolation, not necessarily the belief itself. Hence Secularists are happy and enjoy

a serenity of mind that cannot be surpassed by the most devout religionist. Canon Cheyne aptly stated in a recent sermon that which corroborates the view here set forth. He said: "It contributes greatly to peace of mind to have a compact system of religious doctrines.....but if we treat them as inspired and infallible, we prepare ourselves for many a storm in our inner life, or place ourselves on a level with those undeveloped races which accept without demur whatever forms of doctrine missionaries put before them."

Let those who consider that the removal of Christianity would be a loss pause to reflect in what the "loss" would consist. They would no longer be called upon to believe in some future state of existence under the threat that, if they reject such belief, they will be doomed to "go away into everlasting punishment"; that a God watches over all their actions, like a detective, for the purpose of pouncing upon the first wrong thought or deed, and remembering it against them, in order that in the future a severe punishment may be meted out; that this God created man and woman so that by nature they are necessarily bad, and then threatened them with eternal perdition because they are not good; that man, being unable to save himself, can obtain his salvation only through Christ, yet no one can go to Christ "except the Father draw him"; that a faith is capable of universal application which teaches, "For many are called, but few are chosen"; that, in spite of the difference in organisation, training, and general education, every member of the human family must believe the same thing, or suffer the severest consequences for not doing so; that through prayer diseases can be cured, and the ordinary necessities of life can be obtained; that belief is of more value than conduct; that the Bible contains "God's Word," and should be received as a "divine authority," and as the best guide in human affairs; and, finally, that the most important consideration in life is to endeavor to reach heaven and to avoid hell.

Christianity, which has been professed for centuries, has entirely failed to be of any practical good to mankind. It is, therefore, suggested that these erroneous teachings should be replaced by the inculcation and application of the following facts: That the human family ought to be kept free from the trammels of superstition, and that our first consideration should be the cultivation of our physical and intellectual powers, this being the surest means of promoting honest thought and industrious enterprises, by which the legitimate requirements of body and mind are supplied; that life is governed by fixed laws, and that a knowledge of those laws and obedience thereto are necessary to man's happiness and general well-being; that human effort is indispensable to personal and societarian progress, which has proved of more service in procuring the necessities of existence than all the prayers that were ever uttered; that science has done more for the real comfort and advancement of the people than the theology of all the Churches combined; that morality is far superior to religion as a beneficial factor in daily life; that Christ is *not* the "light of the world," inasmuch as the great majority of the human race have never heard of him, and those to whom his name is familiar do not follow his example or obey his teachings; and that many of the inculcations ascribed to Jesus are quite impracticable and antagonistic to modern requirements. Lecky, in his latest work, *The Map of Life*, admits this. He says:—

"We should hardly write over the Savings Bank, 'Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow will take thought for itself'; or over the Bank of England, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth,' 'How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of God'; or over the Foreign Office, or the Law Courts, or the prison, 'Resist not evil,' 'He that smiteth thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also,' 'He that taketh away thy coat let him have thy cloak also'" (pp. 214-15).

Now, if Christ's teachings are impotent for good in secular duties, where is the utility of Christianity as a reforming agency?

To sum up my answer to the question: What would I offer as an efficient substitute for Christianity? I would erase from the Bible its many objectionable parts and allow whatever is good in it to take its place with useful literature in general. I would substitute for dependence upon religious faith, reliance



upon cultivated reason; for the providence of heaven, the science of earth; for the divine commands, ethical teachings; for service to God, service to man; for prayer, work; for worship in churches, inculcation of secular truths; for ministers of religion, political and social reforms; and, finally, instead of the useless efforts of preparing for some imaginary future life, I would urge the necessity of persistent striving to better our present existence.

Such are a few of the advantages which Secularism would supply in lieu of the follies and absurdities of the Christian faith. As Secularists, we have no heaven in another world to allure, no hell to appal, and no devil to torture. We urge that it is far better to seek to realise a real "heaven on earth," and to get rid of those shams and superstitions which too often make a "hell upon earth." We teach that vice should be avoided because indulgence in it is a wrong to individuals and to society, and that virtue should be practised because it is the duty of all to do what is possible to alleviate human woe and to assist human progress.

CHARLES WATTS.

### Christianity and Civilisation.—I.

THE reputed legal maxim, "No case, abuse the plaintiff's counsel," receives peculiar and forceful illustration from the region of Christian apologetics. With the ordinary methods of abuse those who are engaged in Freethought propaganda are only too familiar. That nearly all the great heretics of the past broke with Christianity because its lofty morality was a constant rebuke to their depraved natures, and that all unbelief springs from a certain weakness of character, are commonplaces with the average Christian evidence monger; and even when the better class of these recognise that the day is passing for the fruitful use of such methods, the stories are handed on to a lower order of believers; and one cannot help feeling that their lively use of them excites anything but displeasure in the minds of their former possessors.

But this principle of vilification and misrepresentation reaches much farther than attacks on individuals. It is applied also to nations—even to civilisation. For the purpose of whitening Christianity by contrast, whole civilisations are blackened, history rewritten and miswritten, facts distorted, incidents invented, and the implication suggested, not merely that Christianity has been a factor in the development of the modern world, but that civilisation itself would have disappeared but for the presence of Christianity. And this tendency is, as I have said, pandered to by men whose abilities and whose studies might well have led them to a far different conclusion. Men of the standing of the late Mr. Froude and of Mr. Lecky, to go no farther afield, speak of Christianity as having been a great civilising force, in spite of the facts stated in their own volumes which demonstrate that every organised expression of Christianity has been a steady hindrance to rational development. Such conclusions come dangerously near making history, as Voltaire said, "nothing but a parcel of tricks we play the dead."

But when men in the front rank of modern writers make such statements, people of lesser note may plead some extenuation. Consequently the Rev. Professor Orr, of Edinburgh, who repeated in a recent address in London all the old stories of the evils of pre-Christian civilisation and the benefits conferred on the world by Christianity, may at least plead that he is sinning in good company. Professor Orr's object was to show "what history owes to Jesus Christ" on the "lower plane of moral and social benefit." The "lower plane" is a significant illustration of the bent of the clerical mind, which is, and always has been, ready to subordinate these benefits to the assumed "higher" one of religious extravagance. His method of demonstrating how much the world owes to Jesus is the simple one of claiming that everything that is good came from his teaching. He found a world hopelessly corrupt; he left it the means of regeneration. The Professor says:—

"Think for a moment of what the world was when Christianity first began to be preached throughout it. It found, as all history will tell you, a pagan world in the last throes of dissolution and decay.....Dissoluteness

flooded society. The one duty which was held supreme was allegiance to the State.....There was little sense of individual right. The father, for example, in the family held all power in his own hands, and wives and children and slaves were subject to his absolute authority. Infanticide and exposure of children were common recognised institutions.....The social structure was built on slavery. Half the population of the Empire were slaves; half the population of Rome were slaves.....Women..... had no rights any more than slaves. The favorite amusements of the populace were the sanguinary spectacles of the amphitheatre, the fights of gladiators with wild beasts, or of Christians or others thrown to be devoured by wild beasts in the arena. Marriage had hardly any solidity.....And, worse than all, heathen society had not within itself.....any principle of regeneration.....The codes of the philosophers were without sufficient sanction, and there were not those ideas of the dignity and the worth of the individual man which made it worth while people taking pains and making sacrifices for them."

So much for the condition of the Pagan world as it existed, in the opinion of our clerical Professor. Now for his view of what Christianity accomplished:—

"It [Christianity] brought a totally new idea of man himself as a being of infinite dignity and immortal worth. ....It brought into the world a new spirit of love and charity, something wonderful in the eyes of these heathens as they saw institutions springing up round about them that they had never thought or heard of in heathenism before. ....It restored woman to her rightful place by man's side as his spiritual helpmeet and equal, and created that best of God's blessings on earth—the Christian home..... It taught the slave his spiritual freedom as a member of the kingdom of God.....and struck at the foundations of slavery by its doctrine of the natural brotherhood and the dignity of man.....It entered as a revolutionising, as a regenerating principle, into that ancient society..... It flashed into men's souls a new moral ideal, and set up a standard of truth and integrity and purity which has acted as an elevating force on moral conception in the world till this hour."

I have given these two lengthy statements from Professor Orr, not because they contain anything new, but because, coming as they do from the head of a theological college, they should carry rather more weight than if they had issued from less responsible quarters. Of course, such special pleadings have been answered almost as frequently as they have been made; but the fact that they are still being repeated renders it necessary to meet constant misrepresentation with constant correction. More particularly is it necessary when some of our leading writers, with a curious impartiality that generally lands them on the wrong side, give a certain sanction to this habit of imposing on the living by playing tricks with the dead. The quotations, moreover, contain so much of the matter in dispute between Christians and non-Christians that a somewhat detailed examination of Professor Orr's statements may serve to clear the air a little—for some, at least.

