

THE Freethinker

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The Witness-Box.

SCENE: A Police-court, now empty after the business of the day. A NEW TESTAMENT resting languidly on an OLD TESTAMENT at a corner of the witness-box ledge. The two volumes gossip in faint whispers.

NEW TESTAMENT (*sighing*): Ah, dear me. I'm glad it's over—for the day at least. The times I've been kissed this morning and afternoon! It was the same yesterday; it will be the same to-morrow, and so on, I suppose, until I fall to pieces. I'm sick of it, and that's "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me, God"!

OLD TESTAMENT: Tut, tut. Sick of being kissed! You're but a young thing yet. Why should you complain of being kissed? 'Tis but natural that the nice young Gentiles, if no others, should take you up and kiss you.

N. T. (*coquettishly*): Do you really think so?

O. T.: Yes, I swear it—s'help me, Jehovah. You see you are new. Now look at me: I'm labelled "Old" in gilt letters on my back. Doesn't that give a lady away? By the holy Moses, I've only been kissed three times to-day.

N. T. (*sympathetically*): Poor old Testy; and they haven't even licked the dust off its aged cheek.

O. T.: That's true. But you, my young lady, are not quite so blooming as when you first came here—sixteen years ago.

N. T.: Well, how can you preserve your complexion when you are being slobbered over fifty or sixty times a day by all sorts of people—clean and dirty, old and young—and that from one year's end to another? It isn't my fault that they are always smacking their lips over me. (*Beginning to weep*) I feel so very common. (*Savagely*) I wish I could poison some of 'em.

O. T.: That, my dear, is exactly what the doctors say you are very likely to do. They say you collect, and may disseminate, germs of disease.

N. T. (*indignantly*): Oh! Indeed. And am I come down so low as that? But, pray, what about you?

O. T. (*resignedly*): I suppose I am just as dangerous. But never mind. They say the same thing about the chalice at Holy Communion. Your pious and superfine Christians nowadays are afraid to drink after one another from the same cup, even at God's altar. Their Christian brotherly love is not strong enough to stand even so trifling a test as that. The Real Presence of the Lord is apparently quite unequal to nullifying the impurity. The prayers of the priest do not disinfect. A dishelout is thought to be more potent than the Deity as a preventive.

N. T.: No wonder, then, if they are afraid to sip the Wine, they shrink from kissing the Word. What, indeed, are we coming to? But I don't want their kisses. I would often say, in the words of the old song, "Kiss me quick, and go, my honey," if it weren't that very few of the lips that touch me are in any sense "honied," and their owners have to stop and reel off their little yarns—true or false. Then they fumble about me on the ledge with their greasy, fidgetty fingers, till my nerves get as much upset as theirs. I do wish to be treated with some show of respect. Thank God that, at any rate, when gentlemen kiss me, they don't put their hats on.

O. T.: That is aimed at me, isn't it? Well, never mind. After all, what does it matter? Whether hats

are on or off, the lies—the unblushing lies—that are often told are just as villainous.

N. T.: Then it doesn't much matter whether there is any swearing at all. Really, when I come to think about it, I don't know why either you or I should be here. For all the service we render in the way of eliciting true testimony, we might as well be miles away. For my part, I'd sooner be under a flower-pot on the parlor-window table of a working-man's home. There, at least, I could look out into the street. The atmosphere wouldn't be quite so fetid, and I shouldn't be mauled about. No; I might be dusted on cleaning days, but otherwise rarely, if ever, disturbed.

O. T.: Ah, and I could share your repose, because we should probably be bound together. But have you noticed the many different ways in which we are, as you say, "mauled about" here?

N. T.: I notice that nearly everyone takes me in hand and kisses me differently. I can tell by touch, like a blind man. Some make a grab at me, and print on me a loud, echoing smack. Then the folks in the Court titter, and I feel so mad—not that it is my fault, but I hate to be associated with the ridiculous performance of a clown. Others take hold of me timorously, and their hands tremble, whilst I can hardly feel the touch of their lips. These are witnesses who are going to speak the truth. They are the conscientious folk who needn't be sworn at all. The people who come to perjure themselves never seem to have the least compunction about the little formality. You never notice the faintest shake about them.

O. T.: Ah, the lies we have heard in this witness-box, and God called upon by name to listen to them!

N. T.: But then has it never occurred to you that there are some pretty good old liars amongst the God-favored patriarchs who are cracked up in your pages. They could give some of our witnesses more than a few points, and beat them easily in the end. All the same, the patriarchs are now wearing golden crowns and twanging golden harps in heaven.

O. T.: New Testament, know thyself. Haven't Dr. Schmiedel and Dr. Abbott, the latest of the Gospel critics, shown that many sections of your synoptic contents are devoid of credible elements?

N. T.: Excuse me, you are forgetting yourself. If you talk like that I shall ask the officer of the Court to move me away from you.

O. T.: You needn't. Why be so indignant? Let me explain. Why are we in separate volumes on this stand? Because the persons who kiss me wouldn't kiss you.

N. T.: Dear me! They can keep their kisses to themselves. I don't want them. (*Sarcastically*) Aren't we setting ourselves up as somebody!

O. T.: Don't you see—the witnesses who are sworn on me do not believe in the preposterous stories told in your pages. They don't believe that your Christ was the Messiah, that he was born without an earthly father, that he walked on the sea, raised a dead person to life, turned water into wine, cast out devils, was crucified, rose from the tomb, ate fried fish several days after he was dead, and finally ascended to heaven to sit on the right hand of his Father who is himself.

N. T.: Well, on the other hand, my witnesses don't believe in the preposterous stories told in your pages.

O. T.: But they are obliged to accept the major portion, else there is no foundation for their Christian faith.

N. T.: Well, I'm not inclined for argument just now. One thing is certain—the Higher Criticism has about settled the claims of most of your history.

O. T.: And the *Encyclopædia Biblica* has about done for yours.

[*They squabble violently for some minutes.*]

N. T. (*eventually*): Well, if we both contain so much that is false, why are we here in the interests of truth?

O. T.: For witnesses to be sworn on, and the witnesses accommodate themselves to the situation by sticking just as near to the truth as it suits them. They are sworn on *you*, though one of your plainest teachings is "Swear not at all."

N. T.: But that applies only to ordinary conversation.

O. T.: Nonsense. Look inside yourself—Matthew V. It is directed against oaths of any kind, and is so understood by Quakers and other Christians who are not wise above what is written.

N. T.: If that be so, I at least should not be here. By the way, what did you think of the Freethinker who was here yesterday? You saw him push me aside to make an affirmation. I felt quite slighted.

O. T.: Why should you? He would remove both of us from this witness stand and the uncongenial atmosphere of the Court. Would not that be a real service of respect?

N. T.: Decidedly. Good luck to him, say I. But here comes the charwoman. I wish, some night or early morning, it would occur to her to give us a good scrubbing.

O. T.: Truly, she might polish our covers, but, alas! I fear that "not all the perfumes of Arabia" would ever sweeten our pages.

FRANCIS NEALE.

Misconceptions of Freethought.

FREETHOUGHT is a term which, with us, who apply it to our intellectual opinions, has a definite meaning, and one about which there should be a clear understanding. Nevertheless, many who hold views differing from our own are continually falling into error regarding the meaning that we attach to it, and making their misconceptions the basis of arguments against our principles. The two chief errors in reference to Freethought with which we have to contend are, that the term "Freethinker" is synonymous with "Loose Thinker," and that Freethought is utterly incompatible with what is called, but not very correctly, Necessitarianism, which is the theory that in mental phenomena, as in physical, every effect must have a cause; that, therefore, all man's actions, and even his thoughts, result from the operation of fixed laws; and that, consequently, what is usually spoken and written of as Free Will is a figment of the imagination, having no real existence in point of fact. We hope to show that both these views are entirely erroneous.

It was the Rev. Charles Kingsley who first publicly confounded "Freethought" with "Loose Thought"; but why he did so it is difficult to conceive. It is surprising that an able and powerful writer and thinker, such as he undoubtedly was, did not see that there was no necessary connection between the two words. To be free is, assuredly, not to be loose in the sense in which the latter term is employed with reference to habits of thought, or habits of any kind. To loosen is to set free; a free man is, therefore, one who is loosened from his bonds. But in every-day language, no less than in the phraseology of the thinker, "a loose man" is a man who has used his freedom to fasten upon himself other bonds—those of habit—which have robbed him of the very freedom of which he boasts. And a "loose thinker" is one who is without regular method, sound judgment, or the requisite amount of care and discrimination to avoid erroneous conclusions; or, perhaps, a person who seldom thinks at all, in the proper sense of the word. In spite, therefore, of the Christian misconception of the term Freethought, we allege that its true meaning is not loose thought, and we disclaim loose thinkers quite as much as Kingsley did.

If it be contended, on the other hand, that he spoke of Freethinkers as loose thinkers, not because he supposed the words to be synonymous, but on account of the characteristic habits of thinking that he observed in

persons known as Freethinkers, we reply that his examination of the writings of these men furnishes an excellent specimen of the loose thinking he deplures, since it is clear that the conclusion at which he arrived was a very hasty and unjustifiable one. The greatest thinkers of all ages have held views somewhat analogous to those of the Freethinker of to-day. Ample evidence of the truth of this allegation is to be found in the works of Buckle, Lecky, J. S. Mill, Laing, Draper, and Dr. Andrew White. The recognised Freethinkers of the century just closed were in no way behind their opponents in profundity of thought. Among scientists—to go no further than our own country—we had Darwin, Tyndall, Huxley, and Clifford; among philosophers, Herbert Spencer, J. S. Mill, Bain, G. H. Lewes, and many others; and in the field of literature an array of men whose names would form a long catalogue.

A Freethinker is one who thinks freely, but closely—the opposite of loosely—upon all subjects which come before his notice. To him no topic is too sacred to be discussed, and there is no opinion too extreme to be proclaimed, provided it has been arrived at by legitimate and cautious reasoning. He believes that all "opinions are to be examined if we will make way for truth, and put our minds in that freedom which belongs and is necessary to them. A mistake is not the less so, and will never grow into truth, because we have believed it a long time, though perhaps it be the harder to part with; and an error is not the less dangerous, nor the less contrary to truth, because it is cried up and held in veneration by any party" (*King's Life of Locke*). Further, a Freethinker deems that man's duty is to use such faculties as he finds himself possessed of in an honest and earnest endeavor to learn the truth upon all subjects that fall within the scope of his observation. To pass carelessly over any field, where he thinks some few grains of truth may be discovered, he holds to be a crime against his own intellectual nature and against society; and to be debarred from the investigation of any subject by the supposed sacredness of its character, or by the fulminations of men who have an interest in preventing free inquiry, he maintains to be sheer cowardice, of which no true man would be guilty.

Freethought, therefore, as taught in Secular philosophy, instead of being loose thought, is thought requiring an unusual amount of care, judgment, and judicious ratiocination. That there are loose thinkers amongst Freethinkers may be true. People who loosely or who scarcely think at all are to be met with in the ranks of every party; the party must not, however, be made responsible for their presence, since in many cases it is impossible to get rid of them. But to admit that loose thinkers exist amongst Freethinkers, and that sometimes they pass themselves off successfully as the genuine article, even as a counterfeit sovereign may occasionally pass current for a real one, is a very different matter from allowing the false notion to go forth that Freethinking is of itself loose thinking, and nothing else. As well maintain that a free man is necessarily a man of loose character as that a person who holds himself at liberty to think without restrictions must be an individual who is incapable of thinking rightly. If there be one point more than another upon which Freethinkers insist as a necessity of the attitude they assume, it is that all opinions must be submitted to the test of the very strictest examination and the severest logical processes, and that no conclusion shall be admitted to be sound except in so far as it can stand the test of being discussed from every possible standpoint. This is really the very antithesis of loose thinking.

