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Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

Wicked Opinions.

MR. HOLYOAKE has replied to Mr. Watts. He had a right to choose his antagonist, and I do not want to step between them. But there are some fresh points in Mr. Holyoake's reply, which are not vital to the issue raised by Mr. Watts. These concern us all, and I propose to deal with them, leaving (for the present) the main question to my colleague.

Personally, I may say that I do not care two pins, or even one, whether Mr. Holyoake has or has not made or undergone a change in his opinion, his attitude, or whatever he or anyone else may choose to call it. He is quite passionate about it in replying to Mr. Watts, but it is really of importance to nobody but himself. The only important question is whether he is right in what he says now. All men but the fossilised have changed intellectually, as they have changed physically. "In a higher world," said Newman, "it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often." Emerson stated the same truth with scornful relation to human vanity. "A foolish consistency," he said, "is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines." It may be telling in political debate, where there is ever a hundred grains of nonsense to one grain of sense, to reply to an opponent out of his own mouth, and show that what he says to-day is answered by what he said several years ago. Vain politicians fall into this trap, because they fancy their own consistency is something of infinite moment; not their consistency of principle or intention, but their consistency of mental conclusion. But now and then a stronger politician laughs at the trap which is laid for him. Some persons thought it was mere cynicism on Beaconsfield's part when he declined to argue a question before parliament in the light of certain "musty old speeches" of his, which had been quoted against him in the debate. But it was sanity and wisdom. It was a personal question whether he was right or wrong twenty years before; it was a public question whether he was right or wrong at that moment.

Mr. Holyoake, as I understand him, says he never was an Atheist. He was always an Agnostic, but he lacked the word to express his attitude. The term he did suggest was Cosmism as a substitute for Atheism. In connexion with it he quotes the words—from Thomas Cooper, I believe—"I do not say there is no God, but this I say—I know not." Perhaps it will surprise him to learn—or to be reminded of it if he has forgotten it—that Charles Bradlaugh, both in print and on the platform, was fond of quoting those very words as indicating the essential attitude of Atheism. Are we to conclude, then, that Bradlaugh, too, was an Agnostic without knowing it? Are we also to conclude that not a single Atheist during the past forty years understood Atheism, and that the only person who did understand it was Mr. Holyoake, who was never an Atheist at all?

"Agnosticism," Mr. Holyoake says, "relates only to Deity." Well, I have only to remark that Huxley did not thus restrict its meaning and application. "It leaves a man," Mr. Holyoake continues, "to reason, to conscience, to morality, to nature, to the laws of truth, of honor, and the laws of the State." Yes, and it also leaves him, if he prefers, to the opposite of these—to folly, vice, and crime, to the workhouse, the lunatic asylum, and the prison. But the point I wish to

emphasise is this: that what Mr. Holyoake says of Agnosticism is simply an echo of what Bacon said of Atheism. "Atheism," that philosopher said, in the *Essay Of Superstition*, "leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural piety, to laws, to reputation."

When Bacon wanted to dig the Atheist in the fifth rib with a dirty dagger, he treated Atheism as a denial of God. "None," he said, "deny there is a God but those for whom it maketh that there were no God." Which is equivalent to saying that no one denies God but a scoundrel. But when he talks like a candid philosopher his language is very different. "It were better," he declared, "to have no opinion of God at all, than such an opinion as is unworthy of him." That was the real difference between Atheism and Superstition. "No opinion of God at all." Bacon regarded that as philosophical Atheism. Mr. Holyoake regards it as philosophical Agnosticism. Well, this is a free country, at least to that extent, and I prefer to side with Bacon.

Let me also observe, in passing, that Mr. Holyoake plays with the word "God." He treats it as a definite word, with one invariable meaning. One has to remind him again that the word "God" means anything or nothing according to definitions. Without a definition, you might as well pronounce it backwards. It may be true that the Atheist "denies the existence of God" if you define God to mean Thor, Jupiter, Jehovah, or Christ. But is it true that the Atheist denies the existence of any possible God? That is the point to which Mr. Holyoake should address himself.

It seems to me that Mr. Holyoake's philosophy or "disbelief" and "non-belief" is a sad confusion, abounding in arbitrary statements. But I leave that matter to Mr. Watts, who invited the explanation, and will doubtless be able to deal with it satisfactorily.

A much more important matter, from my point of view, is Mr. Holyoake's turning his back upon a principle which he has often expounded; a principle which is the justification of Freethought, and without which Persecution is honest jurisprudence. Mr. Holyoake refers to certain "Atheists whose disbelief is born of dissoluteness, and who conceal vice by theological outrage of speech." This is followed by a scornful reference to "pot-house Atheism."

I am not well acquainted with pot-houses, but I should imagine that Atheism is not prevalent in them. I have seen the pot-house people at large on certain holidays, but I never noticed much Atheism in their conversation. Vulgar, malignant Christians, of course, have often suggested that Atheists hold their meetings in public-houses; but I hope Mr. Holyoake does not wish to countenance this calumny.

I should imagine, too, that if a man wanted to "conceal" his "vice" he would be a very great fool to resort to "theological outrage of speech." It would pay him better, or rather less badly, to be outrageous in any other direction. This is precisely the way to excite odium, to attract hostile regard, and make himself an object of general suspicion. That a vicious man should wear a mask of piety is sufficiently intelligible. Myriads have done it, and many still do it, as we learn every now and then by the police news. But for a vicious man to range himself on the side of an odious and hated minority, to affront the prejudices of the very people he wishes to impose upon, and thus to invite a scrutiny where he desires to practise concealment, would be an amazing display of imbecility.

But it is still worse to hear Mr. Holyoake stigmatising

the "disbelief" of certain Atheists—not their affectations or pretensions, but their *disbelief*—as "born of dissoluteness." If this has any meaning at all, it implies that belief is amenable to volition. If it be so, you can change a man's belief by punishing him; that is, by giving him a strong inducement to believe otherwise; and, in that case, the Christians were quite right when they fined, imprisoned, tortured, and burnt heretics as guilty of moral perversity. Such offenders *could* believe the orthodox faith, but they *would* not, and force was employed to overcome their obstinacy. But the truth is, that men do not think as they would, but as they can; that is to say, as they must. The intellect may be affected by the emotions, but not directly. The wish is sometimes father to the thought, but it must necessarily be a case of unconscious paternity. We may be blinded by passion, but when the mist disperses the mind's eye sees the facts according to its capacity and the laws of mental optics. I do not merely "disbelieve," I "deny" that Atheism ever was, ever is, or ever could be, born of dissoluteness. "The fool," according to the Psalmist, "hath said in his heart, there is no God." Mr. Holyoake substitutes *sinner* for *fool*, and thinks he is philosphic. I think that he and the Psalmist are in the same boat.

Let us take an illustration. A burglar is going to break into a jeweller's shop, but he sees a policeman looking at him from the opposite corner. He wishes to crack that crib, he came out to crack that crib, he is there to crack that crib. Why should he not do it? There is a policeman over the way. What of that? Can he not *wish* the policeman were not there? Can he not *believe* the policeman is not there? We know he cannot. We know the shop is safe for the present.

Now the God that Mr. Holyoake refers to in this connection is the heavenly policeman. A vicious man wishes this God were not looking on, then he believes this God is not looking on, and thus he becomes a full-blown Atheist. Could there be a greater absurdity?

It should be recognised that the human intellect acts (or functions) according to necessary laws. Given certain information, and a certain power of judgment, and a man's conclusion follows with mathematical precision. His desires, and hopes, and fears, have nothing to do with the matter. They do not govern his opinions. His opinions govern them. Our ideas do not accommodate themselves to our emotions: our emotions accommodate themselves to our ideas. Love itself, which is supposed to be absolutely blind, walks with some degree of rationality in the light. Peasants do not fall in love with a princess. Why? Because they know she is beyond their reach.

Actions may be wicked, and intentions may be wicked. But there cannot be a wicked opinion. An opinion has only one quality; it is true or false—or, to be still more strict, it is accurate or inaccurate. The quantity of accuracy and inaccuracy may vary, but the quality is unchangeable.

An opinion may always be reduced to a proposition. Now if you apply the word "wicked" to a proposition you will immediately see its grotesqueness.

It is true that a man may neglect to inform himself on a subject, either through indolence or wilfulness; and his opinion will suffer in consequence. He may even be dishonest, if inquiry devolved upon him as a duty. But his *opinion* cannot be dishonest. You might say it was born of dishonesty, but that is a very forced metaphor, and not the language of philosophy. An opinion is always born of two parents; a man's natural faculty of judgment and the information on which it operates.

If there cannot be a dishonest opinion, of course there cannot be an honest opinion. It is nonsense to talk of a man's "honest belief" unless you simply mean that the belief he expresses is the belief he entertains. Strictly speaking, the honesty is not in the belief, but in the man. He either believes what he says or he does not; in either case his belief is his belief. He knows it, if you do not.

Mr. Holyoake, if I recollect aright, has championed the cause of "honest disbelief" in his former writings. The expression was unfortunate, because it was unphilosophical; but I always understood him to mean that the sceptic had the same right to his thought as a believer. So far I agree with him. In any other sense

of the words I profoundly differ. And I deeply regret that Mr. Holyoake has given the sanction of his name to a view of the formation of opinions which is calculated to serve the cause of bigotry, if not of active persecution. I fear that the sentence I have specially criticised in his reply to Mr. Watts will be quoted against Atheists *ad nauseam*, and will be a fresh stumbling-block in the path of Freethought advocacy.

G. W. FOOTE.

Atheism in Relation to Morality.

As the question of Atheism has recently been occupying the attention both of Secularists and Christians, it may be useful if I state what appears to me to be its relation to morality, by which term is meant a condition of life where truth, honor, sobriety, industry, and justice are practised. I regard an Atheist as a person who has failed to discover any evidence to justify a belief in what is called God. Atheism teaches that the basis of good conduct, with its incentives and its rewards, is to be found in the natural order of things. I have frequently intimated that Secularism and Atheism are, in my opinion, quite distinct from each other as systems of philosophy. The former refers directly to duties pertaining to every-day life, while the latter deals with certain dogmatic allegations as to the existence of a Supreme Being. Although the distinction between the two isms is clearly marked, it is within the province of Secular duty to correct any misapprehensions which may obtain as to the influence of Atheism upon human conduct. To do this is the more necessary, not only in the interests of truth and justice, but also from the fact that many Atheists belong to Secular Societies. It may here be fairly asked: If Atheism were as objectionable as it is often described to be by Christians and others, would its devotees accept as a guide Secular principles, whose very aim is to cultivate the nobler parts of our nature, and to discourage whatever impedes the welfare and progress of the human race? The fact should be remembered that, while Secularism and Atheism are distinct in their teachings as to the existence of God, they are in perfect unison as to the value and necessity of living noble and upright lives.

It is not my present purpose to inquire whether or not Atheism is logical in its position towards Theistic assumptions. To avoid any mistake, however, as to my view upon this point, let me say that Atheism, as I understand it, is perfectly reasonable in reference to the pretensions of Theism. It may be readily understood why Theists object to Atheism upon theological grounds, but it is difficult to find any justification for their assertion that Atheism destroys the sanctions upon which ethical culture depends. Even Goldwin Smith, who is far from being an orthodox Christian, writes in the *Contemporary Review* of last month:—

"When belief in anything beyond this life had vanished, who would take thought for the good of the race or for posterity?.....Life would surely be saddened by the prospect of extinction, and of parting for ever from those whom we love. The history of man would present a mournful record of pain and misery unmerited, serving no moral purpose and without hope of compensation."