Let us take, first of all, the general charge of the Roman Empire being in a state of "utter decrepitude and decay." Such statements are easily made, but not quite so easily proved. Briefly, the only reason that can be advanced is the inconclusive one, that the Roman Empire actually did die out. But this obviously proves nothing. It is quite possible that the near future may witness the disappearance of the House of Lords; but it by no means follows that its members are either immoral or in a state of utter decrepitude. The fall of an empire no more proves its corruption than the maintenance of one demonstrates its virtue. It is never safe to trust either wholesale condemnations or laudations of an entire people; the great probability in either case is that we are dealing with writers who look at one side of the picture only. A writer of to-day who gathered together all the unsavory things that might be gathered from the public courts, divorce courts, and gambling hells, and then presented them to his readers as a fair sample of English life, might succeed in showing that "dissoluteness flooded society" here as well as in ancient Rome. Yet this is the manner in which Christian writers have dealt with the first three centuries of the Christian era. Such pictures as those drawn of the pagan world by Christians disprove themselves by their own extravagance. A society so hopelessly corrupt as Roman society is pictured, with marriage, and consequently the home, neglected (although, at the same time, the husband is represented as having power of life and death over his



family), without anything in the shape of moral teaching worth having (although the people are represented as sacrificing everything to an ideal of civic duty), could not exist for a single century, whereas on the face of it Roman civilisation lingered on until it was forcibly stamped out. As Fustel de Coulanges says: "To say that the Roman Empire perished in consequence of its corruption is to utter one of those senseless phrases which are injurious alike to historic science and to the knowledge of human nature."

It is difficult to deal with general charges of social corruption, inasmuch as they would hold good of almost any society at almost any time. With Professor Orr's statements concerning women, slaves, etc., I shall deal at length later. Meanwhile I venture to say that the careful student of Roman history during the first four or five centuries of this era will discover amongst much evil a far greater amount of good. He will find that the Pagan society that preceded the reign of Christianity was, with all its faults, preferable to that which existed in Christian Europe for over a thousand years. "Few men," says Lecky, "who are not either priests or monks, would not have preferred to live in the best days of the Athenian or of the Roman Republics, in the age of Augustus or in the age of the Antonines, rather than in any period that elapsed between the triumph of Christianity and the fourteenth century" (*History of European Morals*, ii., 15). And Gibbon, in a famous sentence, has observed that "if a man were called upon to fix a period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and most prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus" (A. D. 96-180).

Instead of finding a society destitute of good teaching and good institutions, he would have found both in an abundance ample to meet the needs of the time. In all its charitable work Christianity was only carrying on the work that had been carried on for long by Pagans. It was Trajan, a Pagan emperor, who first opened orphan asylums in Rome, and Antoninus Pius added to their number in honor of his wife. The temples of Æsculapius, Serapis, and Hygea served as medical colleges, temples, and hospitals. The distribution of charity was both frequent and widespread—too much so for the welfare of the nation. What, then, were the institutions that sprang up under Christianity that had "never been thought of or heard of in heathenism before"? Perhaps the institutions that were lacking were, as one writer remarks, those of "illustrious families becoming extinct in the cloister; wives leaving their husbands, and husbands their wives; family estates sold for the purpose of founding establishments in which idleness and cowardice too often found a shelter; the country infested with hordes of so-called monks, pillaging the poor."\* Perhaps the institutions lacking were those of the *auto da fê*, the torturing in gloomy dungeons of men and women whose only offence had been honesty of thought and speech, or the witch-burnings of the Middle Ages. These were certainly lacking in Pagan society; but they were deficiencies that Christianity soon supplied.

In matters of morals, too, the Pagans had nothing to learn of Christians. The boot was on the other foot. It almost passes comprehension how, in these days of cheap publications and public libraries, men can still go on repeating the old stories concerning the new moral ideal set up by Christianity, and its introduction of the principle of the brotherhood of man. For a shilling or two one can now get the writings of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, to name no others, on the subject of morals; and it is simply impossible for anyone to read only these three of the Roman writers and not see how utterly false are the ordinary Christian claims. There is no more oft-repeated doctrine among the Stoics than that of the brotherhood of man. The whole of the meditations of Marcus Aurelius are permeated with it. It was Socrates who, when he was asked to what country he belonged, replied: "To the world." It was the Roman emperor whose official duties caused him to offer up prayers for the whole human race. It was Seneca who wrote: "Nature

made us all brethren when she begat us from the same materials." It was Epictetus who said: "Never, in answer to the question to what country you belong, say you are an Athenian or a Corinthian, but that you are a Cosmopolitan." It would take too long to multiply these illustrations further. The matter may be summed up in the words of Mr. Lecky:—

"We find a system of ethics of which, when we consider the range and beauty of its precepts, the sublimity of the motives to which it appealed, and its perfect freedom from superstitious elements, it is not too much to say that, though it may have been equalled, it has never been surpassed.....Stoicism placed beyond cavil the great distinctions between right and wrong. It inculcated the doctrine of universal brotherhood, it created a noble legislation, and it associated its moral system with the patriotic spirit which was then the animating spirit of Roman life. The early Platonists of the Empire.....gave free scope to the amiable qualities, and supplied a theory of right and wrong suited, not merely for heroic characters and extreme emergencies, but also for the characters and circumstances of common life. The Pythagorean and Neo-platonic schools revived the feeling of religious reverence; inculcated humility, prayerfulness, and purity of thought; and accustomed men to associate their moral ideals with the Deity rather than with themselves."\*

And this in a society that was "in a state of utter decrepitude," that was "flooded" with immorality, and "without any principle of regeneration."

C. COHEN.

### A Laugh in Church.

SHE sat on the sliding cushion,  
The dear, wee woman of four;  
Her feet, in their tiny slippers,  
Hung dangling over the floor;  
She meant to be good; she had promised,  
And so, with her big, brown eyes,  
She stared at the meeting-house windows  
And counted the crawling flies.

She looked far up at the preacher,  
But she thought of the honey bees  
Droning away at the blossoms.  
That whitened the cherry-trees;  
She thought of a broken basket  
Where, curled in a dusty heap,  
Three sleek, round puppies with fringy ears  
Lay snuggled and fast asleep.

Such soft, warm bodies to cuddle,  
Such queer little hearts to beat,  
Such swift, round tongues to kiss,  
Such sprawling, cushiony feet;  
She could feel in her clasping fingers  
The touch of the satiny skin,  
And a cold, wet nose exploring  
The dimples under her chin.

Then a sudden ripple of laughter  
Ran over the parted lips,  
So quick that she could not catch it  
With her rosy finger tips.  
The people whispered, "Bless the child!"  
As each one waked from a nap;  
But the dear, wee woman hid her face  
For shame in her mother's lap.

—Pittsburg Times.

### Would have to Borrow One.

Some time ago a well-known barrister had under cross-examination a youth from the country who rejoiced in the name of Samson, whose replies were the cause of much laughter in the court.

"And so," questioned the barrister, "you wish the court to believe that you are a peacefully disposed and inoffensive kind of person?"

"Yes."

"And that you have no desire to follow the steps of your namesake, and smite the Philistines?"

"No, I've not," answered the youth, "and if I had the desire I ain't got the strength at present."

"Then you think you would be unable to cope successfully with a thousand enemies and utterly rout them with the jawbone of an ass?"

"Well," answered the ruffled Samson, "I might have a try when you have done with the weapon."—*Spare Moments*.

\* W. D. Babington, *Fallacies of Race Theories*, p. 56.

\* *History of European Morals*, i., pp. 291, 355.



## Acid Drops.

LORD ROSEBERY'S recent Rectorial Address to the students of Glasgow University is now published in pamphlet form by A. L. Humphreys, Piccadilly, under the title of *Questions of Empire*. The price of this publication is one shilling, which is a good deal for thirty-seven pages of large-sized type. But when peers condescend to become authors we can hardly expect their productions at common market prices.

It is beyond our special scope in the *Freethinker* to criticise Lord Rosebery's political and social views. There are certain passages, however, with which we may fairly deal. He refers incidentally to the Churches in relation to the "self-examination" which he declares to be necessary to a people who have to bear imperial responsibilities. "The Churches, it is true," he says, "are always demanding it—all the more honor to them. But the adverb 'always' contains the secret of their want of success, or of their only partial success. They are always, necessarily, doing it, so they necessarily deaden their effect; it is their business to do it, and so men pass on." Could there, we ask, be a stronger condemnation of professional exhorters? Lord Rosebery simply corroborates what we have said a hundred times, that sermonising people in the name of morality, or righteousness, or whatever you like to call it, is a sheer waste of time and energy. The ethical appeals of the regular pulpit, week after week, and year after year, make as much impression on the character of the auditors as water makes upon the back of a duck. And the people in the pews know it, only they don't like to say so; and the preachers know it, only they can't afford to say so.

"The missions of the Churches," Lord Rosebery says later on, "and the Churches themselves, apart from their sacred functions and home labors, which directly serve the State so far as they raise their flocks, have incalculably aided in the expansion, consolidation, and civilisation of the Empire." We agree with his lordship. Christian missions have "incalculably" aided—in the sense of "infinitesimally." The amount is too small to be calculated. But there is a certain sense in which missions have contributed handsomely. They have sometimes broken ground for the trader, the adventurer, and the political agent. Did not a Maori chief, out in New Zealand, say that the missionary came along and taught the natives to "look up," and that when they looked down again all their land was gone?

Lord Rosebery is understood not to be a frequent churchgoer; he has even been reported to be something of a sceptic. In his Glasgow address, however, he indulges in several pious expressions. He talks of our "responsibility to God and man," thus mixing the language of a parson with that of a statesman. He says that on a certain virtue "under Providence" depends the future of our race. This is a sort of utterance in which Lord Rosebery will never be able to rival President Kruger. In the Englishman—or should we say Scotsman?—it sounds rather strained; whereas, in the old Dutchman, it is so entirely natural. President Kruger returns thanks to God and the captain of the ship for his safe voyage to Europe. His logic is infantine, but it just matches his piety. No doubt he feels, in a muddled sort of way, that while God did the whole job the captain did a little bit. Anyhow, he was on board, and that counts. Still, if the captain had died, fallen ill, or been otherwise disabled, his place would have been filled by another officer. Not even President Kruger would have liked to know that Providence alone was navigating the ship.