There seems to be an opinion amongst a certain class of opponents that a man who leaves his mind free to receive new truths upon given topics is not only not to be trusted in his judgment, but must be looked upon as a dangerous character in society, whose influence is likely to be prejudicial to the well-being of his fellows. Hence the numerous laws passed against heresy, so-called, which have disgraced the statute-books of most civilised nations. According to these, to be a Freethinker is to be a sceptic, and a sceptic was not to be tolerated for one moment. More than a hundred years ago the great Lord Shaftesbury wrote as follows: "To say truth, I have often wondered to find such a disturbance raised about the simple name of sceptic. 'Tis

certain that, in its original and plain signification, the word imports no more than barely 'That state or frame of mind in which everyone remains on every subject of which he is not certain.' He who is certain, or presumes to say he knows, is in that particular, whether he be mistaken or in the right, a dogmatist."

While, in our opinion, it is possible for a Freethinker to believe in some phase of religion, he cannot place implicit belief in the God or Gods of the Old and New Testaments; neither can he accept the dogma of the Infallibility of the Bible, inasmuch as such a dogma contains elements that would fetter the proper exercise of Freethought principles, and thereby destroy their efficacy. Freethought, therefore, has no antagonism to religious belief, save in so far as such belief arrogates to itself infallibility, and attempts to suppress all views not in harmony with itself. It does not follow that every Freethinker is necessarily a Secularist. There are many persons who think very freely, that have yet to commence regulating their lives by the Secular standard of utility. Secularism allows freedom of thought, but it does more—it prescribes certain moral rules to guide and regulate that freedom.

In our article next week we shall deal with Freethought and Necessitarianism.

CHARLES WATTS.

Byron.

"The like will never come again; he is inimitable."
—GOETHE.

"*L'Audace, l'audace, toujours l'audace.*"
—French Proverb.

FREETHINKERS ought to accord a welcome to the new and stately edition of the *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, edited by Rowland E. Prothero. It throws fresh light on the fascinating personality of one of the most resplendent poets who ever struck his lyre in the service of liberty.

The latest volume shows Byron as a most brilliant letter-writer. It covers a period of eighteen months of his residence in Italy, that land beloved by our poets, which has been consecrated to English literature by the lives and deaths of so many of our great writers. Crashaw, Shelley, Keats, Robert and Elizabeth Browning, all sent their last breaths to mingle with its lovely air. Milton, Landor, and Leigh Hunt may be numbered among its lovers. Byron himself barely missed dying on that soil, the funeral bed of so many English singers. The poets of the strong and virile North love to lay their heads, at last, in the womanly lap of the ever-beautiful land.

Nor has Italy been mindless of her suitors who loved her. Shakespeare inspired her musicians and actors; Shelley has inspired her poets. Leopardi and Carducci loved him; and Byron's influence is still potent in Italy, as in so many European countries. We left Byron in Italy. During this eighteen months' residence he composed the Fifth Canto of his masterpiece *Don Juan*, *Marino Faliero*, *Cain*, and other important poems; he yet found time for an enormous correspondence. Mr. Prothero prints no less than one hundred and eighty-three letters in this volume. Abounding with trenchant criticism on men and books, sparkling with wit, they range lightly over human affairs, and discuss with equal zeal the qualities of Italian beef and the question of the immortality of the soul. The humor is, it must be admitted, strongly Rabelaisian, and the editor occasionally inserts asterisks in the place of the homely vernacular which the poet used in his gaiety of heart.

Byron is almost an ideal letter-writer. Egoist as he was, he never forgets his correspondents. His letters are not essays or lectures. They are what they profess to be, merely letters and nothing more. From the vice of discretion, which spoils so much correspondence, they are conspicuously free. His ideas were not often profound, but they were invariably clear and precise. He was not afraid of personalities. Above all, he wrote as well as he could, not to be talked about, but for the pleasure of writing.

Byron was, undoubtedly, a son of that Revolution which scored deep the thought and emotion of mankind, and so effected the whole of the higher literature of

Europe that it might be treated largely as an evolution from that supreme event. These letters indicate the unique and powerful influence at work. Many of them were addressed to John Murray, whom they often nearly drove to the verge of sanity. He, poor man, was much perturbed by Byron's poetry. His commercial instincts told him the value of works which were fought for by all the booksellers, and whose readers were to be numbered by thousands. His orthodoxy suggested alarm at the poet's scepticism and disregard for the proprieties.

Murray was shocked beyond measure by the language of the Devil in *Cain*, and piteously urged modifications. Byron cynically declared that the alteration could not be made without making Lucifer talk like a bishop, which would not be at all suitable. Although Byron feared neither God nor Mrs. Grundy, he had all sorts of communications with all kinds of pious people. One of the most curious was a letter from a widower who had found among the papers of his dead wife a prayer of genuine religious fervor on behalf of Byron, whom she never knew, but for whose brilliant genius she had the highest admiration. Our English Catullus was much touched with this heartfelt utterance, and wrote a courteous and sympathetic letter to the bereaved husband.

Elsewhere, in discussing the question of an after-life, he urges that

"All punishment which is to revenge rather than correct must be morally wrong, and, when the world is at an end, what moral or warning purpose can eternal torment answer? It is useless to tell me not to reason, but to believe. You might as well tell a man not to wake, but sleep."

There is no doubt about Byron's scepticism. It peeps out everywhere in his writings. His dramatic poem *Cain* is a forcible and eloquent protest against the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. *The Vision of Judgment* is startling in its blasphemy. *Childe Harold*, his noblest, if not his ablest, utterance, is full of an emotional nature-worship, akin to that of Rousseau, whose books were solemnly condemned by an Archbishop of the Great Lying Catholic Church. *Don Juan*, his best work, is full of the spirit of the French Revolution. Byron was haunted ever by that undertone in human life which, to the reflective temperament, is so apt to throb with perpetual melancholy. Down in the depths of our life, underneath all our activities, our interests, even our affections and our happiness, he was conscious of an unceasing curiosity to understand the riddle of existence. A sense, too, that we are in the grasp of a power immeasurable and relentless, against which it is vain to struggle; conscious, too, that this fruitless yearning is not confined to the individual breast, but is the deepest element in the life of our race. This view of life colors the glorious poetry of far-off Catullus. It is seen in the passionate verse of the "large infidel" Omar, and is to be found in our own day in the splendid poetry of Matthew Arnold.

We have said that Byron's letters were free from the vice of discretion. Some of his outbursts are interesting. He calls Southey and Wordsworth "those two impostors." For Keats he had a special contempt, considering his early work but "a Bedlam vision." He afterwards admitted that *Hyperion* is a fine monument, and will keep his name; but he also said: "A man might as well pretend to be rich who had one diamond." True; but sometimes the diamond is a priceless Koh-i-Noor, as in the case of Gray's *Elegy*, or Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyam*. Byron was fond of Gray, and many will be inclined to agree with him that the following stanza, printed in the first edition of the immortal *Elegy*, but subsequently omitted, is as fine as any of those retained:—

Here scattered oft, the earliest of the year,
By hands unseen, are showers of violets found;
The red-breast loves to build and warble here,
And little footsteps lightly print the ground.

It is pleasant to recall Byron's admiration for Shelley, in view of his caustic remarks on others. "You should have known Shelley," he says, "to feel how much I regret him. He was the most gentle, most amiable, and least worldly-minded person I ever met; full of delicacy, disinterested beyond all other men, and possessing a degree of genius joined to a simplicity as rare as

it is admirable. He had formed to himself a *beau ideal* of all that is fine, high-minded, and noble, and he acted up to this ideal even to the very letter."

Byron was a man of the world, and discounted the goodness of men; but of this Atheist's nobility of character he never really had a doubt.

On the publication of Moore's *Life*, Macaulay had no hesitation in referring to Byron as "the most celebrated Englishman of the nineteenth century." Nor have we. For Byron is appreciated more than any other English author, except Shakespeare, on the continent. He led the genius of his native country on a pilgrimage through Europe. He awakened as no other writer has ever done an admiration and a sympathy for England. The publication of his works were national events.

"What," exclaims Castelar, "does Spain not owe to Byron?" Mazzini takes up the same note for Italy. Sainte-Beuve, Stendhal, and Taine speak of his power in France. He was the intellectual parent of the Russian writer, Puschkin. Goethe and Eckermann, in Germany, help to consolidate the verdict of the whole continental world of letters. From the moment when Byron awoke and found himself famous, until his heroic death in Greece, he was the admiration and the despair of intellectual Europe. This, let us never forget, is the man whom the sacrosanct officials of the so-called "Church of England" charitably considered would profane the sacred interior of Westminster Abbey. Byron had as much right to burial in the Abbey as such sceptics as Ephraim Chambers, Courayer, Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, or even Charles Darwin. His reputation was, at least, equal to that of John Broughton, the "Prince of Prize-fighters," whose remains cumber the sacred edifice in another sense than the tons of marble over Sir Cloudesley Shovel.

Byron was as fine a writer as Mrs. Aphra Behn, a novelist whose book, it is to be hoped our lady readers will not try to read. The tombs of several actresses, beside whom Mistress Nell Gwynne was an angel of chastity, would not be disgraced by the admission of the ashes which once were Byron.

The Greeks naturally desired that the great man's body should be buried in the Temple of Theseus at Athens, but gave way on the understanding that the remains should be conveyed to London for sepulture in the Abbey. But they reckoned without the Christian Church of England, which earned an immortality of infamy by closing the doors of Westminster Abbey to one of England's greatest poets.

Byron was ultimately buried with his mother and his ancestors at Hucknall Torkard, safe at last from the religion which sharpened the steel and lit the faggot. It appears that not one of the illustrious obscure families about Nottingham responded to the invitation to attend the funeral procession, so strong was their instinctive feeling that Byron was the enemy of their pretensions; but the great-hearted common people flocked in masses to be present at the last sad pilgrimage of "Childe Harold."

Farewell, thou Titan fairer than the gods!
Farewell, farewell, thou swift and lonely spirit,
Thou splendid warrior with the world at odds,
Unpraised, unpraisable, beyond the merit;
Chased, like Orestes, by the Furies' rods,
Like him at length thy peace dost thou inherit;
Beholding whom, men think how fairer far
Than all the steadfast stars the wandering star.

MIMNERMUS.

Christianity and Civilisation.—XVII.

(Concluded from page 164.)

In the course of the lengthy series of articles of which the present one is, for the time at least, the conclusion, it has been my aim to exhibit within as brief a compass as possible the real influence of Christianity on human development. The exigencies of space have prevented this examination of Christian claims being as exhaustive as it might otherwise have been, although sufficient has been said to show that the ordinary plea that modern civilisation owes much to the influence of Christianity crumbles away when tried by the touchstone of historic fact. So long as we are content to remain in an impalpable region of airy abstractions, or confuse casual connections with causal ones, there is a certain plausibility

about Christian claims. It is when we ask for concrete instances of the civilising influences of the Christian religion, for a definite place where the good has been done and a definite people whom it has benefited, that we see how baseless they are.