Such language as the above coming from a fanatical theologian would not have surprised me, but emanating from a discriminating writer, such as I have always thought Goldwin Smith to be, it is somewhat strange. Of course, it is well known that Mr. Smith has no sympathy with Atheism, although it would puzzle most people to know the nature of *his* God. But surely it is possible for an Atheist, who believes this life to be the only one, to be earnest in the endeavor to make it as happy as circumstances will permit. In fact, this is just what an Atheist seeks to accomplish. He has no divided duty between heaven and earth. He is never, like the believer, cast down by doubt. If he has no hope of heaven, neither has he any fear of hell. His entire energies are devoted to the realisation of earthly happiness, to the cultivation and development of his moral nature, to the strengthening of his intellectual faculties, to the engendering of social virtues, and to the enjoyment of domestic bliss. The Atheist has the same nature as the Theist; the same emotions, the same

desires. What gives joy to the one in relation to this life affords happiness to the other. The magnificence of nature, the comparative regularity of her operations, the grandeur of her seasons, the beauty of her products—all afford joy to the Atheist as well as to the Theist. Social intercourse, based on honesty of purpose and integrity of conduct, is also the desire and delight of the Atheist. His affections, too, are the same as the Theist's. He has the same fervid love for the partner of his happiness, the same care for the welfare of his children, and he is equally anxious that they should be so trained when young that, when maturity arrives, their conduct shall be moral, their views enlightened, their desires pure, and their affections stable; and that in securing their own happiness they should not endanger the peace of others, but that truth, justice, and love should be their daily companions. He has the same filial gratitude. He can recognise the care his parents bestowed on him when young; how they sought to implant the principles of virtue in his young mind, to create and cultivate a desire for mental improvement, and to restrain him from the society of those who might have vitiated his unformed mind. All this, as a son, the Atheist acknowledges, and repays by affording to his parents, as far as he is able, the pleasure, in their declining years, of witnessing the good effects of their watchful care, and by imparting to them the greatest joy parents can experience—that of seeing their children walking in virtue's path, perpetuating unsullied the honor and good name of their family.

The old and often refuted fallacy of Atheism being the cause of the horrors of the French Revolution is still repeated. The events that found their culminating point in France during the eighteenth century, and more particularly towards its close, have furnished the orthodox believer with his stock-in-trade accusation against Atheism. The lack of knowledge that obtains among the general public, and more particularly in the theological circles, in reference to the facts of the French Revolution is too well known. As even the most cursory student of history is aware, there were connected with that mighty movement what are termed the horrors of the Reign of Terror, and orthodox believers—in the press, from the platform, and from the pulpit—are continually charging those horrors upon Atheism. It is urged by them that the anarchy and cruelty which attended the September massacres were the necessary results of sceptical opinions, and that, if Atheistic views were predominant in this country to-day, there would be no security against the perpetration of similar acts in our midst. How utterly fallacious and unjust this accusation is must be apparent to the careful and impartial reader of facts. It is not denied that Scepticism, having been the pioneer of freedom in every age and country where liberty really exists, played an important part in securing France her liberties. Still, it by no means follows that Scepticism must be held responsible for the excesses which attended that noble act of regeneration. Would orthodox Christians be willing to test their faith upon the same principle? If so, the system of which Christ is said to have been the originator must be held responsible for the cruelties and massacres of the Inquisition, the holocaust of St. Bartholomew, the rapine, murder, and plunder connected with the Holy Wars, and the terrible excesses of the Star Chamber. Dr. Dicks alleges that, from 1481 to 1759, 34,658 persons were burned to death, and between 1481 and 1808, 288,214 were sentenced to the galleys or to perpetual imprisonment by the conductors of this pious Inquisition (*Philosophy of Religion*, p. 359). Neal, in his *History of the Puritans*, narrates numerous cases of most cruel and revolting acts upon the part of the authorities of the Star Chamber. Human beings had their ears cut off, their cheeks branded, and tortures of the very worst character were inflicted upon them. Talk of the cruelties of the French Revolution! Why, they were nothing compared with those of the priests which preceded it. Dr. Channing says:—

"I am compelled to remember that the people of France, in this, their singular madness, wrought far less woe than kings and priests have wrought as a familiar thing in all ages of the world. All the murders of the French Revolution did not amount, I think by one-fifth, to those of the massacre of St. Bartholomew.

The priesthood and the throne, in one night and day, shed more blood, and that the best blood of France, than was spilled by Jacobinism and all other forms of violence during the whole Revolution."

If the many fearful crimes and sanguine sacrifices associated with these events in Christian development are not to be charged upon Christianity, why, in the name of consistency, should Atheism be blamed for the excesses of the French Revolution?

Had the promoters of religion in France confined themselves to their own functions; had they not made Christianity a weapon of cruel oppression; had they kept themselves separate from the corrupt State, and conducted their own institutions in accordance with morality, justice, and freedom, there is no adequate reason for supposing that the people would have interfered with their faith and its manifestations. Atheism never attempts to destroy a person's religion by force, or to interfere with his right of worship. It is only when theology assumes a despotic attitude, when it allies itself with the enemies of general freedom, when it lends its aid to bolster up decayed and worn-out political governments—when, in short, it champions might against right, monopoly against individual liberty, and stagnation against progress, it is then, and then only, that Atheism challenges its pretensions and seeks to destroy its aggressive power. This was precisely what occurred in France during the eighteenth century. From the time of Richelieu the Church was used as an instrument of the most severe oppression of the peasantry, dominating their minds and robbing them of all that makes life worth having. When the Revolution struck the blow at the corruptions of the State, the clergy refused to be divorced from the Crown; the Church, therefore, shared the fate of the Monarchy. In this, as in all similar cases, the people were justified in their attack on theology when that theology departed from its distinctive sphere and allied its authority with absolute government.

CHARLES WATTS.

The Sin of Unbelief.

It will surprise many people to know that the old doctrine of the sin of unbelief still exists in a more or less modified form in quarters otherwise distinguished by intellectual strength and high cultured moral feeling. That this is so is apparent from a recent article in the *British Weekly*, headed "The Sin of Sins." The writer quotes the words of Christ in describing the work of the Holy Spirit: "When He is come, He will reprove the world of sin because they believe not on Me." Here, says the writer, we have in its most concentrated form that New Testament doctrine "which is at once most supremely difficult and most unmistakably plain. It is a doctrine against which the whole current of modern thought and feeling runs with ever-growing strength. The teaching that the refusal to believe in Christ is the sin of sins is almost incredible to the world. Even the Church in these days finds it hard enough to accept it in all its implications." Naturally it is a hard saying, and unworthy of acceptance; but the Church cannot reject or ignore it, for its meaning is "unmistakably plain."

Unbelievers, according to the *British Weekly*, can understand that cruelty, treachery, and lust bring their punishment sooner or later. Yes, that has been the view taken by unbelievers. "But what they cannot understand is that the mere fact of refusing to believe is the sin of sins." This is not quite accurately put. It is not a question of "refusing," which may imply wilfulness, but of "inability"—which is quite another thing. The *B. W.* writer quotes the following words of some typical Freethinker, unnamed: "Science is but a new way of applying the mind to everything. It has affirmed the right and duty of investigation and verification. It has set up a new kind of intellectual morality, which has substituted the duty of inquiry for the duty of belief. The immediate result has been in England a sudden and amazing diminution of intolerance, a wonderful and wholly unexpected increase of mental freedom." These words we unhesitatingly adopt.

Looking to the causes of the reluctance to rank unbelief as the sin of sins, the *British Weekly* says:—

"We have no hesitation in placing first the undeniable fact, never so plain as in these days, that life, so far as we can judge it, may be fair and noble even when it is lived in open rejection of the Christian faith. So long as Christians could say—and it is not many years since they used to say—that the want of faith in Christ was invariably coupled with gross breaches of moral law, so long this word of Christ was more easily credible. So long as Christians took it for granted that whenever the spirit habitually travelled by lofty paths its central strength was an eager grasp on the Christian faith, so long the moral character of belief was clear. But now we cannot say, at least with the old confidence, that a man will not love the brother whom he has seen without loving the God whom he has not seen. Rather it has become clear in Christian lands that a man may show true tenderness, self-control, obedience to the moral law, and fidelity to the end of his mission, without belief in Christ."

It is difficult, however, to understand the allusion which follows to "many who have reluctantly abandoned early faiths which brought them light and peace." Why did they so abandon them, if that is their continued impression in regard to them? There cannot be light and peace without truth, and presumably their reluctant course was taken in the pursuit of truth. We are told that they have said, "In the shadow we will work," and they have worked faithfully. But why should they leave the light for the shadow—why this voluntary martyrdom, when there is no suggestion that immoral tendencies had any disposing influence with them?

The *British Weekly* admits that the challenge as to these tendencies has been carried by the unbeliever into the Christian camp. "They have asked whether professing Christians have shown the sincere love of truth, the grand indifference to material success, the willingness to be left behind by the multitude, the compassion for the poor, routed leavings of humanity, which have appeared in the lives of men who gladly or sadly have rejected the Christian name.....Nobody who has eyes can fail to see how Christian teachers even hesitate or falter over the uncompromising words: "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Another point considered by the writer referred to is to be found in what he describes as the growing intellectual perplexities of the time. He tells us how in a recent address at Cambridge an aged Bishop exhorted a gathering of young men to face and wrestle with doubt till they had an assured and well-grounded conviction of the truth of the Christian creed. But that surely is not the right kind of advice to give young men. That is simply telling them to place before themselves one foregone conclusion, and not to follow truth whithersoever it may lead. The *B. W.* writer acknowledges that the recent trend of New Testament criticism and philosophical thought has been to render better known difficulties, whether old or new. The theory of evolution has been used by "expert popularisers" as a weapon against the Christian faith and the Christian Church, while the processes and results of the Higher Criticism have been widely diffused.

"Men ask us, what are we to believe about Christ? Do you who are Christians agree as to the words He spoke and the works He did? Are you sure that He was born of a virgin, that He rose again from the dead, that He ascended up into heaven, that He is coming again to judge the world? We take up our daily newspaper, and read of another attack on Christianity. The assailant remarks that it is indeed a melancholy and thankless task to strike at the fountains of belief.....Yet, sooner or later, it is inevitable that the battery of the comparative method should breach their venerable walls, mantled over with the ivy and mosses and wild flowers of a thousand tender and sacred associations."

When the unbeliever urges that he cannot exclude unbelief by the mere effort of will, and asks how can it be a sin not to do what he cannot do, the above-quoted writer acknowledges that it is difficult to answer him, but still he sticks to the text: "When the Holy Spirit is come He will reprove the world of sin because they believe not in me"—an assurance which we take for what it is worth.

FRANCIS NEALE.

Christianity and Civilisation.—VII.

THE QUESTION OF SLAVERY.

(Continued from p. 12.)