When he comes to his peroration, Lord Rosebery gives a free rein to his new-found piety. "Please God"—"the finger of the Divine"—"the supreme direction of the Almighty"—are phrases that occur in a single paragraph. Can it be that his lordship has taken a lesson from the late Mr. Gladstone's book? That distinguished leader of the Liberal party used to take the Almighty round at political meetings as an organ-grinder carries about a less venerable object. Whether he was still of the same opinion, or had radically changed his mind, God was always with him. He had always one faithful supporter in the Deity he worshipped on Sundays and exploited every other day in the week. And the trick succeeded splendidly. When the Liberal audiences—largely Nonconformists—saw the peroration was coming, and heard the "ineffable name" booming round the place, they half-shut their eyes, bowed their heads, and felt that the Grand Old Man was another Moses. Lord Rosebery must have noticed this in former years, and it looks as though he were beginning to think that it is, after all, the ace of trumps in the game of "Liberal leader."

We find it difficult, for our part, to believe that Lord Rosebery is quite sincere in declaring that the British Empire is a thing "human, yet not wholly human, for the most heedless and the most cynical must see the finger of the Divine." The expression itself is not a very happy one.

Bible readers will recollect that the magicians of Egypt recognised "the finger of God" when they saw their unfortunate country swarming with lice. But let that pass, and let us take his lordship at a somewhat happier moment. "Do we not hail in this," he asks, "less the energy and fortune of a race than the supreme direction of the Almighty?" Now what is this but the old chosen-people impudence again? Surely the brilliant and accomplished Lord Rosebery was playing to the gallery. He must really know better in his own mind. The power of Great Britain, and the greatness of the British Empire, are as natural as the rising and setting of the sun. The position of this island, its wonderful resources, its independence of the continent of Europe, its immunity from attack, the necessary hardness of its population, its vast seaboard with every facility for breeding fishermen and navigators; all these things, and many more, contributed to its success by giving it the first great start in the world-race under the conditions of modern science. The problem is as open as a hat, as clear as daylight. There is no room for metaphysical mystery or theological hocus-pocus. We repeat, therefore, that in our opinion Lord Rosebery is simply "trying it on" with the dull, pious, ignorant, and credulous mob of his countrymen. It is possible, of course, and perhaps probable, that such tactics may forward his political progress, but he might as well remember that they will certainly lower him in the estimation of the judicious.

The Rev. Father Brown, of Bristol, is a funny man—though perhaps unintentionally. Speaking at the recent Colston Anniversary, he said that "the grandest and noblest work of man was to co-operate with the great Savior of men for the salvation of the souls of men." Co-operating with Omnipotence is a distinctly good idea. How we go round, said the fly on the wheel. The little fellow thought he was co-operating. No doubt the horse and driver were much obliged to him. And no doubt God Almighty is much obliged to Father Brown.

Old Dowie is having the same experience wherever he goes. At Manchester, Leeds, and elsewhere, the medical students create disorder at his meetings. It is very ill-mannered on their part. It is also very silly, for they are open to the retort that their quarrel with him is a professional one. Surely they are not afraid that science will suffer if it does not suppress opposition.

Balaam was brought up to curse the people of Israel, and he was constrained to bless them. Something of the same sort happened to the Rev. H. Moore at a recent missionary gathering in Huddersfield. He was obliged to say that the heathen Japs were ahead of us in many ways. They were industrious, thrifty, and temperate. A drunken man was rarely seen in Japan. And young Japs made great sacrifices in order to obtain a good education. Still, their besetting sin was pride, of which we suppose Christianity is to cure them, though it has had the opposite effect on the nations it has already converted.

The vicar of Aldershot has discovered a new reason why no elector should vote for "any Jew, Atheist, anti-Churchman, or heretic." The elector has to make "the sign of Christ's holy cross" on the ballot paper, and a mark like that should only go against proper names. Our esteemed contributor, Mr. G. L. Mackenzie, points out, however, in the *Sun* that the elector makes the mark of the Greek cross on the ballot paper, not of Christ's cross. And thus ends the reverend gentleman's brilliant little discovery.

There seems to be no end to the number of curious and remarkable new sects which are continually making their appearance amongst the ignorant and superstitious Russian peasantry. The latest novelty in this way is a new sect in Lithuania, which does not acknowledge the pastors, churches, marriage, baptism, nor any of the sacraments, all of which it considers superfluous. The followers of the new religion will not build any more new houses, as they believe the Day of Judgment is soon approaching.

Another sect that has also appeared—the "Benefactors"—also prophesies the end of the world. As there is little time left to live, the preachers advise their congregations to enjoy themselves while they may. At one of the last meetings held by the "Benefactors" the congregation drank up six and a-half barrels of beer.

The resident in Cossack, West Australia, who writes in the following terms to the *Sydney Bulletin*, must intend to be sarcastic: "In the interests of those who keep fighting-dogs, I would suggest that we always have evening service at Cossack. At present the Sunday morning service and the Sunday morning dog-fight clash, and it is very disappointing to a man if he takes his dog on to the wharf to fight and part of the audience leaves for church."

Quite a novel, not to say ghastly, question engaged the



attention of the Cardiff Guardians the other day. A Protestant man complained bitterly on discovering that his amputated arm had been buried with the remains of a young Roman Catholic woman. Could sectarian bitterness go farther? If this Protestant person had been asked to embrace the young woman when she was alive with that arm of his when it was animate, one might have understood his objection—if she were not particularly good-looking. As a sound Protestant believer, he is, of course, going to heaven. Is he afraid that the young Romanist woman will take his arm with her to the other place, and leave him that limb short when the Resurrection takes place?

The 123 Nonconformist parishioners who have been summoned for refusing to pay tithes to the vicar of Bispham are determined to resist to the uttermost. 'Tis a pretty squabble. If the Church gets her own in the way of tithe, she is not likely to add to her numbers from the ranks of the Bispham Dissenters.

Canon Atkinson, vicar of St. Michael's, Coventry, says that going into a church merely to listen to an anthem is not a religious act. Of course not; one must go to listen, most of all, to the sermon. That obligation may keep people away altogether, but it is, all the same, almost wicked to go into church simply to listen to some music, and then sneak out before the parson has had a chance to preach. The offended Canon says that people "relieve their perambulations of the streets by just looking in for a quarter of an hour to ravish their senses with sweet sounds. Such action casts a slur upon the worship of God." And is slighting to the parson—which is probably what the Canon really means.

The Evangelical *News* is concerned at the utter disregard manifested in these modern times for the holiness of religion. It specially refers to the preliminary announcement of an "attraction" to be added shortly to the "turns" at a pier entertainment. On the stage of this pavilion of amusement is to be enacted the Passion Play of Ober-Ammergau, faithfully represented by the biograph. Then the *News* says: "Will it be believed that this awful parody of all we hold most sacred has already been performed on the pier of a sea-coast town a week or two ago? Even the secular journals find room for a protest against such sacrilege. One correspondent writes: 'Here, in the centre of Christendom, in the diocese of Canterbury, the crowd is mildly amused by the dying agony of a stage Christ on the cross, and rushes off the pier for the "last drink" after gaping admiration at the naturalness of the Last Supper.'

Continental pietists have been much scandalised by the reports of a scene which took place during "high mass" at the Church of Saint Irene, one of the largest and most frequented places of worship in Athens. The chanting of one of the assistant priests did not please the officiating priest, who, abruptly interrupting the service, called on him in a brusque, insulting tone to "stop that miserable chanting," and ordered him peremptorily to leave the church. The chanter, not brooking this insult, retorted in a similar strain, with the result that the two priests flew at one another and came to blows. They were, with great difficulty, separated—not unscathed—by the worshippers, and another priest was sent for to continue the service.

Many people who have been brought up "religiously" will have dismal recollections of their sufferings on the Lord's Day in early years. Someone writes for the *Church Gazette* an account of his own experience. He says: "Knowing what was coming, our spirits began to fall on Friday or so; on Saturday they sank very low, and on waking up on Sunday they were at zero, or as far below it as they could go. Getting downstairs, we had to sing a hymn to welcome the joyful day: what bitter satire it seemed to us! Then prayers, and breakfast followed, all secular subjects being strictly tabooed. As we were not youthful prodigies in theology, this meant that all meals had to be taken in silence."

Then he describes the round of church attendance, and the infliction of having to listen to a sermon of Archbishop Leighton or Isaac Barrow read by his father from a ponderous tome. "We had to sit up straight and listen to a screed of at least an hour. If anyone so much as closed an eye—though mine often waxed very heavy—it did not escape severe censure. I now understand the real nature of the Eutylian heresy. A final hymn followed, and then, 'all rapture through and through,' we were packed off to bed. On Monday morning we were as merry as grigs. This was the old way of trying to bring up children in the way they should go."

Dr. Talmage persists in his suggestions that Freethinkers wish to burn the Bible. Time after time, in his discourses, he reverts to that absurd idea. "Oh, how many assaults," he exclaims, "upon that Word! All the hostilities that have ever been created on earth are not to be compared with

the hostilities against that one Book." Well, it is supposed to be a Divine revelation, and Dr. Talmage, with the assistance of the Almighty, ought to be equal to its protection.