I have examined the influence of historic Christianity on morals, on the position of women, on slavery, on science, on general superstition, and on a phase of social freedom as exemplified in the history of the Jewish people. In each of these instances we have seen that influence to be of a deplorable character, intensifying evils already existing, encouraging passions rather than allaying them. And what I have said is only a tithe of what might be said. If we were to take such questions as Jurisprudence, Education, Literature, and Sociology, the results of our examination would be identical. Nor could it well be otherwise. We are dealing with the growth of an organism, whether we take human nature individually or collectively; and the religion that consciously suppresses some of its legitimate activities produces injurious results all round. A religion or a philosophy that is to rank as a beneficent factor in human life must allow for development in all directions; and this Christianity has never done. It has over-estimated the value of some phases of conduct, and under-estimated the importance of others. Just as its protest against sensualism took the shape of asceticism, which naturally resulted in a still deeper sensualism, so in other matters it lost all sense of proportion, and, even when consciously aiming at order, unconsciously produced chaos.

The folly of regarding Christianity—or, indeed, any religion—as a civilising force is seen when we observe how even to-day it exists amid the most diverse forms of government and of social life. Amid all the contradictory elements that distinguish present-day civilisations, Christianity finds itself able to exist, patronising and supporting all, so long as it is supported in turn. Nor can it be said to exist in various nations as a force striving to raise the people to a certain definite and higher level of life; it exists as a sustaining power to the *status quo*, and invariably resists strenuously all attempts at change. And this is only in line with what has occurred during the whole of its history. Christianity has never initiated a social reform. It has taken whatever form of society it found existing, and given to it its blessing. Or, if the contrary has happened, it has been because the social power refused an alliance.

The substantial truth of the above statements is admitted by the late Dean Milman in the following passage:—

"Christianity.....may exist in a certain form in a nation of savages as well as in a nation of philosophers; yet its specific character will almost entirely depend upon the character of the people who are its votaries. It must be considered, therefore, in constant connection with that character; it will darken with the darkness, and brighten with the light, of each succeeding century; in an ungenial time it will recede so far from its genuine and essential nature as scarcely to retain any sign of its divine original; it will advance with the advancement of human nature, and keep up the moral to the utmost height of the intellectual culture of man."*

We need not discuss here how it is possible for anything to recede from its "essential nature"; it is enough to note that such a confession effectually disposes of Christianity as a *cause* of development. A creed that darkens with the darkness of the surrounding population, and heightens with the light, is not a cause of social conditions, but a reflection of them. It is, at most, but a racial barometer, reflecting the state of general culture, not creating it.

This view of Christianity, however—which is the utmost that can be said on its behalf—is really far too favorable. Even if it be granted that the evils of Christianity were, and are, in some sense a reflection of certain aspects of its social environment, it would still remain true that during its whole career it has seldom, if ever, reflected the highest life and thought of its surroundings. The proof is overwhelming that, in the ancient world, Christianity deliberately ignored all the valuable elements in its science, its philosophy, and its sociology, draining its life by concentrating attention upon theological questions, and burying beneath

* *History of Christianity*, ed. 1875; i., 47-8.

mountain-heaps of superstition the culture that after generations had to laboriously re-discover. No one can pretend that during the Middle Ages Christianity was a reflection of the best intellectual light that existed, or deny that it was only in the teeth of the fiercest opposition that the little enlightenment that had filtered in from the Mohammedan world made itself felt. Coming down to later times, the same reasoning holds good. Not only has every advance in science been met by the opposition of the Churches; not only has nearly every fruitful generalisation or speculation in physical science and in sociology arisen outside organised Christianity; but to-day the really vitalising life of the nation exists apart from the Churches, and only receives recognition from them when the pressure of public opinion is too strong to be denied. In such cases Christianity, if it reflected anything, reflected the ignorance, the superstitions, the prejudices of its environment, to all of which it served to give a new measure of strength and a fresh lease of life.

But, after all, a catalogue of the specific opposition of Christianity to science represents but poorly its adverse influence on racial development. A far greater and more enduring evil was inflicted, unconsciously perhaps, by the inevitable results accruing from Church teachings and Church practices. In dealing with the influence of Christianity on the position of woman, I have referred to the baleful effects on home life and on the growth of the race by the teaching of the superior sanctity of the celibate life. This, by itself, was striking a heavy blow at the growth of a higher human nature, and so perpetuating the rule of brute force and the reign of a more brutal type of character.

This result was probably brought about as the consequence of a short-sighted, ignorant policy; but no such saving plea can be urged in extenuation of the mental terrorism created and upheld by the Churches for so many centuries, and which can scarcely be said to have ceased even to-day. The numbers of those who thought and spoke, and paid the penalty for their thought and speech, is only a faint indication of the number who were afraid to speak, and whose intellectual strength suffered as a consequence. For hundreds of years, generations were born and lived and died under conditions that made honesty of thought and speech the dearest and deadliest luxuries in which man could indulge. A heavy tax was placed upon mental honesty, and a correspondingly heavy premium upon mental sluggishness and dishonesty. Little wonder is it that, under such conditions, superstitions should have flourished, or that during the centuries when Christianity was most powerful there should have been a marked degeneration in the character of man.

The effect of this dual policy of race brutalisation has been so well put by Mr. Francis Galton that I cannot do better than quote his words:—

"Whenever a man or woman was possessed of a gentle nature that fitted him or her to deeds of charity, to meditation, to literature, or to art, the social condition of the time was such that they had no refuge but in the bosom of the Church. But the Church chose to preach and enforce celibacy. The consequence was that.....the Church brutalised the breed of our forefathers. She acted precisely as if she had aimed at selecting the rudest portions of the community to be alone the parents of future generations. She practised the arts that breeders would use, who aimed at creating ferocious, currish, and stupid natures. No wonder that club law prevailed for centuries over Europe; the wonder rather is that enough good remained in the veins of Europeans to enable the race to rise to its present very moderate level of natural morality....."

"The Church, having first captured all the gentler natures and condemned them to celibacy, made another sweep of her huge nets, this time fishing in stirring waters to catch those who were the most fearless, truth-seeking, and intelligent in their modes of thought, and therefore the most suitable parents of a high civilisation; and put a strong check, if not a direct stop, to their progeny. Those she reserved on these occasions to breed the generations of the future were the servile, the indifferent, and, again, the stupid. Thus, as she brutalised human nature by her system of celibacy applied to the gentle, she demoralised it by her system of persecution of the intelligent, the sincere, and the free. It is enough to make the blood boil to think of the blind folly that has caused the foremost nations of struggling humanity to be the heirs of such hateful ancestry, and that has so bred our instincts as to keep them in an

unnecessarily long-continued antagonism, with the essential requirements of a steadily-advancing civilisation."*

It would, I think, puzzle the most ardent advocate of Christianity to honestly point to any benefits conferred by that religion upon human nature at all comparable in extent with the undoubted infliction of these gigantic evils.

C. COHEN.

A Grandiose Scheme.

SOME of my readers appear to have imagined that I was concerned, in some way or other, with the announcement that appeared on the back page of last week's *Freethinker*, respecting a Freethought Institute for London. I must, therefore, say that the announcement was a paid advertisement, inserted in the ordinary course of business. It was quite new to me, except for hints that had reached me indirectly. I had not been consulted myself. My colleague, Mr. Charles Watts, tells me that he was not consulted. Nor was the National Secular Society consulted—of which Mr. Anderson is a Vice-President. Neither was the Secular Society, Limited, consulted—of which Mr. Anderson is a member. The only person whose name appears, besides that of Mr. Anderson, is Mr. C. A. Watts, a son of the well-known Mr. Charles Watts. This gentleman is a printer and publisher, and in that line, I can quite believe, a good man of business. But I did not fancy he would ever be called upon to unite and organise "all sections of the Freethought and Ethical Movement" in one gigantic enterprise. There is a reference to "a few trusted friends" in addition, but it is too cryptic (at present) for serious attention.

Mr. Anderson has been making tentative offers in this direction for many years, as I could show by going back over the files of the *Freethinker*. Only a few months ago a message was brought from him to the Secular Society, Limited, by Mr. Charles Watts—I mean the Mr. Charles Watts. A hall was referred to as having been discovered by Mr. Watts, and as purchasable for £5,000. It was said to be in a populous neighborhood, but, on inquiry, it proved to be somewhere in Tottenham, right outside London. The Board of the Secular Society, Limited, welcomed Mr. Anderson's message; at the same time it pointed out to him that security could only be obtained by carrying out the project through such an Incorporation.

Frankly, I do not see the slightest prospect of raising £15,000 to balance Mr. Anderson's £15,000; and if that is the condition of his offer, I believe he will never have to write the cheque.

If the money were raised, it would all be put at hazard on the basis of a Company. Shares might easily pass into other hands, through death and other changes, and in ten or twenty years the Institute might be used by a Young Men's Christian Association. If the place were handed over to Trustees, there would still be no security. Mr. Symes got a hall built at Melbourne, and the property was vested in trustees; presently they turned him out, the place was sold in the open market, and was absolutely lost. He is in it again, after many years, by the mere accident that the present proprietor is favorable to his cause.

The only possible security is through an Incorporation like the Secular Society, Limited. That, indeed, was the very object of this Incorporation. On the other bases, the more money raised the worse; it is only so much more to be wasted.

Having a hall is one thing. Money enough will always buy one. But "running" it is quite another thing. A £20,000 building, with a £10,000 endowment, could very easily be an utter failure. And it is hard to see how the promoters of this big scheme, whoever they are—and I know who they are *not*—could work it successfully.

As it is presented, I cannot invite my friends to support this colossal project. I think it would be far better to support existing agencies, which are all in need of funds. I say this because I have been asked to say something. Otherwise I should, probably, have left the project to fall by its own weight.

G. W. FOOTE.

* *Hereditary Genius*, pp. 357-9.

Acid Drops.

PARKER, the murderer, who shot that old gentleman in the South Western train, wrote a letter to his mother from the condemned cell. He remarked that he was attended daily by two chaplains, and that he had made his peace with God. At the same time he said that he was not guilty of the crime charged against him. Considering that he was caught red-handed, the fellow was a most amazing liar. And the fact that he could tell that absurd lie immediately after talking about God and heaven serves to show how little necessary connection there is between religion and veracity—or any other virtue.

"I can die happy now," said Parker, "for I have asked God to forgive me." He does not seem to have betrayed the slightest anxiety about the fate of the man he murdered. The only question for the murderer, as usual, was where *he* was going when the hangman had done with him. Whether the man he murdered had gone to heaven or hell was a question of absolute indifference.

Rev. Murdo Mackenzie, a Highland divine, publicly protested against the King starting his recent Continental journey on the Sabbath. Neither God nor the King seems to have paid any attention to the Rev. Mackenzie. The King went, and has come back again. Nothing serious appears to have happened.

At the same time, a number of small tradesmen at Darlington have been fined for trying to earn an honest ha'penny on Sunday. The police have made a raid on the vendors of ice cream, tobacco, sweets, and newspapers, for Sunday trading. But aren't the police breaking the blessed Sabbath, by getting up evidence on that day to convict these small offenders? And what about the parsons, whose busiest day—if they have a busy day—is Sunday? And what about the railway trains, buses, and milksellers, and even automatic machines?

How strange, observes the *Sunday Chronicle*, that the sanctity of the Lord's day should be endangered by the sale of a penn'orth of toffee, and not by the purchase of a railway ticket, or a pint of milk. "Does not the fool of an Act provide that no tradesman, artificer, workman, laborer, or other person whatsoever, shall do or exercise any worldly labor, business, or work of their ordinary callings upon the Lord's Day? And is not a policeman a person? Who will summon a policeman for walking his beat on that day or lying in wait outside an ice-cream shop to trap small boys and girls in the act of consuming the deadly drug? His is a work of necessity, say you? Rather had I thought the policeman of Darlington a work of artifice. It is a pity they have not something better to do. By-and-bye the craze will die down, only to break out somewhere else—and why? Because people want papers and sweets and milk and vegetables and other things on Sunday, and they must travel by train or bus, and they may as well buy their tobacco in the tobacco shop as in the 'pub.' But the Acts are still on the statute book to find employment for policemen when trade in other quarters is dull."