IN my last article I pointed out the nature of the legislation and teaching in the Pagan Empire, or that portion of it which had for its object the bettering of the condition of the slave population. In doing that, the main point I sought to establish was that in both directions there was a distinct tendency in favor of the slaves; and, therefore, had the teachings of Christianity and the opinions of Christians been of the same nature, that feeling should have grown in strength, and the disappearance of slavery have been a matter of a few years. Instead of that, we find an absolute pause in the legislation on the subject for at least two hundred years—unless we reckon a modification of the existing law by the first Christian Emperor, to the effect that a man who killed his slave while inflicting punishment, without meaning to cause his death, should be held blameless; while the number of slaves increased, instead of diminishing, under Christian rule.*

The early Fathers are silent on the subject, except where their voice is raised in its defence. This was accepted by them, as were all other social institutions that did not directly threaten their religious beliefs. The whole truth of the matter is put by Renan in the following words:—

"We have seen that the great school of juriconsults, arising from the Antonines, is entirely possessed by this idea, that slavery is an abuse which must be gently suppressed. Christianity never said slavery is an abuse.....The idea never came to the Christian doctors to protest against the established fact of slavery. The rights of men were not in any way a Christian affair. St. Paul completely recognised the legitimacy of a master's position. No word occurs in all the ancient Christian literature to preach revolt to the slave, nor to advise the master to manumission, nor even to agitate the problem of public law which has been produced among us concerning slavery.....Never is the master Christian who has Christian slaves counselled to free them; it is not forbidden even to use corporal chastisement towards them. If the movement which dates from the Antonines had continued in the second half of the third century, and in the fourth century, the suppression of slavery would have come about as a legal measure, and by redemption money. The ruin of the liberal policy, and the misfortunes of the times, caused all the ground which had been gained to be lost."†

During the Dark and Middle Ages the chief purveyors of slaves to the Mohammedans were Christians. Venice figured prominently in this portion of the traffic, and there appears to have been a pretty smart trade in slaves in England and Ireland.‡ So extensive was this traffic that, in the ninth century, Pope Adrian and a large number of ecclesiastics and barons appear to have been engaged in selling the children of their serfs to the Mohammedans, through the medium of the Jews.§ Indeed, so far as can be seen, the diminution of slavery that did occur towards the close of the Dark Ages resulted, not from Christianity, but from utterly distinct causes. First, from the growing impoverishment of the wealthy classes of Rome, who could no longer support the large number they had been in the habit of supporting; and, secondly, from the influence of the barbarians, to whom slavery, although not altogether unknown, was yet not so habitual nor so interwoven with the social and religious structure, as with either Greeks, Romans, or Jews. The Churches, however, held slaves until the last. In France the liberation of slaves was slower in the domains of the Church than anywhere; and Voltaire notes that in his day the Church owned between 50,000 and 60,000 slaves.|| In other parts of Europe the story is the same. The Church, even while encouraging others to liberate their slaves as an act of piety, held grimly to their own as long as public opinion would permit them to do so.¶ Legally, in England, as late as 1547 an Act

* Lecky, *European Morals*, ii., 70.

† *Marcus Aurelius*, pp. 346-8.

‡ See Hallam's *Middle Ages*, ii., 379.

§ Draper, *Intell. Dev.*, i., 373.

|| Art. "Slavery," in *Phil. Dict.*

¶ See Green, *Short History*, p. 239; Smith's *History of English Institutions*, p. 24; and Lecky's *Morals*, ii., 71.

was passed condemning a "runaway servant" or "idle vagabond" to slavery for two years. And in Scotland, until 1799, colliers and salters were in the position of slaves, being legally unable to move from the scene of their employment.

But all this might, with a certain latitude, be regarded as the lingering on of ancient slavery; although, as the case stands, it is altogether fatal to the Christian's plea. But the peculiar and damning fact is that at the close of the Middle Ages there was inaugurated under Christian auspices a species of slavery which outdid for extent and barbarity anything that antiquity could offer.

The origin of the modern slave trade may be told in a very few words. In the sixteenth century the rich empires of Mexico and Peru were raided by the Spaniards under the authority of the Church, and under the leadership of Pizarro and Cortez. There is no need to go into the history of the conquest. A civilisation—in many respects superior to anything that existed in Christendom—was crushed out, while the number of people put to death in the two empires has been estimated as high as two millions. The labor of the natives in the mines proving unremunerative, negro labor was introduced, and, encouraged by the Government, the traffic in negroes grew with astonishing rapidity. The monopoly was granted to the Belgians; but these sold it to the Genoese, who shared it with other nations. The first Englishman to engage in the trade was the celebrated John Hawkins, a staunch "Gospeller," but who from a very young man had had his eyes fixed on this occupation as a source of profit.* The Church thus "reorganised the accursed institution of slavery on a gigantic scale, and in a form that was in some respects worse than any that had before existed" (Lecky, *Rationalism*, ii., p. 336). Livingstone, too, asserts in his *Expedition to the Zambesi* (p. 240) that slavery was unknown to the Africans until introduced by the Portuguese.

It has always to be borne in mind, therefore, that in dealing with the suppression of slavery in modern times we are dealing with an institution that is Christian in origin; and, if the claim were allowed that it was owing to the activity of Christians as Christians that it disappeared, one body of believers would only be destroying what another body had called into existence. But even in this case the principal lead in the matter of emancipation was given by a man and by a movement that have both been for years paraded as the emblems of anti-Christianism. In Europe, Republican France set an example to Christendom in this matter as in many others. And in America the first public protest was raised by Thomas Paine, in an article entitled "Justice and Humanity," published on March 8, 1775. Thirty-five days later the first American Anti-Slavery society was formed in Philadelphia.† And what Paine commenced Lincoln, a man who, on the testimony of his wife, was without "faith, in the usual acceptance of the term," and, on the testimony of his partner, was "an infidel," and who himself, on the public platform, when asked to deny the charge of infidelity, said he "would die first"‡—what Paine commenced Lincoln finished. Legally, that is, since it hardly needs pointing out that even now good feeling between negroes and whites is far from being established. A recent report of the Howard Association states that systematic imprisonment of negroes goes on in America, in order that they may be afterwards sold to labor contractors for settled periods. And six years ago Miss Ida B. Wells, a colored lady, told a London audience that "the Young Men's Christian Associations and the religious sects are the cruellest persecutors of the negroes, for they are forbidden to join their associations, and will not allow them to worship in their churches."§

A word or two on the slave trade and England may be said before dealing with it in America. The two chief centres for the traffic in England were Bristol and Liverpool, and both places, one might say with little exaggeration, laid the foundations of their prosperity on

the slave trade. In 1795 Great Britain did three-sevenths of the slave trade of Europe. Liverpool did five-eighths of the slave trade of Britain, and one-fourth of the ships belonging to Liverpool were engaged in the commerce. In ten years, between 1783 and 1793, 878 Liverpool ships carried no less than 303,737 slaves, representing a value of £15,186,850; or, deducting certain expenses, the trade represented to Liverpool an annual revenue of over £1,000,000. Over 300,000 slaves "shipped by the grace of God, and by God's grace bound for Jamaica," to quote the pious phraseology of the bill of lading connected with one English city alone.

The horrors of the trade could hardly be exaggerated. Packed into such spaces that movement was impossible, sustained by food of the poorest and coarsest description, the conditions of transportation were such that out of every hundred slaves shipped seventeen died within a fortnight of embarkation, and fifty before the ship reached its final destination. And not only were there many clerical defenders of the traffic, but some actually engaged personally in it. Thus the Rev. John Newton, Rector of St. Mary's, Woolnoth, friend of Cowper and author of the celebrated Olney hymns, actually commanded a slave ship *during the time that he was studying for the ministry*. One or two specimen advertisements for runaway slaves from English colonial papers will tell more of the treatment of slaves than a column of description. One is described as marked "W. S. on his face and breast," another marked "York" on each shoulder and breast, another with "a cattle mark T. H." Another advertisement concerns "an old woman with her two sons and two daughters, one of them very big with child." Another runaway has "both ears cropt," and his fellow runaway has his "nose and ears cut off."* In the same papers there are advertisements announcing the sale of children of eight years of age, with families for sale, either together or separately.

In 1770 a paper detailing the number of slaves sold annually by five European countries was presented to the House of Commons. The sales were as follows:—British 38,000, French 20,000, Portuguese 10,000, Dutch 4,000, Denmark 2,000 (*Ency. Brit.*, vol. xxii., p. 138), so that, out of a total of 74,000, Christian England sold more than half.

Yet it was far from easy to rouse public feeling on the subject. What had been ought to be, and in the election of 1790 the Gascoyne party based their claim chiefly on their support of slavery, and called in poetry (?) to their aid in the following doggerel:—

When our African business was near at an end,
Remember, my lads, 'twas Gascoyne was our friend.
If our slave trade had gone, there's an end to our lives;
Beggars all we must be, our children and wives.
No ships from our ports their proud sails e'er would spread,
And our streets grown with grass, where the cows might be fed.

Wilberforce's motion for the regulating of the slave traffic was rejected by the House of Commons by 163 votes to 88. Three times it met with the same fate; and when it had passed the Lower, and went before the Upper House, it was rejected on an equal number of occasions. Later, when Clarkson's Bill for abolishing the trade altogether came before the House of Lords, Lord Thurlow denounced the measure as contrary to the spirit of the Bible; slavery had flourished in the early ages, when men communed with God, and to attack its legality was an insidious heretical attack on the principles of religion.

It is a matter of history that the Abolitionists eventually gained the day; but it is a mere matter of historic and economic investigation that their arguments would have proven of little avail had not commercial reasons supported them. The plain truth is put bluntly by Finlay, the historian of Greece, in the assertion that "no Christian community of shareholders has yet voluntarily abolished slavery. In no country where it prevailed has rural slavery ceased until the price of production has fallen so low as to leave no profit to the slave-owner."

In my next article we shall trace the support given to slavery by the Churches in the United States.

C. COHEN.

(To be continued.)

* See Froude's *English Seamen in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 6, and Anderson's *Hist. of Commerce*, i., p. 400.

† Conway's *Life of Paine*, i., p. 52.

‡ For full statement of Lincoln's religious views see *Life*, by Lamon, pp. 137-158 and 485-500; Boston, 1872.

§ See report in the *Sun*, May 31, 1894.

* *Liverpool Slave Trade*, by "Dicky Sam," pp. 10-12.

Acid Drops.

SIR ROBERT HART, in a letter to the correspondent of the *Paris Temps*, is not very complimentary to the dear, good, self-sacrificing gentlemen who are trying their utmost—for the usual consideration—to convert the heathen Chinese to Christianity. "Even some missionaries," he says, "took such a leading part in 'spoiling the Egyptians' for the greater glory of God that a bystander was heard to say, 'For a century to come Chinese converts will consider looting and vengeance Christian virtues.'"

"Marauding Missionaries" was the heading of a special letter from Pekin by the *Daily Mail* correspondent, Mr. Thomas F. Millard. "In all the loot phases," he says, "missionaries have had their share. The day after the Legations in Pekin were relieved a prominent missionary, accompanied by a large number of Christian Chinese, invaded the residence of a prince and made a big haul. Incidents like this were numerous. When the purchasing period came, missionaries not only attended the sales, but opened loot marts themselves, sending their Chinese converts out to provide the stock."