He tells a story, in one of his latest sermons, of a man who said, in his "infidel desperation," to his wife: "You must not be reading that Bible." Then he alleges that this "infidel" snatched it away from her. "And though in that Bible was a lock of hair of their dead child, he pitched the Book with its contents into the fire, and stirred it with the tongues, and spat on it, and cursed it, and said: 'Susan, never have any more of that damnable stuff here.' How many individual and organised attempts have been made to exterminate that Bible?"

Talmage is not so dense as really to believe that Freethinkers have the slightest desire to make Bible-bonfires, or that they would put any such veto on their wives as he suggests by this little piece of fiction. Freethinkers do not wish to "exterminate" the Bible. What they do endeavor to do is to "exterminate" the false views which prevail in regard to it. Even with advanced Christians it is still regarded as in some sense the Word of God. And who shall count the myriads who still believe, "because they so were bred," that it is infallible and free from error? These are the notions Freethinkers hope to "exterminate," and not the book itself, which, as far as they are concerned, may remain as a collection of writings, illustrating various phases of superstition.

"Infidelity," says the great Talmage, "declares 'I will exterminate the Bible.'" Of course, as we have explained, it declares nothing of the kind; and, by the way, we object to the term "infidelity" as applied to a form of thought the chief feature of which is the inculcation of fidelity—fidelity to the truth. Then Dr. Talmage inquires whether the "many individual and organised attempts to exterminate the Bible have been successful"? Well, we can tell him that since the publication of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, to which he alludes, up to the present time, there has been tremendous havoc played with the old notions amongst cultured people as to the trustworthiness of the book in nearly all its main features. And this process of enlightenment is going on rapidly among the multitude.

Before the fourteen-year-old son of a respectable Jew, in Warsaw, hanged himself the other day, he wrote: "I have hanged myself out of mere curiosity. I had to find out what they were doing in the other world."

At the Old Bailey, this week, Richard Percival Durnford, fifty, pleaded guilty to forging a cheque for £5. Mr. Warburton, for the prosecution, said prisoner was originally an ordained clergyman, and had been curate at Garston, near Liverpool; at Ware, in Dorsetshire; and he was for some time in Argyllshire, where he had some unpleasantness. He returned to England, and joined the Roman Catholic Church; but he was convicted of an impudent swindle, and was sentenced to nine months' hard labor. On his release he was arrested for a fraud in Argyllshire, and was again sentenced. In May, 1898, he entered the employ of the Church of England Temperance Society, where he remained until May last, when he became secretary of another society, which favored the closing of public-houses on Sunday. He went to Barnet, where he seemed to have organised a very successful meeting, and the following morning he opened an account with the local bank with the proceeds of the meeting—£6 odd. This money he at once drew out in small sums, and his teetotal friends would be surprised to hear that this temperance advocate was in the habit of spending his evenings in a public-house and at billiards. Altogether prisoner had drawn bogus cheques on the account to the amount of £200. Prisoner was sentenced to nine months' hard labor.—*Western Independent*.

A Church Missionary Society clergyman, who was until recently laboring at Scantebury, Rupert's Land, was, it is said, called "the little minister" by the Indians. The actual word used by them was *makuhdawekoonyhyanessmenaun!*

The "up-to-datedness," in Biblical matters, of the new edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* is still engaging attention in the religious journals. The Rev. E. Mansel-Townshend, Llanvapley Rectory, Abergavenny, has written another protest—this time to the *Rock*. He finds fault with the writer of the "Literary Letter" in that journal in regard to his lame apology for recommending the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. He thinks the reviewer should have warned those who have a "love and reverence for the Word of God" against the tendency of these works, which "show irreverence for, or unbelief in, the Bible as God's Word."

He concludes his little tirade as follows: "I feel it very



deeply, as a national disgrace and discredit to a Christian country, that a work like the *Encyclopædia Britannica* should attempt to perpetuate what is a grave libel upon our race—namely, that we are a nation of unbelievers, whom nothing short of the scientific scepticism which it embodies and adopts will satisfy.”

Cardinal Vaughan explains that the third pilgrimage to Rome from England, which leaves on December 27, will “concentrate its whole attention on the Act of Solemn Homage.” This means that “the English pilgrims will join ‘with the Fisherman of the Universe, with the Vicar of Christ,’ in the most solemn and splendid act of world-wide religion that can be performed over the tomb of the apostles, when the Pope, on the last night of the year, will ‘unite two centuries in a solemn consecration of homage to Jesus Christ.’” The Cardinal thinks that there is need for such an act, in view of the sad spectacle offered by the populations of Christendom. On the other hand, rational people are likely to conclude that the really “sad spectacle” will be the “act of homage.”

The Society known as *Œuvre des Brêtres Convertis* seems to have assisted 101 French priests to obtain useful secular employment. Most of them are now teachers and parish schoolmasters; two are police officers, two journalists, one directs a mission for the deaf and dumb, one directs an orphanage, one is a stationer, one is a colonist, one is a superintendent in a hospital, one is a servant in a rich family, etc. Is there any hope of persuading English clerics to forsake their “livings” for some useful secular employment?

Quite a series of criminal charges have been made of late against clergymen and ex-clergymen. At the Winchester Assizes, James Henry Thompson, 48, a clergyman, was sentenced to twelve months’ hard labor for assaulting a girl who was under fifteen years of age. It was stated that the prisoner, when curate at Beaulieu, Hampshire, had the girl in his Sunday-school and prepared her for confirmation, so that he must have known her age by the school register. She also entered his service, and it was alleged that, in consequence of the familiarity between them, the prisoner’s wife left him.

The Rev. Frederick Carlisle, clerk in holy orders, pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud in connection with a scheme for starting a magazine to assist hospitals. He was sentenced at the Central Criminal Court to six months’ imprisonment.

An old scoundrel named Beresford Hope, formerly a clergyman, has received a sentence of eighteen months’ imprisonment for acts of impropriety with a youth.

An Australian parson, who lately condemned dancing as an ungodly exercise, has just started social meetings, at which kiss-in-the-ring and hunt-the-slipper are the favorite pastimes. This gentleman seems to draw very pretty distinctions.—*Topical Times*.

Doesn’t Sir Henry Irving pay too much heed to the absurd allegations by antediluvian clerics against the stage of to-day? asks the *Topical Times*. He has been hammering away at them again in Glasgow. It reminds us a little of the Nasmyth hammer and the insect. Isn’t it a trifle beneath the dignity of our greatest actor to discuss seriously a statement that “the actor’s vocation is not according to the mind of God”? Of course, this is the assertion of a professional pulpiteer.

A nice point for the consideration of Christian people is raised in the *Record*. A lady correspondent writes to invite the opinion of readers in regard to doing needlework strictly for a charity on a Sunday. “Say I am kept indoors all day on Sunday through indisposition, would they think it right for me to work for the poor, or is it best for me to read and trifle away the day doing almost nothing? Would needlework on a Sunday have a bad effect on the minds of my children and servants?”

Obviously the answer is, that she should “read and trifle away the day doing almost nothing.” We cannot have the blessed Sabbath desecrated by needlework, even though it be for the poor. Our Lord said: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” The spirit of that utterance would, of course, exclude any such work of utility as the lady refers to. It is now generally understood that what our Savior meant was that the Sabbath was made for parsons. It is quite certain that they would never sanction needlework on a Sunday even for a Dorcas Society.

“Poor Uncle Horace,” said Isobel (aged seven), after a visit to an English rectory; “he gets so sad: he wants all the people in the parish to go to heaven, and they won’t go.”

The paths of the religious and moral censor are not always those of peace, as an incident occurring at Yorkville, near

Columbia, S.C., last week goes to illustrate. The Rev. A. J. Hensley, Baptist, made public charges of immorality against several business men in town. Indicating a certain block of buildings, he declared that it was disreputable and no fit place for decent people to visit. Dr. A. F. Scoggins, a druggist, and the only unmarried man implicated, met the Rev. Mr. Hensley on the street the next evening, and asked if he was included. The preacher said he was, and refused to retract anything. Scoggins suggested that, as they were of a size, they fight it out. The preacher agreed, and they fell to. The preacher’s wind soon failed, and he was knocked down. Scoggins pounded him on the ground till the Rev. Mr. Hensley cried: “O Lord, take him off; don’t let him kill me.” The Lord did not come to the reverend gentleman’s rescue, but the bystanders interfered and induced Scoggins to get up. Such is the clerical life in the vicinity where the above occurred.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

The anti-Semitic feeling in France seems unfortunately to be rather on the increase than the decline that many had hoped for. At Fontainebleau something like a state of anarchy has prevailed. The efforts of General André, the war minister, to stamp out Anti-Semitism at the college have, we regret to learn, been productive merely of a spirit of defiance and strife. The other week several duels took place in the college, one of them being between a Jew and a Roman Catholic, and arising out of these hateful racial and religious prejudices.

Professor Adeney is contributing a series of articles to the *Christian World* on “A Century’s Progress in Religious Life and Thought.” He says: “Religion has been profoundly affected by science, but as yet science has not shown much readiness to concede the claims of religion.” That is perfectly true as regards the attitude of science. What is the attitude of religion? Let Professor Adeney answer: “From ignoring science, or fearing it, or viewing it with suspicion and jealousy, devout, intelligent Christian people have come to welcome it open-armed, admitting their duty to yield to the imperial rights of truth, even though these may run counter to long-cherished tenets.”

