

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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The Crucifixion Fable.

THE Christians of this country will soon be celebrating the death of their Redeemer. They say that their God was murdered on a certain Friday nearly two thousand years ago. The anniversary of this day they call Good Friday. When it comes round—and it shifts with the moon, that planet sacred to lovers and lunatics—they generally proceed to enjoy themselves, as though it were the anniversary of a wedding. They eat and drink with extra vigor; indeed, they sometimes get drunk. They visit their friends, take week-end trips, scour the country on bicycles, and do all sorts of things that are very much out of harmony with the sad drama that they say was enacted on Mount Calvary. For our part, we hope to be as jolly as they are, but for a different reason. It would never occur to us to attend an execution and laugh at the dying criminal. In the same spirit, we should treat the crucifixion of Jesus with all seriousness if we believed it really happened. But we do not. We regard the whole story, from beginning to end, as a dramatic fiction. And we feel sure that if all the early Christian writings were now extant we should be able to see exactly how it was developed. At any rate, the story of the crucifixion, as it has come down to us, bears every mark of a fable. There does not appear to be one historical characteristic in the entire narrative.

Jesus had to die somehow, or he could not be the Savior. It was also necessary that he should die a violent death. A natural death, from fever or small-pox, would be too unromantic. Nor would it do for him to perish in a tumult, or by lynch law, or by the hand of a personal assassin. That would have been too undignified. The only possible alternative was a public execution, judicially ordered, and carried out by the civil authorities. And this is precisely what the fictionists adopted. In the next place, it was natural, in a dramatic composition, that every feature of the story should be wrought up to a high degree of interest and effectiveness. An ordinary arrest would never do. The Savior had to be betrayed, and Judas was selected for the purpose. He took the constables to Jesus and pointed him out to them with a kiss. Now this is excellent. The dramatist knew what he was about. But his memory was not as good as his invention. He forgot that Jesus did not need identification, since he was about the best known man in Jerusalem, in consequence of the violent antics he had been playing there for several days. What should we think if we were told that the police wanted to arrest the late Charles Bradlaugh, and that they paid the treasurer of the National Secular Society thirty shillings to identify him by shaking hands with him? Should we not say it was too absurd for discussion? And are we not entitled to say the same of the arrest of Jesus?

Next let us take the incident of Peter's denial of his master. One of the twelve betrayed Jesus, and the other eleven forsook him and fled—in order that he might stand absolutely forlorn. But even this was not enough. Peter doubled back, got into the court, and watched the examination. Why? Simply in order that he might be there at the psychological moment to deny his master. Thus the Savior is first betrayed, then forsaken, and at last denied. Now we venture to say that dramas do not occur in actual life with such rounded completeness. They only occur in that way on the stage.

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When Peter got outside, after denying his master, the cock was ready to crow at him. The rooster had been waiting to let fly. When he saw Peter he knew the critical moment had arrived. That is how the story goes. But if you go by the ordinary laws of probability the incident is simply incredible. Moreover, the rooster must have been placed there in readiness, for cocks were not allowed within the Holy City.

Let us now take the case of the two thieves between whom Jesus was crucified. Why were there two? Why not one or three, or any other number? Because two—neither more nor less than two—were wanted by the dramatist; one to rail at Jesus, and the other to acknowledge him as the Messiah. They are just like the "two murderers" in *Macbeth*. The number was determined by the playwright. According to the laws of probability, the odds were ever so many to one against precisely two thieves turning up to be executed at the same time as Jesus; and it was at least two to one against his being placed between them.

The spear-thrust in the side of Jesus is another dramatic incident. It is only mentioned in the fourth Gospel. Why? Because the writer of that Gospel, and that writer alone, brings in Thomas to doubt the resurrection after all the other disciples are convinced. Thomas demands not only ocular but tangible proof. Amongst other things he wishes to put his hand in the hole in the Savior's side. John makes him put his hand there, and John prepares the hole for his doing it. The other Gospels are silent as to both incidents.