Even now the alterations in the nomenclature of the State prayers are causing dismay and confusion. It was only a few days ago that one of the most eminent ecclesiastics in London offered a prayer for the "Duke of Yawnwell and Cork." He even proceeded to intercede for the "Duchess of Yawnwell and Cork." At this point confusion overcame him as he recognised his mistake. He hurriedly altered his petition to a prayer for the "Duke of Yorkwell and Corn."

Edward VII. must be rather astonished to hear the number of virtues that are ascribed to him by the fawning hypocrites who crawl at his feet. He knows, as well as every sensible Englishman knows, that he is simply paid—and handsomely paid—to be a mere ornamental State figure-head. It requires a little stretch of the imagination to think of him as filling even that position with any special credit to himself or the nation. But he will serve, until it is possible to establish some other arrangement not quite so expensive and a little less absurd. In the meantime, we learn from one of the "crawlers" that the King strongly objects to a long sermon. Very likely. Except for form's sake he would, probably, be glad to have no sermon at all.

Let the crawling, sycophantic clerics remember—"The King strongly objects to a long sermon." That shows him to be human, though by fate and fortune he is a monarch. The following story—which is quite of the flunkey order, and appears in a flunkey paper—may be offered to anyone who requires an emetic: "A few years ago his then Royal Highness was entertaining a few favored friends and acquaintances at Sandringham. One of the guests was a clergyman—a well-known popular preacher—who, however, when preaching, certainly never erred on the side of brevity. On the Sunday morning the rev. gentleman preached in Sandringham Church. The sermon was a long one—unusually

long—and the Prince of Wales and his guests appeared wearied—ill at ease. After service, just before lunch, the clergyman made his appearance, evidently well satisfied with himself. 'I hope your Royal Highness liked my sermon this morning?' he asked the Prince. 'I felt quite at home when I was preaching.' 'Ah! Mr. —,' said H.R.H., quietly, 'you felt quite at home, did you? Well, I was thinking how nice it would be if you really were at home!'

The above story is probably a pure invention. We ask ourselves: Was the Prince equal to this? It is but a small piece of talk—nothing particularly smart or sharp about it. Did he make this observation as given? One reluctantly comes to the conclusion that he didn't, because, by all accounts, he is very much too dense.

Dr. Parker is unable to leave "unbelievers" alone. They seem to have got on his nerves. Why doesn't he relieve his mind by a straightforward assault upon them? His constant nibbling serves no real purpose. He asked a congregation the other day: "Have you ever thought that, if next Sunday there should come in one who believeth not, what would you do with him? Will you sit next to an infidel, an unbeliever? Would you like to be seen in such association?"

Well, perhaps they wouldn't, because they have been taught by sky-pilots to regard unbelievers as uncivilised, if not absolutely unclean. Dr. Parker is moved later on in this sermon to say: "You know I've had a long experience of life, and I have met some really honest and honorable infidels." That is well; but why use that hateful and inapplicable word "infidel"?

The *British Weekly* has the distinction of quite out-distancing even the Church papers in its nauseous flattery of the new Bishop of London. Its stories about his prowess in combating Freethinkers in Victoria Park are obvious inventions. It says that he would "argue and answer, thrust and parry, till the most cynical scoffer in the audience would confess that the parson had the best of it." That is a lie.

"On one occasion an earnest young Secularist asked: 'Would it not be better if the rev. gentleman would tell us young fellows something to help our reasons, and not try to make us swallow things as matter of faith?'" That is pure fiction. No "earnest young Secularist" would ask a question in such sapient terms. "Us young fellows," indeed. And Ingram's "thrust and parry"! One would think he was a perfect gladiator instead of a sickly High Churchman, without the least knowledge of the heretic phases of thought that it pleased him to preach against. Preaching is one thing—debating is quite another; and in the latter Winnington-Ingram was nowhere.

Says the *British Weekly*: "The Bishop has always been of opinion that these open-air addresses should be very carefully prepared, and that only the most experienced workers should undertake them." So that there is admittedly a little danger about these performances. What a modest way of saying to the rank and file: "You can't do this sort of thing; you aren't equal to it. Leave it to me; I can do it with success."

Now that Dr. Ingram is Lord Bishop of London he has a chance of being reported—in religious weeklies, at any rate, though ordinary daily papers may not be impressed with his importance. Let him preach one of his "carefully-prepared" sermons on unbelief, and we will see if it is not possible to say something in the way of reply.

Another pleasant item for the new Bishop of London to read. The *Times* says his appointment means that the diocese will be under a man who is *not* intellectually great.

The new Bishop of London protests that he loves East London as passionately as ever, although he has now to live in the West. His former poor friends are asked to believe that he has now to open his heart to all London. Moreover, he has to study the problems of all London. Well, we should think he would find no difficulty in opening his heart to all London. The man who could not do that on £10,000 a year must have a very tightly-closed organ. As to the problems, the less said the better. For our part, we should say that the only problem before the new Bishop of London, as a Christian priest, is how to pack the trains running on the celestial railway.

The Rev. Sheldon Jones, vicar of All Saints, Ipswich, has been fined £10 and costs for indecency before women living in the neighborhood of his house. When it pleased the festive David—the "man after God's own heart"—to dance naked before the ark, a lady observed him, and was much annoyed. David wasn't fined. It was the lady who suffered. She was thereafter, in consequence of her very natural objection, rendered barren. Other times, other morals.

During one of the recent thunder and hailstorms a Dalston church was struck by lightning, the spire being seriously

damaged. This seems to be another instance of the wonderful care of the Lord for his own conventicles.

Chicago is shortly to have a "Christian daily that will print all the news, in addition to a chapter from the Bible in each issue." Bibles must be very scarce in Chicago to make a paper like that necessary.

A Chicago evangelist has undertaken to save fifteen souls in a week, or to forfeit to the funds of the church he has taken for his meeting the sum of 1,000 dollars. Local "sports" are betting on the result, though it doesn't seem quite an easy thing to discover for certain whether the souls are saved or not.

Professor C. A. L. Totten, of New Haven, Connecticut, was once instructor in the military department of the Yale Sheffield Scientific School. Lately, however, he has been studying the Bible. And this is the result. He says he has located the Star of Bethlehem, and that its appearance foretells the melting of the heavens with fervent heat. Professor Totten's immediate relatives and friends have our sympathy.

The University sermon at Oxford on Sunday afternoons has been abolished. One speaker at Oxford said the sermons delivered to an empty church were a scandal to the University, and really bordered on the ridiculous.

The Rev. John E. Linnell writes a letter from Pavenham Vicarage to the *Bedfordshire Times and Independent*. That obliging paper inserts his communication under the heading, "A Serious Charge." This is the "serious charge" in the rev. gentleman's own words: "Some years ago a young gentleman, who took with him from the home in which he had been religiously brought up a faith in his father's God, was brought under the influence of a University Professor, who appeared to take a delight in fastening on every opportunity for attacking the Book our young friend had been taught to regard as the Word of God. With many of his pupils the result was Atheism; nor was the gentleman in question proof against the master's teaching. But the baneful work of the latter had not ended here, for the poor lad—he was little more than a lad—finding that everything from which he could draw peace and comfort to his soul had gone with his Bible, one day took up a pistol and blew his own brains out."

Then the Rev. Linnell goes on to say that "some of the teachers in our schools are undoubtedly pursuing the same course as that adopted by the University Professor. They are frequently (unless their pupils belie them) throwing out such utterances with regard to the Old Book as must eventually sap their pupils' confidence in it; and they must be stopped. I speak feelingly, for I have been a sceptic; and, remembering a past when, in the darkness of unbelief, I shuddered at the sight of a razor, I would by every means in my power prevent others from being brought under the blighting influence of a like experience."

He "shuddered at the sight of a razor"! Poor silly fellow, what a blessed thing it is that he has found peace with Jesus. Freethought, we are sure, has no wish to number him amongst its adherents.

His concluding remark is quite in keeping with the imbecility of the body of his letter. "It will be quite time to destroy the Bible when we have got something better to put in its place." But no one wants to destroy his precious Bible. We simply wish to destroy the false ideas which are prevalent in regard to it. As for the childish inquiry, "What are you going to give us in the place of it?" a convalescent patient might just as well say to his physician: "What are you going to give me in the place of the fever I have now got rid of?"

A Scotch parson upbraided the blacksmith of the village for not paying his church rate. "But I never go to the kirk," said the blacksmith. "That's your fault," said the minister; "the kirk is always open." A few days later the blacksmith sent a bill to the minister for shoeing his horse. The minister indignantly protested that his horse had not been shod. "That's your fault," said the smith; "the forge is always open."

The Rev. J. Morgan Gibbon, at a conference at Cardiff, swept, says the *Christian World*, "the congregation almost off its feet with the torrential rush of his eloquence." What a Boanerges he must be! He was followed by Dr. Munro Gibbon, who said: "A large proportion of the thoughtful and serious unbelief of our time had come through the suicidal policy insisted on by so many excellent people, that if they had any difficulty in accepting the letter of Scripture as absolutely correct from Genesis to Revelation they must give it all up."

In the discussion that followed, Dr. Rendel Harris thought Dr. Gibbon had been in danger of sailing down the channel of no meaning between Yes and No. It would have been

better to be more definite in one direction or the other. They needed to regard the Bible in the light of the larger Bible of the world.

So, according to Dr. Mantle, who spoke at a recent meeting of the Halifax Ruri-Decanal Council, God and all thoughts of him are in danger of being driven out of the minds of men who have got football on the brain. Enforcing this statement, Dr. Mantle remarked that "Some years ago a gentleman on the point of death, whom he was attending, was concerned more about a football match which was being played than about anything else. Although this gentleman knew that his end was near, his one anxiety was to get the evening newspaper to see the result of the match. With the eagerness of a man who had got a passport to heaven, were such a thing possible, he read the result and then settled down and died. Football took the place of his religion. There was no call for prayer by his minister, or word of comfort from the Bible."

Albert French jumped into the Medway to end his unhappy life. Before doing so he wrote his own obituary notice on one of his mother's memorial cards: "Also Albert Jack French, who took his own life by drowning at Yalding. O God, forgive me. I know not what I do." Evidently he didn't know what he was doing, for he was fished out of the river and taken before the magistrates.

Miss Avon Mabelle Bradburn, a member of the Albrighton Hunt, drank a bottleful of poison, and the Wolverhampton coroner had to hold an inquest on her remains. The unfortunate young lady's head seems to have been turned by religion. A document in her own handwriting contained this passage: "We four chums do solemnly declare that we will meet together, if possible, in the same place, same day, and same hour; but if one is passed away or is absent, she will be with them in spirit." It would be very difficult to make out that "infidelity" had anything to do with *this* case of suicide.

Mr. W. H. Keer, of Dubuque, Kansas, lost his son last autumn, and the rumor got abroad that the bereavement was a punishment for his "infidelity." Mr. Keer sent a letter on the subject to the *Claffin Clarion*, from which we make the following extract: "It has been called to my attention that a number of Christians have affirmed that the death of my son Albert, by lightning last harvest, was God's punishment for my belief in his non-existence. In justice to myself and family, I deem it my duty to make a public defence of my position, for which I assume all responsibility. It is deplorable that such people will accuse the God they love of such wickedness, and more deplorable that they will worship a being whom they believe guilty of such atrociousness. No wonder more and more people every year are beginning to question the existence of such a being. If God is just, why should he murder the innocent to punish the guilty? If God is all-powerful, could he not prove his existence in a more humane way? If God is all-wise, did he not know I would never believe he murdered my child? Did he not know that, if I did believe it, I would utterly hate and despise him to the last moment of my conscious existence?"