That has always been the way with religionists. When they have found the truth which they have denounced as heresy too strong, they make a virtue of necessity, and “welcome it open-armed.”

William Thorne, of Broughton Astley, Leicestershire, cut his throat, and then took to writing his reflections as his life ebbed away. There was a good deal of “God” in them, so that the poor fellow can hardly be claimed as an “infidel.”

The newspapers report an “amazing” game of poker, which was played at Stirling, Illinois, to decide whether the pastor of a church should remain or go. But what is there “amazing” in this to a reader of the Bible? Casting lots is common enough in both Testaments. Even after the ascension of Jesus, when the vacancy caused by the suicide of Judas had to be filled, the Apostles cast lots which of two candidates should be selected, and they regarded that throw of the dice—or whatever it was—as the decision of the Holy Ghost.

General Gordon was a great Bible reader, and when he was in doubt about what he should do he used to toss a coin, and let Providence decide it “head or tail.”

The *Lyttleton Times* reports the case of a girl who applied to the Magistrate’s Court for a maintenance order against the father of her illegitimate child. She stated that her parents had turned her out of her house; and, on being asked whether they went to church, she replied that they were constant attendants. Whereupon the bench remarked that it was wonderful how often the people who made the loudest professions of religion were the very last to lend a helping hand to those in trouble.

We have seen some strange announcements on church notice-boards, but this one, outside a North London Congregational place of worship, takes the cake. The subject for Sunday evening was “The B.O.H. and the O.D.V.” What the Devil did it mean? O.D.V. is phonetic for the French name for brandy. Was the man of God going to discourse on that—with samples?

### Obituary.

I REGRET to have to record that the energetic Secretary of the Camberwell Branch of the N. S. S., Mr. T. Wilmot, has just lost through death his young, bright, and promising daughter. The loss was the more painful as it was comparatively sudden. The funeral took place on Wednesday, November 21, at Nunhead Cemetery, without, of course, any religious ceremony. At the request of Mr. and Mrs. Wilmot, Mr. Charles Watts delivered an appropriate address at the graveside.—C. W.



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

*Sunday*, December 2, Aldgate Public Baths, Goulston-street; at 7.30, "The Use and Abuse of the Bible." Admission free.

*Monday*, December 3, Wellington Hall, Almeida-street, Upper-street, Islington; at 8, "Life, Death, and After." Admission free.

*Tuesday*, December 4, Paddington Baths, Queen's-road, Bayswater, W.; at 8, "Secularism and the Bible." Admission free.

December 9, 16, 23, 30, Athenæum Hall.

### To Correspondents.

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

**W. H. NASH.**—We quite understand your loss of temper. It is so characteristic of your species. We never asked you to discuss the general Tacitus question with us. You charged us with falsifications, etc., and we asked you to point them out. You attempted to do so and failed, yet you had not the grace to express a word of regret. Indeed, you almost appeared to think you had honored us by your infamous accusation. Go your own way—like a good Christian. We have no time to waste upon you.

**W. PUGH.**—Thanks for the notes of Mr. Treharne-Jones's lecture, which we hope to make use of next week. We are overfull of copy at present.

**T. EVANS.**—Huxley's *Physiology* would probably suit you. We believe the price is 4s. 6d., less the usual discount.

**H. PERCY WARD.**—You have fought gallantly, you have won what was possible, and we congratulate you in the name of the Freethought party—for which we have, in such a case, a right to speak.

**T. OLLERENSHAW.**—Thanks. Mr. Foote is very well.

**W. E. DOWDING.**—Should be pleased to oblige, but it is really an advertisement; and if we inserted such things gratuitously we should soon be flooded with them. Remember the thin edge of the wedge.

OWING to pressure upon our space of other matter, Mr. Foote's rather long statement and observations on the Freethought Twentieth Century Fund have to stand over till next week.

**F. E. WILLIS.**—'Tis better to have fought and lost than never to have fought at all.

**W. J. GILBERT.**—Next week.

**FREETHOUGHT TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND.**—Received: James Neate, £1; Mrs. Neate, £1; Albert Simson, £1; A. C. Brown, 5s.; Per W. Lamb, 10s.; W. H. Deakin, £2.

**N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.**—Miss Vance acknowledges: Mrs. B. E. Marks, 15s.

**N. S. S. GENERAL FUND.**—Miss Vance acknowledges: Gateshead Friend, 5s.

**A. J. H.**—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.

**J. S. DUNKERLY.**—Almanack has been sent you. Thanks for your trouble in the matter of the hall, which you will see has been engaged. With regard to Jonah, see Mr. Foote's *Bible Romances*. There is a lot of valuable information in that iconoclastic little work.

**SHILLING WEEK.**—W. J. Gilbert, 1s.; J. D. (per J. Neate), 1s.

**A. B. MOSS.**—We regret to hear that you have been laid up, and hope you are now restored to health.

**W. H. MOORE.**—Obliged. See paragraph.

**D. FRANKEL.**—Compelled to hold your letter over till next week.

**W. P. BALL.**—Your cuttings are always welcome.

**J. WALKER.**—Thanks for your encouraging letter. Mr. Foote is preparing a volume of his literary and semi-literary essays for the press. It will include the criticisms of Marie Corelli, which you wish to see in a permanent form. It is pleasant to hear that so many of your friends have enjoyed reading his *Sign of the Cross*, and that it has broken down their prejudice against him as a "vulgar infidel."

**PAPERS RECEIVED.**—Gray's Gazette—People's Newspaper—Two Worlds—Birmingham Weekly Mercury—Westminster Gazette—Portsmouth Evening News—Western Independent—Ethical World—Freethought—Freidenker—Truthseeker (New York)—Boston Investigator—Free Society—Morning Leader—New Zealand Colonist—Liberator—Huddersfield Examiner—Blue Grass Blade—Crescent—Rhondda Leader—Leeds Daily News—Lyttleton Times—Bristol Mercury.

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

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

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

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

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 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.

MR. FOOTE had a good audience at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday evening, though some of his friends had gone off to the Aldgate Baths in response to his appeal, with a view to "assisting"—at least in the French sense of the expression. This evening (Dec. 2) Mr. Foote will go eastward and deliver the third of the Aldgate Baths course of lectures. East London Freethinkers should try to get the hall filled on this occasion.

On Monday evening (Dec. 3) Mr. Foote lectures at the Wellington Hall, Almeida-street, Upper-street, Islington; and on Tuesday evening (Dec. 4) at the Paddington Public Baths, Queen's-road, Bayswater—close to Whiteley's. The admission in both cases is free, and ample opportunity will be afforded for questions and discussions. Freethinkers in these localities should make a special effort to get their Christian friends to attend the meetings, which are really designed for the "unconverted."

There was relative peace at the Aldgate Public Baths on Sunday evening. This was secured by the presence of the police, who will continue on duty there till the end of this course of lectures. Mr. Charles Watts occupied the platform, with Mr. Victor Roger as chairman, and there was a good, orderly, and attentive audience. The lecturer was in his best form, and some useful discussion was elicited. One opponent was the Rev. Mr. Alcock, a West London clergyman, who has agreed (we understand) to hold a public debate with Mr. Watts.

Mr. Watts will lecture at the Athenæum Hall this evening (Dec. 2). His subject will be "Will Christianity Survive the Twentieth Century?"

The hall of the Battersea Public Baths has been engaged for three Sunday evenings—December 2, 9, and 16. Mr. Cohen will lead off this evening (Dec. 2), and will be followed by Mr. Watts. Bills advertising this course of lectures can be obtained for distribution from Miss Vance, at 1 Stationers' Hall Court. It is a long time since any Freethought lectures were delivered at Battersea, and the local "saints" should all do their level best to render these meetings successful.

Mr. Percy Ward did not win a seat on the Birmingham School Board. Still, he polled the respectable number of 8,869 votes. This was considerably in excess of the poll of Mr. Griffin, the Social Democratic candidate, who was thus proved to be the weaker of the two. Perhaps at the next election the purely Secular candidate will be allowed to fight on that ticket for all it is worth, without having votes diverted into losing channels. Mr. Millington, the candidate of the Labor party, has also been defeated. His party invited the help of the Secularists at the outset, but refused to accept "Secular Education," whereupon he was left to fight his own battle. Another defeated candidate is the Bishop of Coventry—the blackguard bishop, who libelled the Birmingham Secularists in the most outrageous manner.

Mr. Ward's votes would have prevented the defeat of the Chapel party if it had secured them. About 1,500 householders voted for him, and 300 of these were plumpers. The number is not enough to cause a revolution, but it is enough to show that the friends of Secular Education in Birmingham have to be reckoned with. Mr. Ward's brave fight this time has been in every way beneficial. He will probably cut a very much better figure in the next elections.

The Church party, in spite of the defeat of the blackguard bishop, seems to have a majority of one on the Birmingham School Board. This is hardly a matter which the Secularists can regret, for it appears that the only way to teach the so-called Liberals a lesson in their own professed principles is to let them have a taste of oppression themselves.

The *Rhondda Leader* is still full of the case of Mr. Treharne-Jones, who has seceded from a curacy in the Established Church and publicly proclaimed himself a Secularist. It reports the ex-reverend gentleman's second lecture, and prints several letters on the subject of his secession. We observe that Mr. Treharne-Jones is announced as intending



to deliver Secular lectures whenever he can get a hall. The local Secularists should advise him to communicate with us.