Under the pretence of rescuing native Christians in the outlying districts, the missionaries joined in plundering places distant from Pekin. "So-called rescuing parties," Mr. Millard says, "became merely armed escorts, under whose mailed wing missionaries collected indemnities from the towns about Pekin. Under fear of having their towns burned, the inhabitants would suffer almost any extortion, and huge sums speedily accumulated in the Pekin mission-houses."

Mr. Millard's report is so scandalous that the *Daily Mail* sought to palliate it by editorial references to "some black sheep" and "a few evil-doers." But the looting malady seems to have been pretty wide-spread, and the missionaries have extensively helped the Chinese to regard most Christians as thieves.

The opening of a new year, and a new century, sees the war in South Africa dragging out its bitter length—let us hope very nearly to the end. Kruger is in Europe, Kitchener is in Africa, and Chamberlain is still at the Colonial Office. But where the deuce is God Almighty? Ay, there's the rub! At the outset of hostilities both Kruger and Chamberlain appealed to the God of Battles. Each thought he had that Deity on his side. But where is that Deity now? We presume he is waiting to see the war finished, when he will range himself (as usual) on the winning side. Meanwhile, we may be allowed to repeat our assertion that it does seem odd that *Christian* Britishers and *Christian* Boers should be unable to find any way out of their quarrel except seeing which can stand "bleeding" the longest.

Jesus Christ is called the Prince of Peace. So he is—on Sundays. On other days of the week he is more often the Lord of War. It is recorded of him, in one of his lucid intervals, that he said he came not to send peace, but a sword. At that moment he understood himself. His followers have misunderstood him ever since—in theory, and understood him beautifully in practice. All through the centuries of the Christian era they have been conjugating the verb "to fight." And they are still at it.

Christians build all the battleships. Christians make all the big guns. Christians turn out all the rifles. Christians manufacture all the gunpowder, dynamite, melinite, lyddite, and other explosives. Christians maintain nearly all the great armies and navies. When a "heathen" nation like Japan engages in this interesting business, it has to learn (and buy) everything of the Christians.

Mr. Francis Grose writes some interesting Notes in the *Peterhead Sentinel*. Incidentally, he remarks that "one of the cornerstones of Christianity is the doctrine of non-resistance." On this ground the British are non-Christian in fighting the Boers. Yes, and the Boers are non-Christian in fighting the British. It cuts both ways. Which is always the upshot when you try to apply Christianity to the practical affairs of this world.

In Chinatown, New York, there are three hundred Christian girls "living tally" with heathen Chinamen. Several of these, says the Rev. C. H. Mead, a temperance lecturer, are the daughters of clergymen. He lays the blame on Sunday Schools, where "too much attention is paid to preparing members for the life to come, and too little in preparing them to meet the dangers of their present existence."

A Boston Unitarian said it was time "to extend the hand of fellowship to the liberal Jews." Rabbi Charles Fliescher, noticing this remark, said that some Unitarians and Jews could shake hands, but the case was different with the rest. "Unitarians of the average type," he observed, "still magnify

Jesus, exalting him to the position of guide and leader. For many of them God may be said no longer to exist, but only his only-begotten Son." How truly did Jesus say that he came to divide people and set them at variance with each other!

The Pope has prayed God to illumine President McKinley's mind. Evidently the Pope feels unable to do it himself. We are not informed what prayer President McKinley has offered up for the Pope. "Let him play the fool nowhere but in his own house" might be appropriate.

The following remarkable statement is made by *Truth*: "I heard a few days ago that the Rev. Robert Eyton, whose name is no longer in the *Clergy List*, but who was, up to a few months back, a well-known Canon of Westminster, is now holding a living in Australia. The statement may appear incredible, but the gentleman from whom I had the information can hardly be mistaken. If it be true, the case affords another denorable example of the laxity of the Anglican Church in dealing with 'criminous clerks.' I am as little disposed as anyone to be vindictive towards a sinner, or to deny him a chance of retrieving his character. But the offence for which Mr. Eyton fled the country is ordinarily considered to exclude a man for ever from the society of decent people; and it should at least disqualify him from ever again publicly officiating as a minister of religion."

Rev. William Boland Tate, vicar of Walpole, near Halesworth, Suffolk, committed suicide by throwing himself into a pond in the vicarage grounds. Latterly he had given way to fits of despondency.

A Roman Catholic farmer, William Russell, of Birr, Ireland, has been sent to gaol for a month for throwing a stone through the window of a hut occupied by a street preacher from Dublin. How these Christians love one another!

A rather caustic remark is attributed to the Bishop of Oxford. Amongst his country clergy is one who may be called Mr. Blank, of Blankton—a man full of fancied ailments, who considers constant change such an absolute necessity that, at the date of the story, he was quite a stranger in his own parish. One day he came to the Bishop with his usual request. "Not very well, my lord—feeling decidedly run down—immediate change of air most urgent." The Bishop's eyes twinkled, but he spoke quite quietly: "Try Blankton, my dear sir—try Blankton!"

A spirit—that of a young girl—is said to have appeared in the house of a small tradesman in the Rue Matuon, Rochefort. She "comes in reply to knocks, and foretells events." That small tradesman has evidently a keen eye for a cheap advertisement.

At Tunbridge Wells the Rev. W. H. Palmer, pastor of Emmanuel Church, was leaving his house to conduct a service when he fell in a fit. Mr. Pincott, physician, was summoned, and, after rendering medical aid to the minister, entered the church and announced to the congregation the reason of the pastor's absence, conducted the service, preached a sermon, and then returned to his patient. It was rather unkind of the Lord to stop the minister just as he was on the point of going to conduct divine service; but he seems to have in some measure compensated for it by finding a ready, and apparently capable, substitute.

The *Record* says that "one of the most melancholy things in recent history is the calm, almost indifferent, spirit in which the general public has received the accounts of the outrage and massacre of European missionaries and their native converts in China." It is hardly correct to suggest that there has been anything approaching indifference; but it is quite true that the sympathy for the missionaries might have been much greater if it had not been for a widespread impression that they were there as intruders, and were meddling some ones too.

Few people may be cognisant of the fact that there is in existence an Act of Parliament which provides that persons who fail to attend divine service on Sunday shall be liable to imprisonment or fine. The statute dates from the period of the Protectorate, but that it is rarely enforced is pretty clearly proved by the sparse attendances which take place at so many public places of worship.

What a pious person the Mayor of Brighton must be! He arranged a half-hour religious service in the Council Chamber of the Brighton Town Hall. The occasion was the first meeting of the Council in the new century. After this we shall expect the Brighton Town Council to display exceptional power and activity in the public business. Might they not effect a noteworthy economy by dispensing with their sanitary officials, and praying to God instead?

The *Rock*, reviewing Archdeacon Sinclair's recent volume of sermons, says: "There are some portions of the contents

to which we must take exception. For instance, it grates upon the ears of those who are acquainted with the present Archbishop of Canterbury's contribution to *Essays and Reviews* to read a long quotation from him acknowledging the plenary inspiration of the Bible."

One of the most cheering events of the past century, according to the *Methodist Times*, was the federation of the Free Churches for aggressive rather than merely defensive action. Mr. Price Hughes's journal is very severe upon Mr. Goldwin Smith for expressing the opinion that "the Free Churches which subsist on religious convictions are apparently losing ground." It says that at the time of the Revolution there were twenty-two Churchmen to one Nonconformist; a hundred years ago eight to one; while there are in Great Britain to-day only two adherents of the Establishment to one of the Free Churches. If, as Professor Wace has suggested, it should be thought worth while to look to other lands, it will be found that, "while the communicants of the Anglican Church number three or four millions, those of the Free Churches number seventeen millions."

It is probable that Mr. Goldwin Smith did not mean that the Free Churches were losing ground as against the Established Church, but as against the spirit of inquiry and unbelief which is one of the great features of our time. In any case, we have no special interest in the question of what proportion the Free Churches stand in regard to other Churches. In our opinion, there is nothing much to choose between them, for they are all organisations for teaching error.

Rev. Mark Guy Pearse, reviewing the past century, says that some thirty years ago he asked an old man of ninety: "Is the world better or worse than it was when you were a boy?" His reply was: "I do not say that the world since I knew it as a lad is Christianised, but I do say it is *humanised*, sir, *humanised*." That, of course, is a very striking distinction, and a satisfactory result.

An appeal has been made to the public to clear off the debt on the church at Stratford-on-Avon which shelters Shakespeare's bones. The general public do already subscribe to the church by the sixpenny entrance fees which are levied. Very pertinently the *Westminster Gazette* inquires whether, if the debt be paid off, the charge for admission will be abolished or reduced. There seems to be very little probability that that will be done.

A *Morning Leader* correspondent at Berlin states that Herr Sanden, the principal director of the Spielhagen group of banks, who has just been arrested for embezzlement on a majestic scale, posed as a furtherer of all religious works, and as a man of unbounded charity generally. A year or two ago he had a magnificent monument placed on his vault in Potsdam cemetery. It represents Thorwaldsen's figure of Christ in the act of blessing, and bears the inscription: "Come unto Me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Herr Sanden is now described as being comparatively poor, the millions which he acquired so deftly being the property of his wife. The ruined creditors are seizing on everything of Sanden's to which they consider they have undisputed right, among other objects this monument, which has a value of £2,500. Now, however, an interesting point crops up. Churchyard monuments are among the articles which the German law does not permit creditors to seize for debt. The creditors assert that as Sanden is still alive this monument to his memory is no tombstone in the ordinary sense of the word, and the courts are to be called upon to decide the question.

In her recently-published volume of poems, Miss Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler delivers herself of the following stanzas, under the head "The Fool that said in his Heart":—

He taught that human love is just
A sentimental whim;
Forgetting that God took the dust
And made it like to Him.
So when he'd proved it all, he died
To put it to the test;
He faced the God he had denied—
And no man knows the rest.

Nor does any man know so much, for who knows that the individual politely called a fool "faced the God he had denied."

At Korospatak, in Hungary, a fire broke out in the church during service. The congregation had to fight the flames themselves, and among the amateur firemen were Countess Kalnoki, Countess Janka, and Baroness Szentkereszty. These ladies, at great risk, rescued children from the gallery, and carried water, and beat out the flames until their hands were bleeding and they were black from head to foot.

Rev. Prebendary Richard Whittington, who died in October last, left personal estate of the net value of £22,600. Not a large amount certainly for a high dignitary of the Church, but quite enough to endanger his eternal salvation. His will

piously begins: "Grateful to God for His many undeserved mercies to me, and firmly trusting in the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ for pardon of my sins." All the same, he stuck to the shekels as long as he could.

A series of "Letters from Spain" are appearing weekly in the *Christian*. The writer relates the following little incident: "The son of the first convert here (Figueras) married a Roman Catholic girl. Shortly after his marriage his sleep became disturbed by a strange whistling at night, and on opening his eyes he saw fantastic figures on the wall of the room. His wife endeavored to convince him that this was a sure sign that he was under the power of Satan. The young man, too ignorant to explain all this to himself, began to feel uneasy. Pastor Rodriguez, however, soon found out that the priest, who used to visit the wife in the absence of her husband, had ingeniously contrived the whistling, and was the author of the phosphoric trick. The pastor's interference at once caused both annoyances to cease."