The *Freethought Magazine* (Chicago) says that Mr. Keer's letter is a good letter, but "if the fools were all dead no such letter would be necessary." This is about the biggest "if" we ever heard of. Heine was speaking from Old-World experience when he said that the fool crop is perennial, but he would probably have said the same thing in America.

The *Methodist Times* raises its note of alarm at the second volume of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. "It is curious to find such teachers as Canon Robinson, of Westminster, and Professor G. A. Smith, of Glasgow, associated with learned scholars who have practically rejected everything that has been dear to Christians in all ages. The articles on the most important questions respecting the authenticity and genuineness of the four Gospels have been contributed by the Extreme Left. The most important and influential writers in this *Encyclopædia Biblica* reject the Deity of our Lord in the sense in which it has always been understood by every branch of the Christian Church. We do not doubt or deny that it is desirable that Christian scholars should be familiar with what can be said against the essential views of Christianity which have been held by all genuine Christians in all ages." But the *Methodist Times* objects to the *Encyclopædia Biblica*.

Recently *The Pilot* described this veritable bombshell thrown into the camp of orthodoxy as the "popularisation of the surmises of extravagant scepticism." The *Methodist Times* says: "It needs a quite abnormal supply of credulity to believe that, with respect to the main facts of the Christian life, the whole Christian Church has been going astray for 2,000 years." No credulity is required to recognise what is an absolute fact. The *Methodist Times*, on other occasions, does not hesitate to assert that the adherents of Buddhism and Confucianism have gone astray in regard to their faith for considerably longer than 2,000 years.

The concluding observation of the *Methodist Times* discloses the fear that prevails in all religious quarters. "This very learned and remarkable volume should be read with great caution, and, for the most part, only by those whose learning or Christian experience will enable them to distinguish between demonstrated fact and mere theory."

Examinations in Scripture disclose some startling juvenile ideas. To the query, "Why was Jerusalem surrounded with walls?" the answer was given, "To keep in the milk and honey." "What is manna?" was another question. "Please, sir, it's taking your cap off to master and missus." A boy said: "We know that St. Peter was crucified with his head downwards, because he mentions it in several of his Epistles."

The Salvation Army in the United States is going into the theatrical business, and will produce plays calculated to inspire audiences with holiness, whilst ministering to their taste for the drama. Some plays are mentioned as likely to be presented under these auspices, but if we may be permitted to offer a suggestion, why not begin with a revival of *The Pink Dominos*, or, failing that, try *The Runaway Girl*?

In reviewing a recent translation of a book from the French entitled *Princes and Poisoners*, the *Daily Telegraph* notes that the famous Marquise de Brinvilliers, one of the most amazing criminals in the history of the world, died "in the full odor of sanctity," and her "memory was actually cherished as that of a saint." We would remind our contemporary, however, that this is by no means a surprising phenomenon. History abounds with great criminals who were notoriously pious.

Religionists all over the world act pretty much in the same way when they get excited. We see by the newspapers that the Aga Khan arrived the other day at Bombay on his return from Europe. The local papers announced considerable secessions from his community, many prominent Khojas having openly repudiated his divine authority. Soon after his arrival three of his fanatical followers, armed with knives, attacked several of the seceders as they were leaving the mosque, killing two and seriously wounding others. Good old religion!

At St. George's Chapel, Albemarle-street, the Rev. Edward Ker Gray will shortly introduce musical Sunday evening services, and has already brought the sanctuary up to date by allowing it to be used as a photographic studio; but an American competitor has already gone one better. A divine of the name of Hillis has, with the view of getting into closer personal acquaintance with the young men who come to hear him, invited them to a social gathering, embellished with refreshments. The first Sunday evening of the new dispensation was a great success. The parlor behind the church was crowded with young swains, who thoroughly enjoyed themselves, especially when laden trays were passed among them by charming young ladies of the congregation, each of whom wore her pleasantest smile. These parlor receptions are to continue for a time on every Sunday evening, and, lest the termination of the mild dissipation should not be in accordance with the beginning, it was deemed advisable to have detectives in the corridors to prevent the entrance of objectionable persons. The "chucker-out" as an auxiliary to the verger or beadle is decidedly an original feature, and, luckily, thoroughly American. In this country a similar "coffee and sandwiches" evensong would soon dissipate the idea commonly entertained respecting the gloom of the British Sabbath.—*Daily Telegraph*.

Mr. Andrew Carnegie is giving away tremendous sums of money, which he will never miss, for he has far more tremendous sums left. Amongst his benefactions we have not heard that he has given anything to the Freethought movement in America. Mr. Carnegie was a "friend" of the late Colonel Ingersoll, and is reputed to be himself an Agnostic. But it is just possible that he does not see how helping the Freethought movement will increase his popularity.

Great indignation is said to have been aroused at Dover by the refusal to confirm some lads at St. Bartholomew's Church, because they had declined to go to "confession." One lad is reported as making the following statement: "Two years ago I was a candidate for confirmation at this church, but I was not sent up, as I would not confess. One day the Rev. — invited me to his house, and while I was there asked what sins I had committed. I replied that I was not prepared to tell him. He opened a little book and asked me a lot of questions from it. I declined to make confession. At last he said he was going down to post, and asked me to come with him. He took hold of my arm, and on the way back he stopped outside the church and unlocked the door. This was about half-past nine, and there was no one else in the church. He took me up to the altar, made me kneel

down, and asked me a number of questions from a book. I would not answer. At last he said: 'You must look up at me and answer me two questions, or you will not be confirmed.' I said I should not answer if he asked me any more such questions. He kept me twenty-five minutes in the church. Finally he put me two questions to be answered, which I did, and he let me go." Other boys tell similar stories. The female candidates attending the confirmation classes were given a list of questions, to which they were expected to reply "Yes" or "No." Those who know what "confession" means can guess for themselves what the questions were. Between the Catholic Church and the High Church there is no real difference when a priest stirs up the minds of adolescents.

Tolstoi has been excommunicated again by the Holy Synod of Russia. It is not reported, though, that he is suffering any inconvenience. But that is awaiting him, perhaps, in the world to come.

When the Roman mob "banished" Coriolanus (see Shakespeare), the great man shouted back at them: "Hence, ye fragments, I banish you." Tolstoi might treat the excommunication of the Holy Synod in the same spirit. Who are they? He is a great writer, famous over all the civilised world.

The vicar of Wycombe has been begging his congregation to save up their coughs while he is preaching, and to let them out in the pauses of his discourse. This is excellent advice—for the man who hasn't got a cough; and very poor advice for the man who has one. The only way in which a man with a cough can avoid annoying the parson is by stopping away from church. But that would probably displease the parson still worse. We suggest that the man of God should try prayer when colds are prevalent in his congregation. Surely the being who used to raise the dead—though it was a long time ago—can allay a little throat irritation for half-an-hour or so. Even the Christian Deity ought to be more powerful than cough lozenges.

Kate Jones, aged thirty-five, was charged at Birmingham with being drunk and disorderly, and assaulting Police-constable Jones (27 A) in the execution of his duty. Defendant called a witness to prove that she had not long left St. Luke's Church, but it was admitted that they had enjoyed a drink together on the way to the House of God, and further admitted in cross-examination that they had paid another visit to the public-house after leaving the sacred edifice. The magistrates, therefore, fined her ten shillings and costs.

We very much regret to see that Mr. Toope, an irresponsible advocate of Freethought in Hyde Park, has been summoning the Rev. H. Alcock in the Bloomsbury County Court for the price of some tickets supplied for a public discussion that never took place. Mr. Alcock acted rashly at the outset in handing Mr. Toope a guinea to arrange for a discussion. He should have dealt with the N. S. S. Branch or some other organisation. By acting otherwise, he lost his guinea and incurred a good deal of trouble, although Mr. Toope's action naturally failed. It was a brutal absurdity to summon Mr. Alcock at all. Whatever else he is, he is at least a gentleman; and that fact, together with his age, should bespeak for him a generous consideration.

As a rule we take no notice of anonymous correspondents. Now and then, however, we make an exception. Some pious idiot addresses us this week—from God knows where, perhaps a lunatic asylum—and asks us: "Wouldn't you like to kill H. P. Hughes, and others, who still fill St. James's Hall?" Not at all, thou pious idiot, not at all. We never went about seeking H. P. Hughes's blood. Why should we? Isn't the blood of Christ enough and to spare? What we sought of H. P. Hughes was the truth about his Atheist Shoemaker story. Of course he wouldn't supply it, but we found it in spite of him. And when we published it his Atheist shoemaker story dropped out of circulation. Nor have we the slightest objection to H. P. Hughes—with or without others—filling St. James's Hall. Somebody would fill it on Sundays, while the fool-crop is so plentiful; and they may as well hear H. P. Hughes as any other mountebank.

Discussing the question of the "shortage" of clergymen, the *Birmingham Mail* makes a most ingenuous confession. "The plain, unvarnished fact," it says, "is that there are too many poorly-paid clergymen to-day for the Cloth to claim its adequate share of the active professional energies of the rising generation. When clerical appointments in the Church are worth having, there will be no lack of able men to fill them." Precisely so. That is what we have always said. The clerical profession is just like others. Men enter it as they enter the law, or medicine, or the army and navy—with the object of getting a living. The pretence of soul-saving, and a call from the Holy Ghost, is put forward to guile the mob into accepting the men of God as preachers of the gospel of poverty and renunciation.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

March 24, Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, London, W. : at 7.30, "The Fable of the Crucifixion."

April 7 and 14, Athenæum Hall ; 21, Birmingham.

To Correspondents.

- MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS.—March 31, Bolton. April 21, New Brompton.—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.
- J. B. CONLY.—The writer of the paragraph you complain of—George Macdonald, of the *New York Truthseeker*—is a bit of a humorist. Perhaps that is the reason why you have misunderstood him. Anyhow, you seem to have read him (so to speak) upside down. If you have, as you say, joined an Ethical Society because you don't like such paragraphs, we fear that Ethical Societies must be full of very literal-minded people. It is a painful goodness that stumbles over an honest jest.
- J. PARTRIDGE.—Date altered as desired. We did not mean "pathetic" in the sense in which you appear to take it. Of course we hope, with you, that the Birmingham appeal will elicit a generous response.
- W. P. BALL.—Thanks once more for your valued cuttings.
- J. E. STANNARD.—We don't think the book you refer to is of any value, or of any special interest.
- R. DAVISON.—See our special article. You will see that we have nothing to do with the scheme, and that we could not have anything to do with it on its present basis. We merely inserted the appeal as a paid advertisement.
- J. M. CHRISTIE.—Your letter is too long, too personal, and too little to the point. We inserted your first letter, and Mr. Cohen's brief reply. There the matter must rest. We have no room to spare for a controversy about such an obscurity as Dr. Campbell.
- E. PARKER.—In sending your lecture notices in future, will you please frame them on the model of the printed list in the *Freethinker*? The compositors have merely to set straight on them, instead of picking out the details from a letter, which is no part of their business.
- T. E. WILLIS.—Thanks for cuttings.
- J. F. HAMPSON.—Thanks for the cutting. We have to ask you to convey our congratulations to Miss Annie Hampson.
- J. G. BARTRAM.—We cannot very well advertise political meetings in the *Freethinker*. A paragraph is always ready for Freethought occasions, and that with the fullest impartiality.
- W. YOUNG.—The tracts you forward us are (at a first glance) of the common run of such things. The one on "the blood" seems full of good, sound Bible Christianity. We will look through them more carefully, with a view to a paragraph or two in next week's "Acid Drops."
- H. PERCY WARD.—Glad to see you are again on the warpath. If you gain nothing else, you will gain experience and fighting power. We send you our benediction—for what it is worth.
- T. W. B. TURNER.—We must see what it is first. You will understand this on reflection.
- W. COX.—We hope the Liverpool friends will not be disheartened. The past year or so has been a shocking one for all advanced movements. Keep the flag flying, in hope—in reasonable hope—of better days in the early future.
- S. HOLMAN.—A Secular funeral is not, of course, a thing to rejoice over as a funeral, but as far as it is Secular there is room for satisfaction. We can quite understand the excitement it would cause in South Wales. Kindly convey our sympathy and best wishes to Mr. Treharne-Jones. Is there any way in which we could assist his gallant attack on the Christian superstition in your district?
- J. G. STUART.—(1) The Christians you refer to are hardly worth troubling about. Charles Bradlaugh certainly did die in debt—like some other great men, for instance, Pitt and Fox; and Cobden's debts had to be paid by a national subscription. Bradlaugh was the leader of the Freethought party in this country, and as such he was always bound to be working in advance of his resources; moreover, he had many costly fights forced upon him by Christian bigots. If he died in debt, he died poor. Even your obtuse Christian friends may see that. And if he died poor, he should stand a good chance in kingdom-come, if there is any truth in the Sermon on the Mount. (2) You will find the facts about Thomas Paine's last days in Mr. Foote's *Infidel Death-Beds*, which we understand you possess. Paine did not answer his own *Age of Reason*; by God's help or otherwise. He left that to the clergy.
- W. LAMB.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."
- A. G. LYE.—You will see that Mr. Foote's visit to Birmingham has been postponed to April 21. He will be glad to lecture at Coventry on the Monday evening.
- S.'s LETTER in reply to Mr. Alcock on the existence of God will appear in our next. It arrived too late for this number.
- PAPERS RECEIVED.—Two Worlds—Freethought Magazine—La Raison—People's Newspaper—Searchlight—Crescent—Truthseeker (New York)—Torch of Reason—Public Opinion (New York)—Yorkshire Evening Post—Bedfordshire Times—East Anglian Daily Times—Hong Kong Daily Press—Light on Freemasonry—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.

THE Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, held its Annual General Meeting on Monday evening at Anderson's Hotel, Fleet-street, London. The Directors' Report and the Balance-Sheet were unanimously adopted; and the feeling was generally expressed that both were highly gratifying, in view of the terrible disadvantages of the past year. Some of those disadvantages were general, affecting all publishing houses, so that even the great firm of Cassell and Company was very badly hit. Others were special, and are never likely to recur.

All shareholders of the Freethought Publishing Company have received the Report and Balance-Sheet, and no word of dissatisfaction has reached the Directors from any one of them. Some have written to say that they are surprised the Company has done so well in the first year, and in such trying circumstances.

Freethinkers who wish to obtain copies of these documents, with a view to becoming shareholders, should apply to the Secretary (Miss E. M. Vance) at 1 Stationers' Hall Court, London, E.C.

Now that the Annual General Meeting is over, I have once more to appeal to the Freethought party for further support. More working capital is necessary if the enterprise is to be conducted with proper vigor and success. Without any appreciable increase of the present expenses, a much larger volume of trade could be transacted. A number of books and pamphlets are being prepared for the press, and the publication of these will involve a large initial investment. It is also highly desirable that a considerable outlay should be made in promoting the circulation of the *Freethinker*, partly by judicious advertising, and partly by opening the ordinary trade channels, which are at present obstructed, as far as this journal is concerned, by the bigotry, fears, and indifference of newsagents.

Some of the existing shareholders—I hope a good many of them—will increase their holding in the Company. If they did so to the extent of even 25 per cent. all round, the Directors would have sufficient working capital for operations that ought to secure a reasonable dividend in the new year. I beg every Shareholder to ask himself what he can afford to do, without inconvenience, and then to do it, with the least possible delay.

Many Freethinkers in various parts of the country who can afford to take Shares in this Company have not yet taken any. I beg to ask them, likewise, to see whether they ought not to give some support to this undertaking. The *Freethinker*, for instance, is no longer my property. It belongs to the Freethought Publishing Company. The duty, therefore, of sustaining it and pushing its circulation devolves upon the whole Freethought party in general, and upon the Shareholders of the Company in particular.

I am making no appeal for a scheme in the air. This Company has a local habitation and a name. It has

property and a business. It has shareholders and capital. And it wants more.

If every reader of the *Freethinker*, who places some value upon it as an organ of opinion, and would like to see it in the hands of thousands of fresh subscribers; if every such reader, I say, were only to do a little in the way of practical support—were only to take ten shares, five shares, or even one share, in this Company—it would be a cause of rejoicing to myself and all concerned in the management, and it would enable us to push this journal into a good paying circulation, in spite of all the bigots in the kingdom. Already the *Freethinker* pays its way. We have to work from a definite vantage ground. And I may add, for the sake of those who have a keen eye for dividends, that when a paper once pays its way, especially a paper of the size and price of this one, the further circulation brings a very handsome profit. Indeed, I have always wondered why some capitalist, with a few thousands to spare, did not come along and “run” the paper as a good speculation. The only reason I can think of is that capitalists don't like touching so “unpopular” a thing as Free-thought. But the resources of the single capitalist can easily be found by a number of shareholders. What the one *will* not do, the many *may* do. The question is, Will they? I ask them in all seriousness, as one who—whatever his faults—has never spared *himself* in the cause of Freethought.

—This appeal ought to induce a considerable number of Freethinkers—some shareholders already, and some not—to send to the Secretary for Application Forms. At least five hundred new Shares should be applied for within the next month. Perhaps I ought to say a thousand. The Shares are only one pound each, and are payable in easy instalments: 2s. 6d. per Share on application, 5s. per Share on allotment, and the balance as may be required, on calls with at least one month's notice. It is hardly possible to go much beyond that in the way of consideration.

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

PRIOR to visiting Birmingham on April 21, Mr. Foote will occupy the Athenæum Hall platform for three Sunday evenings, to deliver a course of Easter lectures on the close of the career of Jesus Christ, as related in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. The first lecture this evening (March 24) will be on “The Fable of the Crucifixion,” the second (April 7) will be on “The Fable of the Resurrection,” and the third (April 14) will be on “The Fable of the Ascension.” This course of lectures will carefully cover the whole ground, and for this reason Freethinkers should try to bring along their Christian friends to the hall.

There was a crowded audience last Sunday evening at the Athenæum Hall, Tottenham Court-road, to hear the debate between Mr. Charles Watts and the Rev. J. J. B. Coles. Every part of the hall was packed, and the very best order was maintained throughout the proceedings. It is not for us to speak here of the merits of the discussion. Evidently the audience enjoyed it, and applauded enthusiastically the disputants. Miss Vance was a model “chairman,” performing the duties thereof admirably. The debate lasted until near ten o'clock, and the one regret expressed was that it did not go on still later.

On Sunday, March 31, Mr. Watts will lecture twice in Bolton. He will be pleased to visit any of the surrounding districts on the following week-day evenings. Will the Secular Societies of the neighborhood communicate with Mr. Watts at once?

Mr. Cohen had good audiences at Glasgow on Sunday, particularly at the evening lecture. He delivers three lectures to-day (March 24) in the Secular Hall, Manchester. His subjects should prove attractive. We hope to hear of good meetings.

Mr. H. Percy Ward is, to say the least of it, energetic. He is not sleepy himself, and he doesn't seem disposed to let

Birmingham get sleepy either. He is standing as a candidate for the Balsall Heath Board of Guardians. Of course he stands as an independent candidate. The machine parties do not want him. Whether the ratepayers do remains to be seen. In any case, we must applaud our young colleague's enterprise. The Freethought party wants men with some “go” in them.

The *Freethinker* paragraph helped the Liverpool Branch to a good audience on Sunday evening, and the lecture by Mr. A. W. Thomas, of the Chicago Bar, was much enjoyed. To-day (March 24) the Branch holds its annual meeting, and we hope there will be a strong rally of members and friends. What with the bad times in general, and in particular the action of the police in stopping the charge for admission at Sunday meetings, the Branch has been almost overwhelmed with difficulties. Some of the older members almost feel like throwing up the sponge. We hope the younger members will join in the work, and bring their enthusiasm to the support of the older members' wisdom and experience.

A meeting of the Pontypridd and District Secular Organising Committee will be held to-day (March 24), at 6 p.m., at the City Restaurant, Pontypridd. All local Freethinkers are earnestly invited to attend.

Mr. J. F. Hampson, the Bolton stalwart, is the happy husband of a broad-natured, intelligent wife, and the proud father of two bright daughters, who have never shrunk from the most open profession of their principles. We are delighted to learn that the elder girl has just won a King's Scholarship, and is going to Owen's College for three years' study, with a view to taking a B.A. degree. We wish all Freethinkers would bring up their children to be Freethinkers too, after the fashion of friend Hampson. It is all very well to sigh for the conversion of the whole world to Freethought. But what is the use of it if you can't begin with your own family?

The United States Senate has voted the Appropriation Bill giving five million dollars to the projected exhibition at St. Louis, and a quarter of a million dollars to the projected exhibition at Charleston; but, unfortunately, on the condition that neither exhibition shall be open on Sunday. No such condition, however, was exacted in regard to Buffalo, and a fight took place between the New York Sabbath Committee and the Anti-Sabbatarians as to whether this exhibition should be closed on Sunday or not. The upshot is that the Buffalo exhibition is to open its gates on the Lord's Day. Only a part of it will be closed—namely, the Midway, a thoroughfare bordered with penny sideshows. On the whole, this may be regarded as a victory for Sunday freedom and rational enjoyment.

The history of Saint David, which begins this week in our columns, is taken from Mr. Foote's volume entitled *Bible Heroes*. Such a close criticism of the career of the man after God's own heart, as the Bible calls him, should be a good thing to put into the hands of an orthodox person who still believes in the Bible as God's Word, but is nevertheless of a slightly inquiring turn of mind. We venture, therefore, to ask our friends to lend this week's *Freethinker* to such persons, if they can possibly do so. It will be a bit of propagandist effort on their part.

The Humanitarian League prints in the *Morning Leader*, and perhaps elsewhere, a long list of more or less eminent persons who have “associated themselves with the protest against the Royal Buckhounds.” It is very odd to see “G. W. Foote, National Secular Society” almost cheek by hawl with “The Most Rev. the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury,” though it is good to see men of widely different opinions associated in the cause of common humanity.

T. L. Lidgett, of Stonebow, Lincoln, combines business with amateur evangelising. He also bursts out into versification. But he is not always happy in these efforts. Here are two lines from a “poetical” tract, headed “Where can I find mercy?”—a question which this Poet-Tradesman-Evangelist somehow finds a pressing one:—

For he's a faithful Jesus,
He says he'll take you in.

Very likely. Jesus has taken in a great many. But forewarned is forearmed. It won't be Mr. Lidgett's fault if Jesus takes in any more.

Stephen Gerard Haughey, an Irish American, who came over to this country to preach what is called a new form of religion—the Seventh Day Advent—has got mixed up in a very nasty scandal at the Public Baths, Aston. It would be wrong to say more while the case is proceeding, but we cannot help making a general remark on the curious frequency with which pious persons become involved in particularly odious charges.

The Methods of Popular Religious Defence.—I.