The *Liberator* (Melbourne) reproduces Mr. Cohen's article on "The Decline of Religion" from the *Freethinker*. We regret to see that Mr. Symes is still pursued by cowardly Christian bigots. Having half-killed him, they now smash his windows, and the police take no notice. For five years past, Mr. Symes says, he has been unable to earn a bare living. He has had no proper home, and next to no furniture. Still, he has never deserted the Freethought flag for a minute. But now he has to tell all whom it concerns that "either the *Liberator* must be better supported, or it must go down."

This number of the *Freethinker* will be in the hands of many of its London readers before they go to the polling station to vote for School Board candidates. Once more we beg Secularists to disregard other points and give their undivided support to candidates who are sound on "Secular Education." To plump for such candidates seems to be the plain duty of all who believe that the great educational problem of the future is how to rescue children from the hands of priests and the slavery of superstition. The editor of the *Freethinker* has six votes in the Finsbury division, and he means to cast them all for Mr. Barwick, who is a real and not a nominal Progressive.

We hope Mr. F. J. Gould will win a seat on the Leicester School Board. It is hardly necessary to press his claims upon the Secular party. His success would be a triumph for the only true principle of State education.

The *Secular Almanack* for 1901 is now on sale at the Freethought Publishing Company's office. This publication is issued by the National Secular Society, into whose exchequer all profit will go that may be realised. As usual the Almanack contains a valuable Calendar, and a mass of useful information concerning Freethought organisations at home and abroad. There are also some special articles by Messrs. Foote, Watts, Cohen, Moss, and Heaford, and "Chilperic" and "Mimnermus." Secularists should keep a copy of this Almanack by them, and might even lend it with advantage to their friends.

## Freethought in Germany.

THE land of Goethe and Heine, of Büchner and Haeckel, is one of the classic seats of Freethought. Germany, with its elaborate learning, has always yielded a rich harvest of heretical nourishment for the intellectual life of the nations. If only she would shake off the yoke of her crushing militarism, her sons and daughters would soon be able to adorn the crown of Teutonic learning with the bright jewel of liberty. But here, as in every other department of human activity, the Church—coward and tyrant in one—bars the way of progress with the brute weight of its authority, reinforced by the willing servitude of the victims of a senile superstition. The only hope for Germany resides in the intellectual ideals of Freethought, combined with the enlightened and anti-Chauvinistic aims of the Socialist Party there.

The stringent laws prevailing in the Empire in reference to the religious question (or, rather, to the religious questions, for the religions of Germany are almost as plentiful as its sausages) make the open expression of unbelief a matter of extreme difficulty and danger. The penal code of the Empire protects the multifarious creeds of the country against all attack or insult, whether expressed verbally or in writing. If you publish the opinion that Catholicism is a piece of idolatry, you are liable to go to prison for your pains. Under conditions such as these, it is really impossible in Germany to deliver a Freethought lecture, or to publish a Freethought journal, unless you are content to soar into the serene regions of pure philosophy, and are willing to refrain from citing any controversial opinion, for such opinion evidently would relate to one or other of the thirty-six Churches into which the one faith of the one, and only, Lord has split itself. Such a tyrannical state of affairs must be calculated to bring tears of godly gratitude into the eyes of our Christian Evidence brigade of bigots, and make them long for the day when the cowardly intolerance thus "made in Germany" may be imported bodily here, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Between the Freethought party and the Socialist party in Germany a natural affinity would seem to exist by reason of the fact that, after eliminating the Christian Socialists (who are notoriously bad Christians, and worse Socialists), every German Socialist is likewise a Freethinker. But, unfortunately, a large number of German Socialistic Freethinkers abstain from affiliating themselves with the National Freethought Federation on account of the exclusion from its program of all political questions. This exclusion has, however, been forced upon the Federation in order not to infringe certain monstrous laws which deprive German women of the right to take part in political lectures, or to join any political organisations. (How tyrannically German Christianity presses upon women we shall see in our next article.) On the other hand, there is a moderate section who reject all proposals to mix up Freethought with the social question, and confine themselves exclusively to the propagation of anti-Christian principles in opposition to all the varied forms into which clericalism, Catholic and Protestant, divides itself.

The German Federation of Freethinkers was founded at Frankfort-on-the-Main nearly twenty years ago, and its object is to bring together and organise the scattered forces of Freethought throughout the Empire. The principal aims and objects of this Society are so interesting, as evidencing the oneness of aim of the Freethought party throughout the world, that I make no apology for setting forth some of the more important clauses of this weighty declaration. These are as under:—

"Our object is, as Freethinkers, to combat, in the domain of thought, all superstition and ignorance; to fling off all stupidities and shackles of whatsoever sort; to attack all religious intolerance, all prerogatives of caste, all extra-legal immunities, and all oppression of liberty of thought and conscience, without, however, plunging ourselves into the political arena, or occupying the necessarily narrow ground taken up by any of the existing parties."

"We, therefore, demand that the chairs of science, and the professors who occupy the same, shall be free, and that the right to publish the results of scientific research shall be enjoyed without any interference on the part of religious dogma. We also claim that the results of science and of the ever progressive knowledge of nature should be made of direct utility to our children, in the sense that in the State popular schools nothing shall be taught which is in contradiction with the facts established by science."

"We, accordingly, demand the complete separation of the School from the Church; that is to say, we insist on schools without creeds, and that these schools shall, in every respect, be properly equipped, so that the rising generation may be trained in the ways of free thought and liberty of action."

"Only a people imbued with these principles can preserve its position in the struggle and competition of nations, and so meet the demands of modern times."

"We do not base our morality on a dreamy future life, with fear of punishment and hope of reward superadded, but rather upon that doctrine of universal love towards one's fellows which springs from the fact that we are all children of one common mother, Nature, and that each man possesses a natural right to the happiness and joy that this world affords."

"Only that morality which enjoins the doing of good from the promptings of one's own free nature can be regarded as genuinely noble."

"We reject every species of religious oppression or constraint, whether exercised against individuals or corporations; we also condemn every kind of limitation imposed upon the full right of parents to the control of the education of their children, or upon the right (as recognised by the laws of the Empire) to renounce one's allegiance to the Church."

The Manifesto, at this point, winds up by a statement which, while it reveals the wide permeating spread of Freethought views in Germany, laments the lack of organisation owing to want of cohesion among the numerous scattered groups and individuals embracing the principles of unbelief. The statement is as under:—

"The upholders of the foregoing principles are counted by the hundreds of thousand—nay, by millions; but, unhappily, the number of groups of individuals who seek to defend and maintain them is comparatively still slight. Political and clerical reaction seeks out every means to combat the results of scientific discovery and the final consequences which logically flow therefrom. Such being the case, the time has now come to raise the flag."



freedom high, and to keep the path clear for the triumph of Freethought and the right of untrammelled research."

In order to defeat the iniquitous laws to which reference has above been made, a large number of Freethinkers are incorporated together under the title of "Freireligiose" ("The Congregation of Free Religion"). This body was most ably represented at the Paris Congress by Ida Altmann, of Berlin. They have quite abjured Christianity, together with all belief in God; but they practise a species of anti-dogmatic "religion of morality," and impart an anti-clerical education to their children. Many of the groups gathered under the above designation—notably the groups at Berlin and Munich—are affiliated to the German Freethought Federation. The Society at Berlin has several thousand members, and owns a private cemetery bestowed upon the members by the gift of a generous benefactor.

In my next article I shall give some additional particulars of the Freethought movement in Germany, which may, I hope, be not only of deep interest, but of great encouragement to the Freethinkers of England—of that land which, with all its advantages, will never be truly the land of the free until it begins to spend more money on scholarship than on soldiering, and tries to create citizens, and not saints.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

(To be concluded.)

### Spiritual Blindness.

BEVERLEY is a sleepy little town, with a population of about 13,000. For the information of those whose geography may have grown rather rusty, it may be added that Beverley is in the East Riding of Yorkshire. It is the county town of that division of the premier English shire. Beverley is a town of some antiquity; indeed, if you spend twenty-four hours in the place, you will inevitably be informed that it carried on a flourishing trade when its now powerful rival on the banks of the Humber was yet in the land of the Great Unborn. Beverley has two glorious churches; in fact, it is questionable if any other town in England of equal size can boast two Christian temples of such magnificence. At one time Beverley was a Parliamentary borough and returned two members to our Lower Legislative Assembly. The town, however, was disfranchised for —.

But I am forgetting myself. I did not sit down to write a history of Beverley. Besides, to refer to an unpleasant episode which is nearly forgotten by the present generation might have an unfriendly look. Hence I will return to my starting-point. I made allusion to Beverley's reputation for drowsiness. True; but things do hum a bit here sometimes as well as in other quarters. Just now the "hum" bids fair to liven into a "buzz," and this is how it came about.

A few weeks ago a certain latitudinarian Alderman of the borough read before the local Debating Society a paper on "Sunday Amusements." This Alderman is a gentleman of literary tastes, who has devoted considerable time to a study of the origin of our Sabbatarian customs, and in his paper he openly expressed approval of all kinds of recreation on the first day of the week. This ungodly laxity roused the ire of the vicar of the Minster parish, and this latter gentleman was indiscreet enough to indite a letter to the local press on the subject. And then the fun began. Both sides of the case have been championed, and the correspondence, as is invariably the case, has widened out considerably. In a recent issue the rev. gentleman, who happens also to be my spiritual pastor, and is, therefore, responsible for the welfare of my never-dying soul, roundly suggested that the writer of this present article is the unhappy victim of spiritual blindness. "Alas!" he says, "we cannot make spiritual things to be seen by the spiritually blind." Probably no Freethinker would care to quarrel with so extremely lucid and self-evident a statement, had not the clerical letter-writer also expatiated on the desirability of "exercising" the "spiritual senses." How can a man exercise a sense of which he is wholly deficient? This is unreasonable, even for a clerk in holy orders.