Wealthy believers are creating a pretty fair demand for water straight from the Jordan for baptismal purposes. A firm of Americans have erected a pumping station in the Jordan Valley, and are sending to Beirut for shipment fifty large casks a day. The cedar-trees which are still left on Mount Lebanon will, it seems likely, soon disappear. A concession from the Turkish Government has enabled a wide-awake French firm to erect large sawmills on the lower slopes of the mountain, where they are cutting cedar-wood by the hundred thousand feet. Most of this is sent back to Europe in the rough, and manufactured there into crosses, panels for reredos and pulpit, or other church decorations.

There is a great deal of truth in the following observations which we extract from a recently-published volume of addresses by C. H. Spurgeon: "There are brethren in the ministry whose speech is intolerable; either they dun you to death, or else they send you to sleep. No chloral can ever equal their discourse in sleep-giving qualities. I heard one say, the other day, that a certain preacher had no more gifts for the ministry than an oyster, and in my own judgment this was a slander on the oyster, for that worthy bivalve shows a great discretion in his openings, and he also knows when to close."

One is rather astonished to find in the columns of the *Rock* something that might be thought to border on blasphemy. But it gives an extract from the new magazine of the United Free Church in which Dr. Robertson Nicol gossips rather freely of his student days at Aberdeen. He mentions the Rev. W. L. Mitchell, pastor of the Free Holborn Church, who was a stern opponent of the Higher Criticism which was just then coming into prominence. One day he met a friend in Union-street, Aberdeen. "Weel, hoo's a' wi' ye the day, Maister Mitchell?" "I canna complain, but, man, I had a wonderfu' dream last night. I dreamt that I was translated to the mansions abune. The sicht was gran', an' there were great multitudes o' folk: nae money that I knew. Moses was pointed out to me. He was lookin' about an' speirin', whare's that wee mannie that said I didna write the Book o' Deuteronomy? But," added the pawky old chap, "he wisna there!"

An open-air swimming-bath is, even in comparatively cold weather, a better institution than a church. The church of St. Nicholas, Norton-juxta-Malton, in Yorkshire, has just been sold, and has realised the insignificant sum of twelve pounds. Not one stranger in ten would guess that it was a church if it were not for the adjoining burial-ground. Architecturally it belonged to no special period. The object of the Urban Council in buying the building is stated to be the utilisation of the stone in the construction of an open-air swimming-bath.

Three lads were fined at Idle for breaking into the Church schools and stealing eleven hymn-books. That was, indeed, an "Idle" performance. It may with confidence be assumed that they never went there to steal hymn-books.

Sam Small, a Cuban evangelist, formerly editor of a Havana paper, was arrested on a charge of swindling. He has compromised the matter with his prosecutors by agreeing to leave the island for ever.

No matter what invertebrates may say or do, we (some of us) shall not pull down the Atheistic flag. Let those who care to call themselves Agnostics do so; we have no quarrel with them, though we should be glad to see a little more pluck in them. However, we are not all built on the same lines; besides, some have reason to fear the vengeance and the sneaking cowardice of Christians; and we have no wish to egg them on to make undue exposure of themselves, for we have no martyrs' crowns to offer them in recompense for any persecution they may endure. That science, that all knowledge, is Atheistic, that is, without God, we have the confession of the late Moderator of the Presbyterian Assembly here; and it would be a piece of cowardice to pull down our Atheistic flag just when the very clergy are enlisting under it. We

cannot prove that nature is absolutely without any sort of thing that may be called God; but we are as sure that no creator, no infinite God exists as we are that Euclid's axioms are true. If Theists had been honest, this had been settled ages ago. They started with a sham God, and all the way along the track of science, and under its invincible influence, they have modified, transformed, remodelled, and revolutionised their God to such an extent that now there is not an atom or shadow of the thing left. The only God we have ever attacked is *non est*. The rest of the Gods neither we nor our foes care a rap for. The Christians claim far more credit than is their due for destroying the Pagan deities, for they died a natural death. We have been a thousand times more successful against the Christian God or Gods, and in a very brief period too. How are the almighty fallen! Their very relics are wanting. God has no influence whatever in science, no more than has the Devil; he has no influence in war, in government, in law; he has almost ceased to have any influence in religion—except as an instrument of cheating and of plundering.—JOSEPH SYMES, in the *Liberator* (Melbourne).

Canon Mason, of Canterbury, preached the last sermon in St. Paul's Cathedral in the nineteenth century. Religion, he said, was looked on with more respect and sympathy than it was twenty years ago; and the Secularist lecturer could not get a hearing to-day such as he got then. Perhaps not; but that proves nothing in favor of religion, nor against Free-thought. The time selected by Canon Mason was when Bradlaugh was being baited and the editor of the *Freethinker* was in prison. The whole country was stirred by these acts of persecution, and thousands of people flocked to hear Free-thought lecturers, who would otherwise have remained apathetic. There, in a nutshell, you have the explanation of that special period of Free-thought prosperity.

If Canon Mason and his clerical friends were to start another persecution of Free-thought, they would soon see a great revival of public interest in our movement. No doubt they are too astute to do anything of the kind. But the propaganda of Free-thought is still being carried on effectively, although less noisily and conspicuously. Christianity itself has had to change in order to live. If we do not kill the Churches, we alter them gradually.

It appears that the value of the real estate owned by the Monastic orders in France amounts to forty-four millions sterling, half of which has been accumulated in the last ten or twenty years. No wonder these Catholic bodies wield such a vast influence. The command of such wealth enables them to do infinite mischief to the cause of liberty and progress. Herein lies the principal secret of the domestic troubles of the French Government.

Englishmen should bear in mind that these Monastic orders are at the back of the so-called Nationalist movement in France, and that the policy of the leaders of that party is hatred of England with a view to a quarrel on some favorable occasion.

Rev. William Rowland Tate, a Suffolk vicar, committed suicide "during temporary insanity" by drowning himself in a pond in his own ground. He had been suffering from depression and illusions. He once told his servants that he should give himself up to the police as a fraud and a hypocrite. We should imagine that a good many sky-pilots might make that confession in their right minds.

And now the Jews are backsliding! The editor of the *Reform Advocate*, of Chicago, is worried about it, and discusses the matter as "the passing of the synagogue." His conclusion is that the synagogue has lost its influence over its members, and that unless family affliction induces a temporary personal interest it is only supported by proxy. Like the Christian Church, the synagogue is filled chiefly with women, and they are now the mainstay of Judaism. Commenting upon this lament, the *New York Sun* says: "A very considerable part of the Jews, made up almost wholly from among those who have attained to prosperity, are practically without any religious faith at all. They pay no heed to the Law in their meats and drinks, and thus outrage the convictions and susceptibilities of the orthodox. So far from being averse to marrying with Christians, some of them are ambitious of such alliances; but in giving up Judaism they give up all religion, and such respect as they pay to Christianity is merely perfunctory." All this is true, we think. The better educated of the Jews, particularly the Germans, are Freethinkers, having no faith in supernaturalism of any variety.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Henry James Capon, aged 31, pleaded guilty at the Old Bailey to forging cheques, and was sentenced by the Recorder to five years' penal servitude. He had been employed by Messrs. King & Co., timber merchants, Gracechurch-street; many of his transactions were imaginary, and his defalcations

amounted to £1,600. It was urged in his defence that he had given largely to philanthropic objects, and had given 150 Bibles to Sunday Schools. "Yes," said the Recorder, "he seems to have been very liberal with other people's money."

An African chief, and an important one too, has been telling the British agent that he is a Christian, and also a Mohammedan and a Pagan. Being a friend of toleration, he carries it to its farthest limit. He is ready to take on the faiths of all his subjects—just to show there is no offence. We daresay he has a private belief of his own, and we venture to think it is a humorous contempt for the whole lot of faiths he has ever heard of.

California has joined the rest of the United States in helping along the religious business. Buildings devoted to the Lord—in other words, to his commission agents—are now free from taxation there. Under the American Constitution, this is the only way in which religion can be endowed. And the Churches make the most of it.

National Secular Society.

REPORT of Monthly Executive Meeting held on Thursday, January 3, 1901; the President, Mr. G. W. Foote, in the chair. There were present: Messrs. E. Bater, T. Gorniot, W. Heaford, W. Leat, B. Munton, J. Neate, V. Roger, F. Schaller, H. Stace, T. Shore, T. Thurlow, Charles Watts, and the Secretary.

Minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed. Cash statement received and adopted. The Secretary was instructed to arrange lectures for Finsbury Park during the summer months. It was also resolved to review the whole of the Outdoor Propaganda at the next meeting, and to obtain from all Branch Secretaries full particulars of their outdoor meetings.

The President reported that an application had been made to the executors of the late Mr. S. Hartmann for the money held by him as Treasurer.

The question of future Treasurership was discussed, and it was moved by Mr. Gorniot, seconded by Mr. Neate: "That this Executive ask the Directors of the Secular Society, Limited, to open a sub-account at their bank, and to receive funds of the N. S. S."

The President also reported upon the London Lecture Scheme.

A motion by Mr. Munton concerning the financial position of the Society was by general consent adjourned until next meeting.

Fourteen new members were admitted.

Mr. Roger moved, and Mr. Heaford seconded: "That this Executive recommend the Directors of the Secular Society, Limited, to take up twelve shares in the new international Free-thought journal, *La Raison*." It was also understood that the paper would be obtainable from the Free-thought Publishing Company, Limited.

The meeting then adjourned.

EDITH M. VANCE, *Secretary*.

Shilling Week.

R. Gibbon, 5s.; J. W. Bolton, 2s.; R. Lewis, 2s.; J. Wilson, 5s.; E. W. Tekell, 1s.; J. O. Bath, 2s.; J. Herrington, 2s. 6d.; W. Caisey, 10s.; E. Wilson, 10s.; W. Lines, 2s.; G. Pinches, 2s.; J. Howard, 3s.; F. Purland, 2s.; J. R. Webley, 12s.; G. A. Kersley, 2s.; W. Garthwaite, 3s.; J. Bradshaw, 2s. 6d.; J. E. Nixon, 2s.; T. Holstead, 2s.; Shellback, 2s. 6d.; D. Frankel, 2s.; T. Whiteley, 5s.; J. P. S., 2s.; H. Porter, 1s.; W. Rowland, 2s.; J. G. Dobson, 2s.; Miss McCrae, 1s.; W. Albin, 1s.; W. W. Pearce, 5s.; R. Axelby, 2s.; E. E. B., 5s.; Emma Bradlaugh, 2s. 6d.; V. Page, 1s.; C. Atkinson, 2s.; Mary E. Scott, 3s.; E. Bowen, 1s.; D. Jones, 2s. 6d.; H. Lees Sumner, 2s. 6d.; F. Pattison, 2s.; F. Guainazzi, 2s. 6d.; T. Ollerenshaw, 2s.; J. R. Evans, 1s.; R. Johnson, 5s.; R. S., 1s.; J. W., 1s.; James Fulton, 5s.; S. B. W. D., 1s.; W. Wilson, 2s.; G. Howlett, 1s.; D. and J., 3s.; John Bray, 2s.; J. S., 2s.; J. Hockin, 1s.; E. Evelin, 4s.; J. L., 2s.; W. Fleming, 5s.; R. Norcott, 1s.; J. B. Skeoch, 10s. 6d.; W. Wright, 1s.; H. E., 5s.; J. Edmonds, 2s. 6d.; F. W., 2s.; J. M. Mumm, 2s.; R. Shaw, 2s.; Mrs. Kimberley, 1s.; Mr. Kimberley, 1s.; F. Simons, 1s.; G. D. Baker, 1s.; C. A. W., 1s.; R. Daniel, 2s. 6d.; J. Hindle, 2s.; A. Rowley, 1s.; John Bale, 2s. 6d.; C. Riddle, 3s.; T. Lowndes, 1s.; D. Wallworth, 5s.; T. Warwick, 2s.; T. Hibbott, 2s.; C. Watkinson, 1s.; John Walker, 4s.; R. Davison, 10s.; T. Fisher, 2s. 6d.; Mrs. Fisher, 2s. 6d.; G. Calcutt, 2s.; W. Banks, 5s.; G. Stanway, 5s.; Policeman, 2s. 6d.; C. Elger, 1s.; A. Tickle, 2s.; G. Brittain, 2s.; Anarchist, 4s.; G. Childs, 5s.; A. Ball, 4s.; F. O. Ford, 5s.; W. Rowland, 2s. 6d.; J. Lawson, 1s.; J. Little, 2s.; F. G., 2s. 6d.; J. Fish, 5s.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, January 13, Athenæum Hall, Tottenham Court-road; 7-30, "Shakespeare and the Bible: A Contrast and a Comparison."