Jesus is brought before the high priest first. Why? Simply in order that the representatives of Judaism—the old dispensation—might insult and reject him. This incident is demonstrably unhistorical. "The court of priests had no penal jurisdiction," as Rabbi Wise tells us, "except in the affairs of the temple service, and then over priests and Levites only."

The trial before Pilate is all drama. There is no history in it—nothing in keeping with what is known of Roman jurisprudence. It is not conceivable that a Roman governor, sitting as a magistrate, took domestic messages from his wife as to her dreams about the guilt or innocence of a prisoner he was trying. It is monstrous to suppose that he would "find no fault" in the prisoner and yet sentence him to execution; or that he would exculpate himself by washing his hands in public—an act that was meaningless to a Roman. All these things, and more, are pure inventions. The object of them is to divert blame from Pilate, who represents the Gentiles, and to throw all the guilt upon the Jews. "His blood be upon us and upon our children" was never cried by his countrymen against the seat of justice—which would have been *no* seat of justice in listening to them. This is the malignant cry of Christian bigotry; a pretence and a justification for hating and persecuting the Jews.

The more this Crucifixion story is examined the more dramatic and the less historical it appears. We could continue this examination at great length on the lines we have been pursuing, but our space is limited, and what we have already said is enough for any reader who will take the trouble to think the matter out for himself. What we desire to point out in conclusion is this. Christianity is said to be the only religion that enables a man to die with peace and comfort. Yet the last words of Christ himself were "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

G. W. FOOTE.

Does God Care?

THE study of objective nature is the chief characteristic of modern science. I do not mean by this that people did not study nature until modern times; nature is not a recent discovery, however much more carefully it has been studied of late years. But science has become heliocentric, and, instead of studying nature from the standpoint of human feelings and inclinations, it has learned to treat man as a part of a whole whose true constitution can only be understood when we put human feelings and prejudices on one side. It is this which is the dominant note of all modern scientific thought; a feature which has not only dismissed many speculations as fruitless or insoluble, but has completely transformed our conception of the dual relations of man and the universe.

These transformations have been great in all directions, but nowhere greater than in the field of religion. There was nothing inherently grotesque in our predecessors picturing the whole universe as specially designed for the benefit of man. The world was to them so little, and man so great; the immensities of space were as yet unexplored, the infinite wonders and complexities of the animal world unknown. Man bulked largest of all in the estimation of man, and there seemed nothing unreasonable in assuming that he was the object for which all nature existed. From this paradise of ignorance and egotism modern science has rudely and rapidly aroused mankind. It declares with an unflinching voice, and supports the assertion with innumerable and undeniable proofs, that nature is absolutely indifferent to the welfare of man as man. In the structure of things man is only a fragment of a whole, a product of forces as unconscious in their operation as those which result in the formation of a crystal. His woes and joys, his hopes and fears, are nothing to nature, save as they are considered as expressions of a universal world force. All his beliefs to the contrary are only the extension of his inward states to the outside world. But nature will, when carefully examined, countenance none of them. By innumerable proofs it shows that in the economy of things the life of a man is of no greater consequence than that of any other animal. To himself or to his fellows the ill-doing or well-doing, the life or death of a man, may be fraught with great promise or peril; but to nature at large it is but a new arrangement of complex forces. The indifference of nature is the one supreme fact established by modern science.

And if we fail to trace in nature any concern for human well-being, what is to be said of that power which men have feigned behind nature, and which they have believed was actively concerned in securing human happiness or producing human misery? I do not wish to discuss here the question of the existence of God; let that be granted for the time being. I only wish to face, and to get others to face, the question of the indifference of God to human wishes or well-being, assuming such a being to exist. For I maintain that, the indifference of nature once admitted, the indifference of God follows as a natural corollary. The day has gone when people could assume the existence of miracle as God's method of operation; it is admitted that *if*—a most colossal "if"—if there be a God, he only operates through the agency of natural law, and therefore in deciding the one question science has really settled the other.