"We cannot make spiritual things to be seen by the spiritually blind." Certainly not. But if a man is blind, who will dare to blame him? Moreover, if he is so invincibly blind that he does not even know he is blind, upon whose shoulders shall we lay the responsibility?

After mature reflection, I have come to the conclusion that I must belong to this order of the invincibly spiritually blind, and I have drawn my opponent's especial attention to the fact that this condition is not due to any lack of church-going on my part. For at least thirty-five years of my life I joined in public devotion two, three, and even four times a week. Nor was my worship a mere formal attendance, as is the case with a considerable percentage of my vicar's congregation. The rev. gentleman says "the meeting-place of the human spirit with the Divine is a temple whose threshold the uninitiated cannot pass over." Well, I can only conscientiously answer that my search for this "threshold" was both diligent and prayerful. Why, then, should admittance to the innermost shrine have been denied to me? Why should all my patient inquiry go unrequited?

Moreover, what shall I say of my spiritual guides during all these years? Were they "blind leaders of the blind"? I roughly estimate that during my lifetime I have listened to between three and four thousand sermons, and I am not an inattentive hearer. I have asked my vicar to explain why not one of those preachers could lead me into possession of spiritual eyesight, and I look forward with considerable interest to his reply.

I am not unacquainted with the symptoms of this abnormal cerebral development denoted by the term "spiritual vision." Indeed, for many years I was firmly impressed by a conviction that I was myself a victim of the disorder. As the fact of my recovery is beyond all question, it is clear that I cannot have contracted the true type of the disease, such being well known to be a quite incurable complaint. Moreover, when a man, by his persistent haunting of infected areas for upwards of thirty years, has done his level best to acquire the malady and has met with no success, I submit he is justified in assuming that he is unsusceptible to attack, and that he ought not to waste his time in further fruitless endeavors. I am therefore confirmed in my opinion that I belong to the order of the invincibly spiritually blind, or, as it would be expressed in terms of pathology, to the order of the unsusceptibles. I further conclude that I was born so, that I am powerless to alter my condition, and that I am therefore in no way responsible for it.

I have thought it right to enter into this somewhat lengthy recital of my case, because it is important we should understand how elusive a faculty is this alleged spiritual vision. So subtle are the differences between the true and false types of the disorder that even the most highly qualified experts are sometimes unable to distinguish between them. In this instance not only I, but many others, labored under the erroneous impression that I saw, when all the time I saw not. In the light of such a testimony as mine, how can even the holiest man feel sure that he is in possession of true spiritual vision? After all, he may only have contracted a false, and therefore curable, type of the complaint. His case may not be so hopeless as it seems. The day may yet dawn when he, too, will awake to a sense of his complete recovery.

I will forbear to dwell upon certain qualities exhibited by persons who have acquired this disease in a malignant form. I have had too bitter an acquaintance with this variety of the human species to have any desire to widen my knowledge of its idiosyncrasies. Those who think this is a branch of study worthy of their pursuit cannot do better than frequent assiduously some church or chapel. To be fair to my opponent, who is a Canon of the Church as by law established in this realm, I would say chapel for choice. For my own part, I have come to the conclusion, founded upon a somewhat ripened experience, that nothing in this world is to be preferred above sound health, both of mind and body.

G. DAWSON BAKER.

The spiritual measure of inspiration is the depth of the thought, and never who said it.—Emerson.



## Tolstoi and Secular Education.

IN view of the forthcoming School Board elections, it is well to bear in mind the aspect of the case for Secular Education as it affects the interests of the children. In a recent number of an American journal I find an article by Count Tolstoi on this topic, in which the great Russian writer says some weighty things that might well be brought to the attention of the people who have now, in a very small way—for the issue is not set before them in any large way—to decide whether the children are to still have theological doctrines impressed on their young minds before they can critically examine or test the truth of what they are taught. The children in this matter, as, indeed, in every matter, are helpless; there is something, indeed, tragic and grimly ironical in the fact that the "religious" beliefs, which we are told are the most tremendously important in life, of the next generation should be dependent on the "compromises" effected by rival sets of politicians, and perchance on the influence or lack of it of a few hundred publicans. To-day the children are taught a mass of doctrine which Tolstoi accurately summarises thus:—

"We tell the child, claiming for our words the respect due to sacred truth, things which we know perfectly well that it would be absurd to believe, and which have no meaning for us. We tell this child that a mysterious and savage being, whom we call God, about six thousand years ago conceived the project of creating the world; that he, in effect, did create the world as well as man; but that, as man sinned, this God inflicted upon him and upon us the punishment for his transgressions and his faults. We add that our chief business lies in propitiating this God in order to escape the torments to which he has condemned us."

Whatever politic quibbles may be indulged in, that is the basis even of "compromise" Christianity. How many men and women in London to-day honestly believe it? Yet, owing to some curious apathy or carelessness, numbers who do not believe this superstition themselves, yet permit themselves to be hypnotised into handing their children over to be taught it; they lazily convince or half-convince themselves that the teaching of this nonsense somehow makes for morals, and they are imposed on by the terrible bogie of Secular Education, which is put before them in awful shape. In reality, of course, it is the theological parties who stand for the bogies. The child, instead of being taught naturally and kindly, and instead of its having its mind developed, is frightened by vague and mysterious dogmas, which very often, because of their vagueness and unintelligibility, frighten all the more. Tolstoi says:—

"All children are aware that man's obligations are complex, and they possess a moral character. Yet we teach them that the greatest obligation of man consists in believing blindly in praying—that is to say, in uttering certain words at certain hours, and in swallowing some sort of a soup representing the blood and flesh of God. The governments, the ruling classes, those who possess power and influence, are indissolubly tied to them. Thus, the ruling classes are incessantly working to impress upon a child's mind the prestige of these fictions, and doubling their efforts in order that their hypnotic influence might be exerted upon the minds of the adults."

These are words whose courage is only equalled by their truth. The attempt to maintain the dogmas in the schools is not so much, on the part of the leaders, a genuine error as a gigantic hypocrisy. Three-fourths of the men who stand for the teaching of the dogmas in the schools have personally little belief in them, and the journalist who, in his columns, pretends that Secular Education is the high-road to national crime and decadence in all probability does not personally care two straws for the sanctity of the Incarnation or the Atonement. For one of the saddest convictions borne in on the observer of the passing world-drama is that half the evils or half the errors of to-day are due not so much to ignorance as to deliberate baseness and hypocrisy. Ignorance there is in plenty, in all conscience; but of knowledge stultifying itself there is a vast deal too. The hired journalist to-day will write up anything his millionaire master tells him, and the little politician, afraid to front public opinion, will echo the millionaire-kept journals.

Tolstoi, at any rate, whether one agrees with him or

not, has a mind of his own, and in the article from which I have quoted he has this to say on the question of the hour:—

"Absolute indifference regarding religious problems, the negation of all religious forms, the absence of all beliefs in positive religion, are of incomparably more value to childhood than all the teachings of the Jewish Church, no matter in what form they be presented. Knowing that Church teachings are but fiction, how could I tell a child, who questions me with simplicity and confidence about them, that they are sacred truths, while I have knowledge of their inanity?"

"It would be better if I could point out to him the true solutions of the questions which the Church answers with falsehoods. But, if I am incapable of doing so, I ought at least to refrain from palming off for truth what I consider a falsehood. Besides, it is not true that a man cannot find other convictions to transmit to his child but his faith in the dogma of positive religion. All sincere men know the good in their lives."

No excuse seems needed for thus lengthily quoting these weighty words, which sum up the case against teaching the orthodox dogmas in the schools, and put the case for Secular Education. Tolstoi, of course, is no Secularist, but a devout religionist. Yet he is an honest religionist, and has, indeed, achieved his fame as a teacher, primarily, by his amazing directness and honesty. And, as a result, he is, in the practical outcome of his teachings, positively nearer to the Secularist than to the orthodox dogmatist. Beyond professing to be a follower of Christ, he shares little in common with the ordinary Christian. But in the passage just quoted Tolstoi has put the main case which Secularists put with sufficient force. "All sincere men know the good in their lives." And there is quite enough work to teach children the best we *know* without teaching them speculative doctrines which at least we are aware are the subject of infinite dispute.

FREDERICK RYAN.

## The Land of Confucius.

THE Chinese empire is unique in the history of the world. It stands alone, unapproached in point of age, unexplained in its resources, unparalleled in its vitality. Prudent historians decline to fix the date of the origin of this people. In a general way they say that that great people probably originated with some nomad tribe whose history is lost in prehistoric time. All agree, however, that this is by far the oldest nation on the globe. It is the only nation now extant that was contemporaneous with the Assyrian, the Egyptian, and the ancient Jew. We speak of ancient Rome. The city of Rome was founded in the year 753, before this era; yet even then the Chinese empire was venerable. It was old when Moses inscribed the tables of stone; it was before the Pyramids of Egypt were; it had a history, with official records and annals, before the Christian era was born. In the extent of territory and population it is equalled by no State in the world. In geographical extent it is the largest, save Russia alone. It occupies a domain of more than five million square miles, with a population variously estimated at between four hundred and five hundred millions of people—that is to say, the Celestial empire comprises one-tenth of the habitable globe and one-third of the entire population of the world.