To Correspondents.

- MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS—January 20, Sheffield; 27, Leicester.—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.
- N. S. S. GENERAL FUND.—Miss Vance acknowledges:—A Gatehead Friend, 5s.
- MARY E. SCOTT.—We are much pleased with your letter. A Freethinking wife and mother is a pledge of a certain amount of solid success to Freethought in the future.
- E. BOWEN.—Glad to hear you derive so much edification, as well as pleasure, from reading this journal every week, as you have done for the past two years. Our answer to your query about Atheism is as follows. The "A" before Theism and Theist is simply privative. Theism, therefore, is belief in God; and Atheism is non-belief in God. A Theist is a believer in God; an Atheist is a non-believer in God. Practically, a Theist has a God, and an Atheist is without a God.
- D. JONES.—Never mind; it would be a grand subscription if every Freethinker gave as liberally as yourself.
- F. W. L.—We are pleased to hear of Mr. Hales' success in the Portsmouth School Board elections. In the long run "Secular Education" is the most dangerous enemy of priestcraft—and the priests know it.
- FREETHOUGHT TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND.—T. Holstead, 5s.; Mrs. Daniel Baker, £1 (second subscription); D. Jones, 10s.; Geo. Newman, 10s.; J. Hindle, 10s.
- J. PARTRIDGE.—We thought the members would take that view of the matter.
- H. LEES SUMNER.—The communication you refer to never reached Mr. Foote. We suppose it went astray, as letters sometimes do, even in our much-lauded Post Office.
- F. GUAINAZZI.—Shall be pleased to see you at the Annual Dinner. Come by all means, and introduce yourself in the reception-room.
- T. OLLERENSHAW.—We wish all Freethinkers felt as you do, that financial support is necessary to accelerate the triumph of Freethought. While the Christian Churches are raising so much money, it behoves the Freethought party to provide a weighty counteractant.
- F. J. VOISEY.—Returned as requested. The *Bulletin* verses are severe to the point of bigotry on the Jews. Are they not? Thanks for cuttings. Miss Vance has sent Almanack. We intend to deal with Dr. Dillon's article next week.
- S. HOLMAN.—See paragraph. Order passed on for execution.
- R. JOHNSON writes: "I regret very much to see what trouble you have had week after week in begging for the Freethought Twentieth Century Fund. People ought to have responded at the first asking. However, you have done *your* duty in the matter, as you always do in everything you take up."
- JAMES FULTON.—We have handed the Secretary your annual subscription to the Secular Society, Limited. Always very pleased to hear from a veteran Freethinker like yourself.
- W. WILSON.—As you say, C. D. Stephens' letter ought to have stirred them up.
- G. HOWLETT.—Unfortunately, such bigotry is only too common.
- GEO. NEWMAN, in subscribing, writes: "Permit me to express my admiration for the ability, courage, and energy with which you and your able colleagues are carrying on the propaganda."
- G. S.—Glad to hear you find the *Freethinker* educational. We mean it to be that, though we do *not* make it solemn.
- E. EVELIN.—We certainly did not *intend* our last week's article to be "doleful." We do not feel that way ourselves, and never did. Looking back at our last paragraph, we consider it strikes a note of triumph.
- WILLIAM and JESSIE HARDAKER.—We cordially reciprocate your new year's good wishes.
- HAROLD ELLIOT.—We quite agree with you. If one designation is given up to disarm bigotry, the next designation will soon become as objectionable. It is what Shakespeare would call a world-without-end process.
- J. EDMONDS.—Pleased to see our "hard work" appreciated.
- F. W. (Walham Green).—We also wish your subscription could be "hundreds."
- R. CHILD.—Many thanks. We will write you on the subject.
- G. STANWAY.—The experiment does not always succeed, but it generally does, and is always worth trying. Thanks.
- POLICEMAN.—You do your part, anyhow.
- W. P. BALL.—Thanks for cuttings.
- E. R. WOODWARD.—Such a conversation is hardly a business report. We are always ready to insert an official statement.
- G. MULLETT.—The late Rev. Professor Momerie was not a Freethinker in the usual sense of the word. He was a liberal-minded Theist.
- R. DANIEL.—Glad to have your expression of confidence.
- D. WALLWORTH.—The "drink question" is a very difficult one to deal with. For our part, we trust chiefly to the spread of intelligence and education.

J. HINDLE writes: "Let me felicitate you on the good work you are doing."

J. FISH.—If all were as generous as you are in proportion to means, the party would never lack ample funds.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—North Devon Herald—Free Sunday Advocate—The Ledge (New Denver)—Liberator—Morning Post—Secular Thought—Democracy—Boston Investigator—Truthseeker (New York)—Liverpool Mercury—Peterhead Sentinel—Blue Grass Blade—Two Worlds—Crescent—Truthseeker (Bradford)—Freidenker.

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.

Special.

I HAVE to ask my readers to excuse all editorial shortcomings in this week's *Freethinker*. One cannot be always in first-rate form. I had a cold journey to Birmingham on Saturday evening. On Sunday I delivered three lectures there—a very heavy day's work in any case. It was bitterly cold; and, not being able to keep a private brougham, like a Spurgeon, I had to breast the nipping east wind each time I left the platform for my hotel. On Monday morning I spent nearly three hours in a cold London and North-Western railway carriage, which contained no heating apparatus, and was just fit for cattle—or rather it was *not* fit for cattle. Arriving in London at 12.30, I had to run home. Then I went in haste to my office, worked there till 7, and had to ride on the top of a 'bus to the Temperance Hall, in Blackfriars-road, where I lectured in a freezing temperature to a half-frozen audience. The result is quite natural—a beastly cold. Not a dangerous one, but a disabling and depressing one. I am too conscious that I have a nose, too conscious that I have a throat, and too conscious that I have a head—with a back to it. And perhaps, by this time, the readers of the *Freethinker* are too conscious that it has an editor. So I will prudently wish them all a happy new year, and ask them, as they are in the majority, to be not only strong but merciful. I will try to compensate them next week.

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

MR. FOOTE lectures this evening (Jan 13) at the Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham-court-road, London, W. His subject will be "Shakespeare and the Bible: A Contrast and a Comparison." This is an entirely new lecture, and there should be a crowded audience if the weather is at all propitious.

It was bitterly cold in Birmingham on Sunday, and most people kept within doors. Even in the evening a gun might almost have been fired with safety down New-street, which is usually so crowded with promenaders. In the circumstances, it was not surprising that Mr. Foote's morning and afternoon lectures were only moderately attended. The real wonder was that such a crowded audience assembled in the evening. After the lecture a good collection was made towards the financial deficit on Mr. Percy Ward's School Board candidature.

Amongst those who were kept away from Mr. Foote's lectures at Birmingham was the veteran Mr. Ridgway, one of the N. S. S. vice-presidents. Mr. Ridgway's advanced age compels him to be very careful. He sent his best regards to Mr. Foote, who reciprocates them with the greatest sincerity. Mr. Ridgway is one of those steadfast supporters, in adversity no less than in prosperity, of whom any cause might be proud.

Mrs. Baker, of Birmingham, widow of the veteran Mr. Daniel Baker, sends a second subscription of £1 to the

Freethought Twentieth Century Fund. Miss Baker, who forwards it on her mother's behalf, regrets that she was unable to attend any of Mr. Foote's lectures on Sunday. The weather was trying, and kept many away from the meetings.

The Birmingham Branch held a special members' meeting on Monday evening, to decide whether the Branch should return to the Board Schools for Sunday lectures on the prescribed condition—namely, that no literature of any kind should be sold or distributed. This condition is not applied to any other Society than the Secularists. In these circumstances, the members decided not to go back. Meetings will, therefore, be continued in the Prince of Wales Assembly Room.

Mr. S. M. Peacock, who has for fifteen years been a member of the South Shields School Board on the "Secular Education" ticket, is once more appealing to the electors in a brief but sufficient address. His program and his past services are well known. The election takes place on Wednesday, January 16, and we should very much like to see Mr. Peacock at the top of the poll. We take it for granted that all the local Freethinkers, and all who believe in Secular Education as the only proper policy in Board Schools, will give him their undivided support. Each of them has thirteen votes to give Mr. Peacock.

Mr. J. Hales has been returned as a member of the Portsmouth School Board. Formerly he failed with 5,600 votes; this time he succeeded with 7,286 votes. He included "Secular Education" in his program, and we strongly advised the local Secularists to support him. We are now asked to thank those who assisted in electing him on the Board.

Mr. E. Treharne-Jones lectured at Merthyr on Sunday. He lectures there again to-day (Jan. 13) in the Trevethick Hall, his subject being "Christianity—Pagan, not Jewish."

Secular Thought (Toronto) reproduces "Mimnermus's" article on Gibbon from our columns. Mr. Heaford's article on Freethought in France is reproduced in the *Truthseeker* (New York).

Mr. Joseph Symes reproduces in his *Liberator* (Melbourne) the article on "Agnostic Nonsense" by the editor of the *Freethinker*. Mr. Symes adds some words of his own on the subject, most of which are reproduced in this week's "Acid Drops." His condemnation of Mr. Holyoake is very straightforward and decisive; too much so, we fear, for some Freethinkers in the old country. For the sake of peace and quiet, therefore, we refrain from reprinting this particular paragraph.

Monday evening (Jan. 14) is the date of the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner at the Holborn Restaurant. Mr. Foote will preside as usual, and will be supported by Messrs. C. Watts, C. Cohen, and other leading Secularists. The tickets are 4s. each, and can be obtained of Miss Vance, at 1 Stationers' Hall Court, E.C., or of any London Branch secretary. For the sum of 4s. those who attend will secure a good dinner, good company, good music, perhaps some good speaking, and an opportunity for conversation with representative men and women in the Freethought movement. There ought to be a grand rally of "saints" on this occasion. Let the new century be started with a notable social gathering, at which we may all lay in a stock of enthusiasm for the work of "the good old cause."

It has already been announced, but we repeat it, that there will be no collecting cards and no financial appeals at this new century's dinner. At the present moment a special appeal at such a function is neither necessary nor advisable.