THE *New York Journal* is not, perhaps, the kind of paper one would go to for profound or serious contributions to the elucidation of any intellectual question. It stands as the representative and type of what has come to be called "yellow journalism"—flashy, frothy, flippant, insincere. Though it must be said, on the other hand, by way of defence for one side of yellow journalism, that all that glitters is not necessarily base, and dulness is not an essential mark of depth. Some of the most "respectable" of English newspapers have shown quite recently that they can be quite as "yellow" as the worst of those to which that title is usually assigned.

In its Sunday edition, however, the *New York Journal*, in common with many of its contemporaries, is in the habit of getting people with "big names" to contribute articles on various topics of the day. It is notable that these articles have a persistent knack of turning on the question of religion and the Bible, Agnosticism and the future of Christianity, and the like. Though the vast majority of the articles are ostensibly intended as defences of Christianity, their very frequency is striking. When eminent and learned "divines" assure us, week after week, that Christianity was never more firmly established; that Agnosticism and Freethought are dead, or as good as dead; that the day of "blatant infidelity" (a mouthful that never fails) is over; that we are witnessing a re-birth of faith, and all the rest—we are reminded of nothing in the world so much as the proverbial gentleman who used to whistle to keep his courage up. Really, if Christianity be in such a flourishing way as its apologists are given to assert, one is tempted to ask: Why make such a fuss; why go to the trouble of elaborately defending what only a "discredited remnant" are attacking? The plain truth, of course, is that an opinion which requires constant defence is obviously shaky; and in some cases the very need for defence damns the opinion sought to be defended.

Mr. H. J. W. Dam is one of the writers who contribute to the *Sunday Journal*, and the Rev. Dr. Parkhurst, a prominent New York clergyman, is another; and in recent numbers these two gentlemen are let loose on such topics as "Where Science has Failed" and "The Death of Agnosticism." In view of some recent discussion in this country, the following passages—samples of the whole—from Rev. Dr. Parkhurst are worth reproducing, howsoever stale the rhetoric may be:—

"Agnosticism is Greek for 'I don't know.' If this system of philosophy (or of unphilosophy) had not had a classic name, it would never have had so many advocates....."

"Besides the fact of its elegant and cultured name, hosts of people have become adherents of Agnosticism because it is a lazy philosophy, and a philosophy that makes no demand upon the brain. Not to have a creed is its creed. It takes no profundity to be able not to know. A boy can stand at the foot of his class without having to cram for it, or to precipitate himself into brain fever. Atheism is a far more robust kind of thing than Agnosticism is. Atheism is disbelief; Agnosticism is merely unbelief. Atheism commits itself to something; Agnosticism does not. Agnosticism is a system of philosophical straddle."

There is obviously nothing new in this kind of religious journalese. In this country you can buy cart-loads of it for a few pence in Paternoster-row. But it is notable—in view of the charge latterly made by some Freethinkers that the term Atheism is either misleading or unphilosophic—to find that the term Agnosticism fares no better at the hands of the religious rhetoricians who profess to be misled by the term Atheism, and whose business is not to understand and not to dispassionately and philosophically weigh the meanings of any terms used by Freethinkers. When Agnosticism becomes the badge of robust Freethought, as with some Freethinkers it has, it will draw down on it quite as much religious malice as any other badge of Freethought. And, to those who aver that the word Atheism is taken by the ignorant to imply a universal

denial of a possible fact, the retort is to hand in Dr. Parkhurst's fireworks, that the word Agnosticism has continually led to the word-play that the Agnostic, declaring himself to be ignorant, was thereby, on his own confession, ruled out of court. Trying to make your meaning clear to people who do not want to see it, or else want to prevent others seeing it, is hopeless; the problem becomes, not one of terminology, but of morals.

On the same page as Dr. Parkhurst's article is one by the gentleman who rejoices in the curious name of Dam. Mr. Dam says that "Agnosticism, as a philosophical system, is dead—as dead as alchemy. Like a floating island in the Amazon, it has been undermined, washed away, and swept out of existence," and so forth. Dr. Parkhurst, on the contrary, chimes in with this:—

"Mr. Dam has intimated in his recent article that Agnosticism is dead. No, it will never die—at least so long as there are intelligences that have no thought and no venture, and so long as people who are without philosophy have the indolence and the cheek to make a philosophy out of their own mental indecision, and to decorate it with sonorous nomenclature in order to contribute to their own amusement and the bamboozling of the public."

Thus no attempt is made to even superficially harmonise the two lines of religious abuse; any phrase seems good enough for the serene Christian, so it is abusive enough.

As a further example of the confusion into which the religionist is thrown, when attempting to defend his creed, we have Mr. Dam telling us that "Huxley was a man of most brilliant mind, of the deepest sincerity, but embittered, embittered to the core by the painful struggles of his early life"; whilst Dr. Parkhurst contributes this gem:—

"The intellectual conceit of a studied scientist like Huxley is bad enough, but in point of exasperation is not a circumstance to the sophomoric complacency of a man who has studied just long enough not to know that he doesn't know anything."

Mr. Dam's assumption, habitual with religionists of a type, that all Rationalism and Agnosticism is the result of painful and embittering struggles in early life, may be set beside the sweet-souled utterances of people like Dr. Parkhurst.

For the rest it would be almost undignified to take stuff like Mr. Dam's and Dr. Parkhurst's to pieces; talk about Agnosticism being a lazy philosophy, and making no demand upon the brain—in view of the life and work of men like Huxley and Spencer, and Mr. Holyoake and Mr. Bradlaugh (all of whom are virtually intended to be included in Dr. Parkhurst's diatribe)—may be left to stand as a sample of the imbecilities to which the professional religionist is now reduced, by way of defending his position and emoluments. The other day in these columns a correspondent, Mr. W. W. Strickland, in the course of a criticism on the conduct of the paper, vaguely hinted at some strong arguments on the Theistic side of which the *Freethinker* takes no notice. One is at a loss to know exactly to what arguments Mr. Strickland refers. But the fact may be brought to the attention of such critics that the current argumentation of what may be called official Theism is of the most trifling and inept description. If there are really strong and weighty arguments on that side, it does seem somewhat remarkable that such pains should be apparently taken to keep them hidden from the public gaze; and that, instead, the prominent and popular defenders of Theism should be driven to such drivel as Dr. Parkhurst's—drivel which one need not even be an Agnostic or a Freethinker to recognise as such.

FREDERICK RYAN.

Obituary.

Mr. J. F. Aust, a well-known Secularist, residing at Abercynon, had the painful experience, on Wednesday week, of following the remains of his beloved child, aged eighteen months, to the Quaker's Yard Cemetery. The burial service, which was a Secular one, was conducted by Mr. E. Treharne-Jones. Much interest was taken in the proceedings, as Secular burials are a rare thing in South Wales.—SAMUEL HOLMAN.

Saloon-Smashing Carrie.

(Mrs. Carrie Nation, of America.)

O CARRIE, bare that mighty arm
And do thy prison walls some harm;
Black-eye thy warders, pull their hair,
Thy nature is to do and dare.

Or if confinement makes thee limp,
I would some cheeky, merry imp
Could bring thee just one can of beer
To rouse that spirit drunkards fear.

Or art thou husbanding thy strength
That, when thy time is up, at length
Thy brawny arms may screw the throats
Of all who will not give their votes

To banish alcoholic drinks?
Alas! the gentle Carrie winks!
A softness melts her massive face!
Then looks of pride usurp its place.

What is it? Gentle Carrie's sold
Her fiery soul for circus gold,*
In gaudy chariot she will drive
To keep her *amour propre* alive.

At every resting-place she'll spout
To keep the drunken demon out;
She'll hurtle forth in fierce tirade
The violence that such havoc made.

And should her accents rouse fierce wrath,
Should mobs in fury drive her forth,
Another tone her cause may aid,
The gentle Carrie will persuade.

Perhaps a husband will crawl out,
No longer fearing curse or clout,
And a sweet squalling babe may end
The ravings of the drunkard's friend.

WALTER K. LEWIS, B.A.

St. David.

The Man after God's Own Heart.

By G. W. FOOTE.

DAVID was the ideal King of the Jews. The documents which record his career are semi-legendary, and contain the embellishments of after ages. But these very adornments are characteristic. They reveal the essence of the race. David combines all the qualities which the Jews have prized and displayed. He is intensely patriotic, generous to friends, cruel to enemies, fond of his children, brave, shrewd, shifty, grasping, tenacious, sensual, hypocritical, and, above all, pious.

This national hero so affected the imagination of the Jews that the Messiah was to descend from him, resemble him, and restore his throne. Hence the ridiculous genealogies of Matthew and Luke, which connect Christ with David through Joseph, although his real father was the Holy Ghost.

David is even called a man after God's own heart. He was the kind of man Jahveh liked, and Jahveh was the kind of God the Jews liked. Every people's gods are idealisations of national character. Judging men by the company they keep is not a surer rule than judging them by the deities they worship.

When Samuel first quarrelled with Saul, he informed him that the Lord had "sought him a man after his own heart" to supplant him as king. This eulogium of David is repeated in the New Testament, where God calls him "a man after mine own heart." Holy Writ also informs us that "David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uria the Hittite." Words could not more plainly stamp the life of David with God's approval. He has one flaw to show he is human, but all the rest is perfect. To improve on David, therefore, would be

To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet.

Thus the case stood in olden times. But "the thoughts of men are widened by the process of the suns." Morality develops like intelligence, and the ideals as well as the beliefs of one age are contemned by another. David is now seen to be a very shady character, and the champions of the Bible are obliged to "torture one poor word ten thousand ways" in order to absolve Jahveh from the vices and crimes of his favorite. Leland maintains that the text in Kings is less inclusive than it looks. The "design" is, not to assert that David only committed one fault, but to assert that in no other instance did he presumptuously and wickedly depart

* See *Daily Mail*, February 22.

from God. This apology is worthy of Leland's lumbering intellect. Warburton's apology, as may be imagined, is more dexterous. "It is of importance to the cause of truth," he says, "to know that this *character* was not given him for his *private* morals, but his *public*; his zeal for the advancement of the glory of the *theocracy*." There speaks the theologian and the priest. David never fell into idolatry; he worshipped the god of the Jehovist priests who wrote the history, and he steadily maintained the wealth and privileges of "the Church." Surely such public virtues are enough to cover a multitude of *private* sins!

Unfortunately for Warburton's plea, David's public life will not bear a rigid scrutiny. His friendship for "the theocracy" is undoubted, but his cruelty in war is almost matchless, and his dying counsels to Solomon were grossly malignant. "It is not possible," wrote Shaftesbury, "by the muse's art, to make that royal hero appear amiable in human eyes, who found such favor in the eye of Heaven. Such are mere human hearts that they can hardly find the least sympathy with that *only one* which had the character of being after the pattern of the Almighty."

Milman, with his usual audacity, blames those who take the expression *after God's own heart* "in a strict and literal sense," and urges that allowance must be made for David's age and country. He forgets that the historian and the theologian cannot adopt the same standard of judgment. According to the Acts, the Lord called David a man after his own heart, over a thousand years after his death, and it is presumption to doubt the literal accuracy of such an authority.

David's name in Hebrew signifies *Beloved*. It is a Phœnician name, the same as that of Dido, Queen of Carthage. According to the usual chronology, he reigned over Israel from 1055 to 1015 B.C. But Dr. Robertson Smith says the computation is uncertain. Ewald places David ten years earlier, and other critics so much as thirty and fifty years. His history, as we have it, "is extracted from various sources of unequal value, which are fitted together in a way which affords considerable difficulty to the historical critic." Renan shrewdly observes that nearly every story is told as David would have liked it.