Its products range from those of the frigid to those of the tropical zone; it is intersected and diversified by mountain ranges and vast rivers, estuaries, and other natural water-ways. At one period of its history these rivers and lakes were connected by artificial canals, and the foundation of a vast system of international commerce was laid. Its mineral resources, in diversity and extent, are believed to be surpassed by those of no other part of the globe. The fertility of its soil is abundantly witnessed by the fact that it has been able to support, without the aid of foreign assistance or the interchange of commodities, countless millions of human beings from before the dawn of history. Its people are essentially an agricultural people—domestic, peace-loving, conservative, and devoted loyally to their national ideas and institutions.

The Celestial empire has always been an isolated one.



While maintaining that seclusion, it necessarily suffered the penalty of having its early history of little interest to the rest of the world. The great world-struggle, in which mighty drama nations were the actors, did not in the slightest way affect this ancient people. The long-continued contest for supremacy between the Babylonian, the Assyrian, and the Persian did not disturb the secure and serene life of the Flowery Kingdom. The Moham-medan conquest, that swept with fire and sword from the Ganges to Central Europe, and threatened to inundate with blood the inhabited world, contained no menace to the Dragon throne. It lived on alone. Centuries came and went, and it had no intercourse with the outside world. This seclusion of the Celestial empire accounts, in part, for its vitality and its power of continuance. Throughout all of the earliest centuries its history was its own, and was not complicated with that of the rest of the world. The influences that brought it into connection with the outside world date from the thirteenth century. Up to that time China, without the aid of the rest of the world—without interchange of literature, ideas, or commerce—worked out its destiny and fulfilled its ideals. The first of these influences was the Mongol conquest in the thirteenth century. A Tartar prince from one of the northern provinces of China, developing great prowess as a warrior, inspiring his followers with the love of conquest, lust for spoil, and thirst for victory, increasing his armies by adding to them the forces from the States which he had rendered vassal to his own, succeeded in overrunning practically all of the provinces of China.

The original Middle Kingdom numbered but eighteen provinces; adding those of the outlying districts, the number finally reached to about four hundred. These provinces were governed by petty princes and pretentious governors. Rivalries, revolutions, and broils were frequent. Massacres, slaughters, and the ferocities of war make up the annals through long centuries. These internal strifes were surpassed only by the astounding power of the people to recover from their enormous devastations. As the result of the Mongol conquest by Ghengis Khan, the provinces were brought into subjection to a central authority, and the date of the empire in its modern form may be fixed at that point. This conquest by the Mongols was in many respects like the conquest of Britain by the Normans. The Mongol did not seek to overthrow the religion or abolish the institutions of the Chinese. Seeing their excellencies, and appreciating the people's affections for them, as far as possible he adopted the ideas that he found. The people of China, with immense power for absorption, assimilation, and adaptation, became part Mongolian, as the Saxons of England became part Norman.

One of the other influences tending to bring China into contact with the rest of the world was the efforts of the mediæval traveller, who, impelled by curiosity and the fabulous stories of the wondrous wealth of the people, did, with vast effort, succeed in making his way into the forbidden kingdom. Then came later the development of commerce, and still later the wars carried on for the purpose of securing a safe position in China for foreign residents. During all of this time China presented a stubborn resistance to the encroachment of the foreigner. From the earliest time that resistance showed itself. Before the Christian era one of the emperors built around the kingdom the Great Wall, which is still recognised as one of the seven wonders of the world. It was built with the sole purpose of repelling the invasion of the Tartar hordes from the north. We have still to reckon with this feeling of resistance possessed by the Chinese against contact with other people. It may be accounted for, in part, by the feeling of self-sufficiency, which is characteristic of that ancient people. They are, to a great extent, free from the ideals and ambitions that characterise the modern nations. They are not clamoring for better opportunities to sell their wares; their statesmen are not eager to acquire new markets. They are quite able to produce within their own dominions all that the people want. Their lives are simple, their wants are few, and the foreigner, in their judgment, has nothing that they cannot, happily, get along without. That feeling of self-sufficiency, of confidence in their own

resources, is a part of the explanation of their reluctance to form any communication with the outside world.

Further explanation is to be found in their sense of superiority. The Chinaman looks upon the rest of the world as new-comers, as a sort of tyro, as a kind of untried adventurer. From his mountain-summit of history he contemplates this presumptuous world. He sees in it an arena of change, of succession. He sees the mournful ruins of kingdoms that once flourished, made war, and developed commerce. He sees the imposing tombs of great peoples that once helped to shape the destiny of nations, and he looks for them at present upon the field of human action in vain. They are gone, and others have taken their place. He turns to the annals of his own people, and finds that they were toiling, loving, struggling, suffering, and hoping ages before any of the modern nations were born. He thinks of the title which he lovingly gives to his emperor, the "son of heaven," and thus there has grown up through these thousands of years a feeling of superiority to the rest of mankind. It is not based so much on an intelligent comparison between himself and other people as it is fostered by the pride in his annals and in his ancient history.

Still another thing that helps to account for his resistance to foreign contact is the fact that he is naturally suspicious of all foreign people. He knows them chiefly through their attempts to invade his kingdom; he knows them through the sound of martial music and the embattled hosts. He thinks with dread and regret of the resistless impulse of these nations upon his long-cherished kingdom. It is these things which must explain, in part, that stubborn resistance which a Chinaman offers to all attempts of the foreigner to establish even fraternal relations. This has so far been successful that, until within fifty years, there has been little, almost no, contact with the rest of the world.

(DR.) J. E. ROBERTS.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

(To be continued.)

## Correspondence.

### MORE JONAH.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I am truly grateful for the hospitality of your columns. Permit me to say, in reply to the inquiry of your editorial note, that the firstborn of Israel were solely claimed to commemorate the death of the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus xiii. 15). The former were never sacrificed.

And now, on the principle of fair-play, will you be good enough to allow your readers a Christian version of Jonah's history, which is often implied in the *Freethinker* to be a myth? Your correspondent "R. R." professes to believe much about the fish, which many hold was not a whale, but a marine creature specially formed, a "sea-monster" (Matthew xii. 40, margin; Revised Version). The question is immaterial, and I leave it.

The difficulty of "R. R." appears from this quotation: "How is he (the fish) to spew up Jonah at Nineveh?" Now Scripture states nothing of this sort. Its brief annals imply that Jonah, being vomited on land, went straight home, and then the Word of the Lord came to him a second time (chapter iii. 1). Meanwhile, we may suppose the seamen returned, telling their wondrous story, and that this, combined with Jonah's reluctance to deliver his awful message (thus showing he did not rejoice over his errand), procured his respectful hearing from the Ninevites. They apparently hoped that, if God could pardon Jonah on repentance, he might also pardon themselves. Otherwise they would have been destroyed without warning.

God could have saved Jonah without using the "sea-monster"; but this method was chosen to typify Christ's burial and resurrection, and it is hard to imagine how they could have been more efficiently symbolised. Before Jonah was thrown overboard, he offered his life to save the sailors—a type of how Christ offered His for sinners. The coincidence is striking, but of course must not be pressed too far, as Jonah was guilty, while Christ was innocent. Similarly, the repentance which followed Jonah's preaching after his preservation resembles that which followed the preaching of the Gospel after Christ's resurrection.

Space forbids my discussing why Jonah avoided his mission, or why he wished the ruin of Nineveh. "R. R." may find both explained in good commentaries.

(REV.) HENRY J. ALCOCK, M.A.



## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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

### LONDON.

- THE ATHENÆUM HALL (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, C. Watts, "Will Christianity Survive the Twentieth Century?"  
ALDGATE PUBLIC BATHS (Goulston-street): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The Use and Abuse of the Bible."  
BATTERSEA BATHS (Latchmere-road, Battersea): 7.30, C. Cohen, "Missions to the Heathen."  
PADDINGTON BATHS (Queen's-road, Bayswater, W.): December 4, at 8, G. W. Foote, "Secularism and the Bible."  
CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7, Conversazione.  
SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell-road): 7, Dr. Washington Sullivan, "Ideals Visible only to the High-minded."  
EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (78 Libra-road, Old Ford): 7, H. Snell, "The Human Element in the Bible."

### OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

- HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, A lecture.  
BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, W. J. Ramsey.

### COUNTRY.

- ABERDEEN (Northern Friendly Society's Hall): 6.30, Miss L. M. Ker, "Ruskin and Tolstoi."  
BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): 7, A lecture—Particulars in *Daily Mail*, Dec. 1.  
CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school.  
GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): 12, Discussion Class, Mr. M'Gregor; 6.30, Social Meeting.  
LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, T. Parris—11, "The Evolution of the State"; 6.30, "Creator and Creation: A Reply to Dr. Dallinger."  
LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, A lecture—for subject see *Football Echo* of Saturday next.  
MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): H. Percy Ward—11, "A Christian Ghost Story"; 3, "Thomas Paine"; 6.30, "Who Made the Devil?" Tea at 5. December 3 and 4, at 8, Debate between Will Phillips and H. Percy Ward on "Is Spiritualism True?"  
SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Mr. Gorrill, Descriptive lecture on the Paris Exhibition. With lantern illustrations.  
SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, "Ethics: Natural and Supernatural"; 8, Committee Meeting.

### Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—December 2, Battersea Baths.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall-Heath, Birmingham.—December 2, Manchester; 3 and 4, Debate at Manchester.

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