Several persons have asked Miss Vance whether evening dress is necessary at the dinner. Certainly not. There is no reason in the world why guests should be obliged to dress like the waiters, or why all of them should dress alike. We don't want a butcher in a smock-frock, or a navy in corduroys. The costume a man gets his living in should be abandoned, and every man should wear what the French call a citizen's dress—that is to say, some sort of cloth raiment. As for the ladies, they will of course dress as they like. They generally do. But we hope they will eschew knickerbockers. When a man is dining, he would rather have a frock next him than a pair of trousers—or half trousers.

The popular annual social gathering of the members and friends of the South Shields Branch of the N. S. S. was held in the Infants' School-rooms, Baring-street, under the patronage and presence of the President, Mr. S. M. Peacock, Mr. and Mrs. R. Bow, G. White, and others. There was a large attendance, and the catering, under the management of Mrs. J. Fothergill, gave every satisfaction. Music was provided by Mr. J. Chapman. A happy New Year's Day was enjoyed by old and young.—*Shields Gazette*.

God's Answers.

"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee."—*Psalms i. 15.*

"Good Lord, deliver me," murmured the widow. "I have three children, and none of them can earn bread. Morning, noon, and night have I labored to feed and clothe them. If my hand fails, these little ones will weep amid strangers. And it is like to fail. The physician examined me this morning, while the nurses stood by, some pitying, some indifferent; and he told me I suffered from incurable cancer. He gave me six months to live. In six months I pass from the light of day, and my three children will cry after me."

And God said to the angels: "Create a new star; and let it be attended by planets that swing in age-long revolutions about their central fire; and let the heavens declare my glory."

A seven-year-old boy sat under the oak on the hill-side. There came a troop of village lads and lassies along a lane; and they bounded over the stile, and sported in the meadow; and gathered blackberries along the hedge, and nuts in the hazel copse; and then they hurried, with shouts and laughter, to the brook; and leaped from boulder to boulder amid the little stream, and floated paper-boats on the eddies; and then they romped gleefully in a kissing-game.

"Kind Father," whispered the boy under the oak-tree, "I was born with a maimed foot. Heal me, and let me run."

And God said to the angels: "Fling abroad the lightnings, and loosen the winds; and prepare the chariot in which I ride through the black confusion of the storm."

A tiger-light was in the man's eyes as he watched among the bushes; his blood pulsed with vicious fever. Along the forest glade tripped the maid, her basket on her arm, her blue skirt fluttering. She sang a song she had learned at the village church:—

The King of Love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his,
And he is mine for ever.

He that lay in wait strode forward; and she, looking into his fatal eyes, cried "Christ save me."

And God said to the angels: "Mix the colors of an incomparable sunset—purple patches on golden haze, and crimson streaks across a rain of green and opal and russet; and the poets will write sonnets while the splendors fade into dusk."

A peasant family sat hopeless on a low hill that overlooked the flooded vale. Here and there a willow peeped above the swirl, swaying with each rush of the waters. The roof of a cottage rose desolate amidst the muddy tide. The modest household was destroyed, and its remnants were tossed despitefully on the torrent; and the bright garden was overwhelmed, and the orchard swamped. When the river had brimmed over its bank, and begun to lap the threshold of the cottage, the peasant had prayed: "May the Almighty Arm protect us from ruin."

And God said to the angels: "Powder the mountains with virgin snow; plant cedars in the glens; and make me blue lakes to reflect my heavenly palaces."

The galloping of squadrons; the tramp of invaders; the tearing of artillery up difficult hills; the sudden shouts of the ambush; the crack of rifles behind rocks, amongst trees, from windows; the dropping of strong men; the binding of bandages spotted with blood; wounded men cursing and sobbing in ditches; dead men opening their mouths to the cynical stars; farm-houses filled with smoke, and the flames shooting about the edges of the thatch. In sight of their burning homes, the people knelt and sighed: "Dear God, make wars to cease, and bring peace on earth and goodwill to men."

And God said to the angels: "Bid the blasts rest to-day; and let the seas lie placid, so that I may behold the secret caves that yawn below, where Behemoth and Leviathan dive, and let the nautilus steer its lovely shell on the unruffled deep."

Slaves toiled in the cotton plantations; and kidnapped

islanders from the South Seas gathered in the sugar-harvests of the white settlers. Women sewed all night for a few coppers; farm laborers made the soil bear richly, and took starvation-wages home; and men and women, lads and girls, worked in the close air of factories—worked till they were blear-eyed, coarse-brained, cold-hearted, indifferent to music and letters and country charms. And out of the fume, and the steam, and the sweat, and the blight, they all besought the Lord of heaven to give them joy instead of heaviness.

And God said to the angels: "Bring me amethysts; bring me sapphires; bring me agates; bring me all manner of gems and crystals, that I may see how lavishly I have ornamented the very dungeons of the earth."

The Hindus were stricken with famine. In groups they fell, they died. Officials, well-fed, rode for miles to and from the relief-stations, and counted the thin corpses, and registered the ghastly numbers in schedules. Vultures hovered and swooped and ate. Hunger-bitten people crawled towards the place where a handful of rice would prolong their hapless lives. Their lips offered no prayer. Their wasted bowels prayed; their blood-shot eyes prayed; the milkless breasts of the women prayed: "God of Grace, have compassion."

And God said to the angels: "The lion and the eagle, the cattle and the creeping things, and the fowls of the air praise my majesty and my providence." And the angels replied, "Holy is the Lord God Almighty."

The fool looked at a fragment of chalk, and knew naught of its wondrous history. He saw a fossil in the rock, and never asked how it came to resemble a living creature. In the stars he perceived no interest, in his own body no marvel. To him the book conveyed no message, and the conversation of the wise kindled no emotion in his breast. Crass and stolid, he stumbled like a beast through the dull years of a life that never gained knowledge. But once, when he passed by a school, and heard the children sing, he muttered: "Father, teach me."

And God said to the angels: "It is the season of harvest. Go, make the wheat golden, and scatter the scarlet poppies amid the corn, that men may praise my bounty; and in all the works of my divine hands let them read the evidence of benevolent design."

And Disease, and Vice, and Terror, and Cruelty, and War, and Oppression, and Famine, and Ignorance moaned together in echo—*Design!* F. J. GOULD.

God, where art Thou?

No man knows God. The divine being is not a fact included within our knowledge. The divine existence is not susceptible of proof. Knowledge and science, demonstration and proof, can neither affirm nor deny the existence of God. The telescope reveals magnitude, but not infinitude. The microscope discloses the minute, but not the infinitely small. The figures on the blackboard demonstrate the theorem, but their sum and conclusion is not God. The law that proves the revolution and habit of one planet is applicable to all the planets, and the mind says "Infinite." It has taken refuge in a word; it has hidden its ignorance under a term. Unable to account for the universe, the mind of man makes a bold assumption, and says God created the world. It does not know; it cannot tell; it must have a supposition to start with, and it says God created the world. Man, to explain himself, to account for his intuitions, his moral sense, and his aspirations, says God is, and man is made in his likeness. Man does not know that; it has never been revealed nor discovered; it is simply an utterance like the other, compelled by the laws of thinking; it is an hypothesis, and only that. According to the fable, God walked in the cool of the garden and cried, "Adam, where art thou?" In all the ages of man upon the earth this infinite being has been walking in the mystery, in the darkness, and man has been crying, "God, where art thou?"

In all the ages of man upon the earth there has come from the silence no voice. The infinite has never said:

"Here I am; I am God." It is easily within the reach of the imagination that the infinite might have revealed himself. Having all things at his command, and knowing of all events before they were, possessing infinite intelligence and power, the infinite surely might have devised some plan of self-revelation, but did not. He remained silent; he continued to be unknown. He did not see fit to reply to the crying of the human world, and there is nothing left for us but to conclude that the infinite preferred to remain unknown. We had no choice in the matter; the responsibility is not upon us. We did not decide the question whether or not God should be known to this world; that silence was self-imposed. The reverent mind will respect that silence.

Since the infinite has withheld any revelation of himself, any assumed revelation is impious. Since the infinite has withheld any revelation of himself, the utmost blasphemy is that of man or institution or book that claims to be a revelation of him. The Bible does not reveal God. Think of the book the infinite might have written, think of the work of an infinite intelligence, the genius, the imagination, the divine power to utter words, the ability to make the language of the lip an exact reproduction of the thrilled and throbbing heart—the perfect union and blend between the lip and the brain.

I almost wish God had written a book; and, if he had, does anyone suppose there could have been a moment's doubt about its divine origin? Nobody doubts now that Shakespeare was a genius; nobody ever doubted that Homer was a master of epic poetry; but God's work would have made Shakespeare's and Homer's book primers.

It seems to me a ghastly sarcasm, the soul and heart of irreligion, to call a book God's Word. If God had written a book, there would not have been any historical discrepancies; the statements referring to the laws of the world, the planets and their revolutions, and other related scientific facts, would have been accurate, and the author of it, if he had been elected to the House of Representatives, might have been permitted to take his seat. If he had written it, it would not have upheld slavery nor countenanced concubinage or polygamy. The Bible is not a revelation of God, and everything that has been claimed as a revelation of God has, by its pitiable failure, shown the wisdom of the non-revealing God. They say the Church is a divine institution, the ground and pillar of truth, the only place in the world that God thinks good enough for him to dwell in. As a matter of fact, the Church in every age has had all the wickedness, all the corruption, all the meanness that belonged to the age in which it lived; it never was any better than the moral average of the generation to which it belonged. To speak of it as a revelation of God—well, it enables one to understand why in this human world there is such an intense prejudice against God.

They speak of God's "call," God's ordainment. There is a sort of revelation of God. The increase in the membership of the Church since 1898 has been a little less than one per cent.; but the increase in the number of churches has been still less; yet the increase in the number of ministers—that is, in the "called," in God's anointed—has been ten times greater than the increase in the number of pulpits. Now, what is the legitimate inference?—that God calls ten men where there is only a place for one? Here is a fact to be borne in mind, that it has always been the habit of men to assume the name of God to give prominence and power to their call.

Religion has always been a coward; it has never dared to stand and win or lose upon the strength of its own appeal to the intelligence and moral sense of men. It has sought the prestige that comes of an assumed sanctimoniousness and special favoritism with God. If a man appears to-day and says, "I have a mission from the Almighty God, I have a message from God," he is promptly and at once, and by all classes, set down as a crank; and yet all the old institutions and all the preachers are making the same claim. It makes God so small, so little, that we pity the poor infinite. Think of speaking of God's book, of God's church, of God's anointed, of God's ordinance! Think of it! Is God a sectarian? To what denomination does he belong?

Was he baptised by immersion or sprinkled in his infancy, or after he had arrived at the age of an adult? Does anybody down in his heart believe it? Suppose that you had a book that you believed God had written, what would you care about the Higher Criticism or the Lower Criticism? What about the discoveries of science or the theories of the evolutionists? Would not a man, if he believed it, stand in the face of all science, all discovery, all criticism, and resist with a smile of indifference every attack? Let all the world be the liar, let all science be confounded—this is God's book. Every letter, every word, and the punctuation marks are inspired.

If a set of men believed God had especially called them, what would be their attitude? If they had a mission from the highest, a message for the salvation of men, what would they care for the music, the upholstering of the church, the frescoing of the walls, the fine building, the elegant and comfortable surroundings—what of that? They would think of the lack of comfort in hell, and plead with men to escape it.