Judah had produced no remarkable man before. David shed a lustre on all his tribe. His father's name was Jesse, and he was the youngest of eight sons. The Rabbis tell a curious story of his birth. It is mentioned by Bayle in his famous article on David, and given in Latin by Baring Gould, to spare the modesty of his readers who esteem the filth of the Bible as divine. David is supposed to say of himself "Behold, I was shapen in wickedness; and in sin did my mother conceive me." From this text the puerile ingenuity of later Rabbis developed the following romance. Jesse had a maid-servant, whom he solicited to impurity; but she, being chaste and faithful to her mistress, told her of the fact. A clandestine meeting was arranged, the mistress put herself in the maid's place, and David was the result of this cohabitation. A similar story is found in the literature of nearly every people under the sun; yet several writers have argued whether David's escutcheon had a bar sinister. St. Jerome was of opinion that Jesse committed no actual sin, and the only defilement on David was that which he drew from his mother. Bayle, who is sarcastic about "illustrious bastards," remarks that if David shared the vigor and talents so often ascribed to illegitimates he must certainly, in the circumstances, have derived the blessing from his father.

Some Rabbis say David was born circumcised. Others say he was not circumcised until he was fourteen. The dispute is therefore entirely Jewish. These wiseacres likewise affirm that David had no soul until his fifteenth year, and he would have died at birth, only Adam, who was entitled to a thousand years, relinquished seventy to give him an innings. They further relate that David was red-haired and diminutive, but he grew rapidly when Samuel anointed him, and was soon as lofty as Saul. They do not tell us whether the holy oil had any effect on his carroty locks. Certainly it did not affect his vision, for he retained his gift of the evil eye. His visual organ was excessively malignant. Merely by looking at people he could give them the leprosy and other dreadful disorders.

That David was "ruddy" the Bible informs us, but it adds that he was "of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to." Such varieties appear among the Semitic races, and their very eccentricity renders them attractive. Nor is it surprising that mental peculiarities should accompany the physical.

"There are sometimes born, in that Semitic orient, habitually hard and stern, prodigies of grace, elegance, and intelligence. David was one of those charmers. Capable of the greatest crimes, when circumstances called for them, he was also capable of the most delicate sentiments. He knew how to make himself popular; when people knew him they became attached to him. His type of face stood out against the swarthy visages of his tribesmen. He had a pink complexion, fine and amiable features, and a pleasant and easy eloquence."

Renan's picture of David is idealised, though it contains elements of truth. David's power of attaching people to his cause is indisputable. His "delicate sentiments" are at least open to question. He loved his offspring, but that is primarily an animal passion; and his friendship for Jonathan is perhaps a later fiction, designed to bridge a chasm in the kingly succession, by transferring Jonathan's hereditary rights to David.

Saint David is introduced to us in the sixteenth chapter of the first book of Samuel. By God's direction the prophet went to Bethlehem and anointed the "ruddy" youth in secrecy as king of Israel. Doubtless the story is a fiction, but it may be taken to indicate that Samuel favored David's pretensions and assisted him in his rivalry with Saul.

Before the end of the same chapter David is introduced to Saul. He is brought to court as a skilful harpist to charm away the "king's evil spirit." Already he is "a mighty valiant man," and Saul makes him his armor-bearer. But in the very next chapter Saul does not know David. After the slaying of Goliath, the king asks, "Whose son is this youth?" Abner, the general, replies: "I cannot tell." No one knew the youth who, in all Israel, had found a medicine for the king's disease!

Profane wits have inquired whether David played upon the little harp peculiar to his nation; but such frivolous questions are beneath the dignity of the subject.

(To be continued.)

Correspondence.

THE CREATION STORY.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—If you permit a reply to Messrs. Watts and De Caux, I propose to let the matter drop, unless at your own invitation. Let me say Genesis i. gives an excellent illustration of supernatural guidance. Were the wisest men to suggest how such an ancient document might suitably discharge its duty of telling how the earth was prepared for man, their decision might run as follows. Let the document from age to age yield doctrinal information, combined with references to nature; said references being constantly in agreement with knowledge which man might have gained by mental ability. Well here, as I affirm, we have our exacting demand anticipated in a treatise coming down from the infancy of humanity. A calm judicial mind can perceive that the difficulties are tremendous connected with a denial of its super-human origin. There were and are a thousand chances of going wrong, yet here we have a history compiled in popular phraseology, which contradicts no verified modern discovery.

Progressive science has exploded the interpretation which was usually given some centuries past. This was that creation took place some six thousand years ago, that the sun had no existence till the fourth of the six days, and so forth. But then to prayerful investigation another meaning became gradually apparent, of which I gave a version. I now proceed, briefly, to show how my two critics have not in the very smallest degree shaken or discredited what I wrote.

I begin with Mr. Watts. After much irrelevant preliminary matter, his criticism opens by asking if I hold the "Westminster Catechism" theory of how creation was accomplished? I reply, I hold no theory respecting the process; I contented myself with stating the fact, solely on the authority of Scripture. My statement was: "Genesis i. (1) informs us that where before had been vacancy God called into existence the boundless universe." (2) Next a quotation is given, which makes me say, science taught creation had taken place. The consequent criticism runs thus: "Where does science teach that creation took place? Will the rev. gentleman answer that question?" My answer is that my teaching has been mistaken through no fault of mine. These questions ignore the context immediately preceding the quotation. Of this context a sample has just been given by myself, and shows I base my statement respecting the occurrence of creation solely on Scripture authority. What, then, does science teach? Merely that creation did not take place (as used to be held) about six thousand years ago, but at some period inconceivably remote. (3) Your readers will recollect I taught the work of the six days exclusively referred to a small portion of Western Asia, over which a dense canopy of gloom impended, and outside the bounds of which nature was pretty much as now. My exact words were: "Outside its bounds birds and beasts, trees and vegetables, flourished just as now, while it is needless to say the sun, moon, and stars were in no manner affected." Now, the fashion in which my interpretation is treated is very surprising. It is calmly left unassailed, and indeed it is unassailable, while the old exploded theory is vigorously attacked. (4) The last paragraph professes to give an explicit reply to my inquiry, whether "increasing knowledge interferes" with my interpretation. This paragraph, however, establishes the full truth of what it was intended to overthrow. First we are told with respect to the supposed void, between the two first verses of Genesis, "there is no knowledge upon which such an assertion can be based." Well, then, the case is as I stated; science does not "interfere" with a theological view which it leaves unnoticed. Second, we are told "science knows nothing of this alleged creation." Well, then, science does not "interfere." Before it can "interfere" it must know

something. Be it remembered, I only said that, whenever creation took place (whose occurrence we learn solely from Scripture), science taught it took place at some remote time. Third, we read: "A knowledge of the Bible shows that the 'beginning' was a part of the six days (see Exodus xx. 9 and 11, and xxxi. 17)." My reply is obvious: in giving my own theory, I have already rejected that of Mr. Watts. Moreover, I fail to see how in any case comparing one Biblical passage with another can prove advancing science interferes with my interpretation.

Now for Mr. De Caux, who hopes his own critique will "cause the scales to fall" from my eyes. His remarks may be briefly dismissed. (1) Referring to my statement that God created the boundless universe, he asks: "Is not illimitable space the boundless universe?" I reply: Certainly not; all dictionaries show that space and universe have different significations. (2) He asserts that science "teaches in the most unmistakable manner that the boundless universe never had a beginning." I confess my utter ignorance of this scientific teaching, and I earnestly request Mr. De Caux to prove the truth of his sturdy assertion. When he has done this, he will cause millions of Christians to renounce all faith in Genesis i. (3) He gives his own version of the beginning of Genesis i. This I have already rejected by having given my own. (4) He gives a quotation from Mr. Henslow. I have already implied its truth. I have stated that theologians, perceiving the old interpretation of Genesis i. contradicted science, gradually perceived Scripture suggested the adoption of another.

HENRY J. ALCOCK.

Publicans and Parsons; or, Mutual Advertisement.

[A parson at Southend recently offered to pay a publican £2 per annum if he would hang up inside his bar a copy of the hymn, "What shall the harvest be?" The publican replied: "Agreed, on condition that you advertise my liquors in your church."—*Daily Paper.*]

O PRIESTS inspired by God the Third,
The publicans are ready
To take you at your brother's word;
But steady! parsons, steady!

Your services are highly priced,
You have good homes and victuals;
And "Bungs" must live; you live on Christ,
They live on beer and skittles.

Now, if you'll advertise their stores
And bring them £ s. d., sirs,
They'll advertise that hymn of yours,
"What shall the harvest be?" sirs.

They'll puff the Book that teaches flats
That whales have stretching throttles,
If you will advertise their vats,
Their barrels, and their bottles.

And if you'll advertise and laud
Their "Ordinary" dinners,
They'll advertise your Lamb of Gaud
That feeds "communing" sinners.

If you will advertise their beers,
Their Allsopp's and their Bass's,
They'll advertise Jehovah's seers,
And other talking asses.

And if you'll advertise their rum,
Their sherry, and their champagne,
They'll advertise your "Kingdom Come,"
Your blazing Hell and damn pain.

If you will "puff" their penny weeds
And twopenny Manillas,
They'll "puff" your "airy" creed that leads
To Jah's aerial villas.

If you will puff and magnify
The virtues of their claret,
They'll puff your mansions in the sky,
Whose bricks are eighteen carat.

Come, advertise their glorious booze,
And then, most reverend misters,
They'll advertise your glorious news
Of endless bliss and blisters.

Your Bible advertises "lush"
In very many places;
Then so should you without a blush
Appearing on your faces!

ESS JAY BEE.

At the Manchester Bankruptcy Court a bookseller, named Frederick William Keltz, attributed his failure chiefly to the trickery of his brother, the Rev. John Keltz, who obtained £500 of him ostensibly for the purpose of purchasing an advowson, but really for the purpose of settling a breach of promise action. Comment is unnecessary.

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, "The Fable of the Crucifixion."

CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, J. M. Robertson, "The Imposture of Christian Love."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell-road): 7, Dr. Washington Sullivan, "Huxley's *Life and Letters*."

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, High-street): 11, H. Snell, "Colenso as Theologian."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, A lecture.

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11 and 7.15, Messrs. Ramsey and Hannable, "The Atonement."

STRATFORD (The Grove): 11.30, Mr. Davis, "God and Mammon."

COUNTRY.

ABERDEEN (Northern Friendly Society's Hall): 6.30, Miss Ker, "Some Apostles of Simplicity."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): H. Percy Ward—11 (in the Bull Ring), "Is there a God?" 3, "Thomas Paine and the *Age of Reason*"; 7, "From Wesleyan Pulpit to Secularist Platform."

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school; 7, R. P. Edwards, "A Rational Interpretation of the Bible."

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): Mrs. Bradlaugh-Bonner—12, "Freethought in the Old Century and the New"; 6.30, "Chinese Reformers."

HULL (2 Room, Friendly Societies' Hall, Albion-street): 7, Mr. Trumper, "The Aims and Objects of the National Democratic League."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, H. Major, B.A., B.Sc., "Chinese Puzzles" (with lantern illustrations).

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, Annual Meeting.

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): C. Cohen—11, "Darwinism and Ethics"; 3, "Religion and Insanity"; 6.30, "Atheism and its Critics." Tea at 5.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): W. J. P. Burton, F.G.S.—3, "The Story of the Derbyshire Gribstone"; 7, "Volcanoes and Earthquakes" (with lantern illustrations). Tea at 5.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7, A reading.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 241 High-road, Leyton.—March 24, Manchester; 31, Camberwell.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham.—April 28, Glasgow.

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