If God has an institution in this world, it ought to be supreme. Every organisation of men ought to be subjected to it. If the infinite had exercised his wisdom and had put an organisation here, then all the other organisations, principalities, and powers among men ought to bow down to it—every one of them. The Catholic Church says it is such an institution. They have raised up and cast down thrones. They have a leader crowned with a triple crown—the ecclesiastical, the spiritual, and temporal authority. They had the power once; some think they expect to have it again, and are trying to have it; but, whether that is true or not, the position is consistent. If the Church is God's organised power, and the only one in the world, it ought to be supreme.

The other day a company of ministers went before the Police Board, and engaged in a simian performance. One of the ministers, in the course of the interview, as reported, said: "We are not here as ministers; we are here as citizens." Think of it—a man called by God, anointed, and set apart as an emissary and representative of the Infinite, of the Everlasting, choosing to lay down the dignity of that great position, and stand just as an ordinary man, as a citizen. If I was the infinite governor of this world, and had a representative who threw down the robes of authority and dignity that I had put on him, I would recall him and cancel his commission by telegraph.

We like honesty, consistency; and if the called are all that word implies, let them stand to it, and for it. If I thought I stood here as the representative of God—my imagination stops right there.

Think of God's ordinances, the sacraments. What are these ordinances of God? They are not the rising and setting of the sun; nor the coming in the night of a constellation of stars; nor the approach of spring with the smell of sweet earth, nor the wooing of the south wind. Those are not God's ordinances. It is not human love, where spirit meets spirit, and blends in the unspeakable mystery of loving and being loved; that is not one of God's ordinances. But what are they? Take out the floor of the tabernacle, line the space below with zinc, and fill it with water; go down into it, and come up out of it—that is an ordinance; or take bread and break it, and wine, and pass them around—that is an ordinance of God. Think of it! Oh, how little, how poor, how wanting in magnitude, is religion in its conception of God. Is it thinkable that the maker of the seven stars and the solar star is any more in the baptismal pool than he is in the mother loving her child? Is he any more in the bread that is broken by the hands of the priests, and the wine that is poured, than he is in the honest handclasp of mutual friends? Is he any more in one place than he is in another, or in one thing than he is in another, simply because the priests have said he is?

I resent the littleness of these conceptions, because they are unjust to man and degrading to God. We may respect the priest in his functions, the honest preacher in his attempts to reach the secret of things and make men better by holding up the ideal; but why call the man with his priestly robes God's anointed, any more than you would call the man with blacksmith's apron God's anointed?

If God is partial to the men that pray on the streets and take up collections everywhere, and not to the man and woman that work and toil, then we want a new God. Let us defend the honor of the infinite.

God never told us the secret of himself, and we infer he never wanted us to know. Living, then, just as if there were no God, what would be wanting as sanctions for the right, the just, and the true? What would be lacking as an inspiration or support of the moral idea? Under that conception truth would be what we find out; not revelation, not something to be believed, but something to be discovered. After all, it may be that the great value of truth is not in knowing it; it is in seeking to know it; it is not so much in possession of truth as it is in the pursuit of it. The world has always been able to find out enough for immediate use.

Can a man serve God? What does the language mean? We have heard it all our lives; thousands of ministers this minute are imploring people to serve God. What does it mean? Can we benefit him or injure him? Can we bring anything to him that he has not already? Can we take anything away from him and diminish his stores? If we take the words "serve God" and seek the meaning, what is there in them? I know it is worked into song and hymn, and ritual and literature, and orations and rhetoric, and is part of our common intellectual life—the idea of serving God; but what do we mean by that? Loving him? What do we mean by it? It is more important to love one's wife and children than to love God. It is more important to serve one's neighbor and friend than to serve God; and maybe that is what loving God and serving God really mean, after all.

As to morals. If we are to live as if there were no God, nothing is taken away from the sanction of right-doing, because the moral standard of the world is one that is filled up out of experience. The world never had any conception of morals until it reached it by experience—by experiment—by trying. The thing that was a virtue in one age becomes a vice in another; and what was once considered a vice comes to be regarded as a virtue. The world never needed other revelation than experience.

There is a natural morality and there is an unnatural morality. The unnatural morality is the kind that comes to us by revelation, and is useless in the world. A man may conform to all the prescribed ordinances of the Church and not be any better, being worse, because he has made the pretension of being better; and no man who seeks to do the right thing, the fair thing, the square thing, needs any other morality, and can perform no higher service to man and to God.

It is my belief that religion diminishes the moral force of the world. Suppose the millions of people that are satisfied with the Church morality, and the Church service and its requirements, and hope to win heaven and shun hell that way, should have taken away from them this morality, and be thrown back upon their own resources, and should be told that they had to work out their own salvation; that there was not any atonement, any faith that could save them from hell; they had to save themselves. Suppose that was the condition, then what would men do? They would say: "If that is the case, the thing for us to see to is that we order our lives in such a way that everybody else may be given an equal chance and be made as happy as possible, and not be entrapped or burdened by anything we do."

Do you know what I think? I think that right here in this world, as it is, with the present folks, there is enough power and enough justice to make everybody happy that deserves to be, and those that don't we need not pity, or even think about. But we have not got at it yet; we do not know how it is to be done, and will never know how it is to be done, until we stop serving an unknown and exerting our forces along lines that lead into mystery; until we stop planning our lives in accordance with a map drawn and stereotyped by the priests, and arrange our lives with reference to the human needs that lie about us.

As to salvation. How are we going to be saved, living as if there were no God? Saved from what? Saved from a God? If we live as if there were no God, then we do not have to be saved from him. That doctrine of salvation is a bugbear devised for priests' profits; they first conceive of an angry God, and then conceive of a

salvation which they have for sale. The honest soul does not need to think of salvation; he can afford to pass it by. The concern of an honest soul is how not to damn anybody here, or mingle any bitterness or fear of hell in any heart or life by anything one does. As to the future, I will say, if it comes, it will be time to attend to it then.

Kansas.

(DR.) J. E. ROBERTS.

Church Wealth in France.

THE French Government has been at pains to ascertain the value of real estate owned in France by monastic orders, in view of the impending debate on the Bill on Religious Associations. Figures have been supplied by the Inland Revenue Office, and are to be embodied by M. Waldeck-Rousseau in a Parliamentary paper. They are, of course, absolutely reliable as far as they go. That is to say, they do not include personalty, and probably they are not exhaustive. The returns are based upon land taxes paid by the Monastic orders, or on their account. The Director of the Inland Revenue gives their real estate under two heads. Firstly lands which the monks and nuns admit belong to their order, and secondly lands (or houses) owned nominally by private people, but which the Director of the Inland Revenue is satisfied belong to Monastic orders. It is a favorite trick of French monks and nuns, in order to evade payment of main-morte duty (a commutation of succession duties), to entrust their real estate to some wealthy "man of straw." In the course of the domiciliary visit paid by the police to the Assumptionist Monks a letter was seized from such a "man of straw," stating that, should he die suddenly, he wished his heirs to understand that the Assumptionists' houses and lands were held by him only in order to evade the law.

The Jesuits' real estate in France is assessed by the Inland Revenue at two millions sterling, but not more than a paltry four thousand pounds is held in their own name. The rest nominally belongs to wealthy Catholic trustees. The Assumptionists, who have played such an infamous part in French politics the last three years, are far less wealthy than the Jesuits. They own real estate worth £120,000 sterling. Not a penny of this is returned in their own name. The Christian Brothers are comparatively "straight." They pay rates and taxes on about one million sterling, and evade taxes to the tune of one million and a-half. The nuns of Saint Vincent de Paul admit to owning £800,000 in land, but they have another million and a-half or over held by friends. Altogether the value of real estate of Monastic orders in France amounts to forty-four millions sterling—a figure which is all the more startling when one bears in mind that half of it has been accumulated in the last ten or twenty years, and that their wealth is steadily increasing.—*Daily News*.

Correspondence.

CHRISTIANITY AND SLAVERY.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Mr. Cohen mistakes a Christian's view of the effect of his religion upon slavery. I therefore earnestly hope you will kindly allow a correct version of the matter to appear before your readers. I shall be as brief as possible.

Christianity might have assailed slavery in one of two ways. Thus the former might have taught clearly the latter was a vile institution, and that every bondman was entitled to assert his freedom, if he could. This the New Testament does not do. If it did, we may imagine that bloody massacres and insurrections would have sprung up everywhere, had such teachings laid hold of the servile race. I will not suggest what the fate of Christianity would have been after such transactions. But it is quite certain that its rejectors in all ages would be asserting that its original progress was merely due to bloodshed, commotion, and anarchy.

Christianity destroyed slavery by teaching doctrines under whose influence, when realised, the latter melted away gradually, just as an iceberg dissolves under the sun after drifting south from northern glaciers. I give some illustrations. First, the complete equality of all persons in its sight: how that in Christ among other evils swept away was the distinction between "bond and free" (Colos. iii. 11). Second, how that believers belong to the same family, as they have in God a common Father (Gal. iii. 26). These teachings would be pressed home continually by the use of the two Sacraments. Thus candidates for baptism would be taught they were being enlisted into the same army of salvation, and candidates for the Lord's supper that they were commemorating the self-sacrifice of the same Savior, who died for each and all. Space forbids my saying more.

Mr. Cohen implies Christianity did not destroy slavery, as it did not do so ages past. To this I reply the Bible was little known for many centuries. Further, in some mysterious way we cannot explain, conscience is awakened to the greatness of evils previously little noticed. Thus about a century

ago the vileness of duelling was almost ignored, and the evils (now seen by the Churches) of neglecting missions to the heathen.

I conclude by saying that before Christianity no ancient nation perceived the baseness of slavery; nor does any modern nation even now, where the influence of Christianity is not felt.

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

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Friends of the Society who have remembered it in their wills, or who intend to do so, should formally notify the Secretary of the fact, or send a private intimation to the Chairman, who will (if desired) treat it as strictly confidential. This is not necessary, but it is advisable, as wills sometimes get lost or mislaid, and their contents have to be established by competent testimony.

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, G. W. Foote, "Shakespeare and the Bible: A Contrast and a Comparison."

CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30 E. B. Rose (late of the *Transvaal Leader*), "The Truth about the Transvaal."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell-road): 7, J. M. Robertson, "The Darwinian Method in Morals."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, R. P. Edwards; 7.15, J. W. Cox.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, A lecture.

COUNTRY.

ABERDEEN (Northern Friendly Society's Hall): 6.30, A lecture.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): H. P. Ward—3, "A Search for God"; 7, "Christian Ministers: What they Preach and What they Practise."

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school; 7, Annual Meeting: Balance-sheet, election of officers (members only).

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): 12, O. Fraser, "Is there a God"; 6.30, A. G. Nostic, "The Ancient Mariner"; with lantern illustrations.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, W. Glanville, "Carlyle's *French Revolution*."

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, A lecture.

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, M. T. Sims, "Land Reform and the Common Good."

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): Mr. Gorrill—3, "Machinery and Tools in the Paris Exhibition" (with specimens of work); 7, Will repeat the more important lantern illustrations shown some weeks ago—with additions thereto—of special objects of interest seen in Paris and the Exhibition, and description of the same.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7, "The School Board Election."

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