Still, a belief is not killed, so far as the general mind is concerned, when science says it nay. Religious beliefs linger, not because there is evidence of their harmony with facts, but because they are already in possession of the mental field, and thus come before us more in the nature of sovereigns exacting obedience than as subjects expressing our will. In spite of all that has been made clear during the last fifty years concerning the inner workings of natural forces, the pitiless struggle for existence always and everywhere going on, the countless numbers of animate beings whose deaths are the indispensable condition of the survival of others; in spite, too, of the many evils that afflict human nature, and which cannot *all* be regarded as punishment for wrong-doing; despite all this, the old language is still used, and people continue to talk glibly

of a heavenly father ruling the world for the benefit of his earthly children!

Where are the proofs found for such a belief? Certainly not in the animal world. No man looking at the whole scheme of nature, as exemplified here, can logically assume that there is any solicitude for animal well-being. For every animal born to live there are a hundred, a thousand, even more, that are born destined to suffering and a premature death. The very existence of a section of the animal world is dependent upon the destruction of a much larger number. Disease and starvation carry off their myriads of victims. Heat and cold, pestilence and volcanic outbreak, demand their yearly tribute. Right through the animal world the picture is far more that of a deity creating only to destroy, developing elaborate plans for tormenting the beings he has arbitrarily called into existence, rather than that of an all-powerful, benevolent being arranging all things for the benefit of his creatures.

I know all that may be said of the gradual perfecting of the animal structure that is secured by this struggle for existence; but this does not remove the objection; it only proves that *some* benefit by the process. This no one denies. A tiger benefits by dining off a sheep, but the injury to the sheep is none the less. The people "butchered to make a Roman holiday" gave pleasure in their dying to those who witnessed the scene, but this would sound a curious justification for the pastime. To such statements as these, which are the stock-in-trade of the Theist seeking to rest his beliefs on an evolutionary basis, the argument of Professor G. J. Romanes holds as strong as ever. "Looking to the outcome," he remarks, "we find that more than one-half of the species that have survived the ceaseless struggle are parasitic in their habits, lower and insentient forms of life feasting on higher and sentient forms; we find teeth and talons whetted for slaughter, hooks and suckers moulded for torment—everywhere a reign of terror, hunger, sickness, with oozing blood and quivering limbs, with gasping breath and eyes of innocence that dimly close in deaths of cruel torture." Among all the numerous instincts which exist in the animal world there is not one that has a clear and distinct reference to species other than those that possess it. Every species of animal is brutally egoistic, caring nothing what dies so long as its own kind can continue to live.

Is there any proof of the divine care to be found in the world of human life? Here, too, much that has been said of animal life at large applies also to human nature. Science re-creates our ancestors for us at a stage but little removed from that of the animal. It shows us how the same struggle for existence that rages in the lower animal world has gone on among mankind; how progress, in its earlier stages, is effected by the crudest, cruellest passions—superstition, tyranny, and cruelty; and how myriads of people have been offered up as sacrifices in the past, and are being offered up in the present, to the end that the survivors may dimly glimpse some of the simplest lessons of right social living. Surely we have a right to expect to find a far different picture than that which we actually do find, did love, allied with power and wisdom, rule the earth. We have a right to demand that, even though progress be slow, it should at least not be paid for by the price of the sufferings and slaughterings of unnumbered thousands, each one of whom has as clear a claim to consideration as those that survive.

Even in the sphere of earnest human endeavor after right the same lesson is conveyed. Easy it is to understand the apology for the evil that results in good, although even that form of evil disproves the validity of the belief in God's supreme goodness; but what is to be said of the evil that does *not* lead to good? "I do not wonder at what men suffer," says Ruskin, "but I wonder often at what they lose. We may see how good rises out of pain and evil; but the dead, naked, eyeless loss—what good comes of that? The fruit struck to the earth before its ripeness; the glowing life, the goodly purpose, dissolved away in sudden death; the words, half-spoken, choked upon the lips with clay for ever; or, stranger than all, the whole majesty of humanity raised to its fulness, and every gift and power necessary for a given purpose, at a given moment centred in one man, and all this perfected blessing

permitted to be refused, perverted, crushed, cast aside by those who need it most—the city which is not set on a hill, the candle that giveth light to none that are in the house: these are the heaviest mysteries of this strange world.*

A mystery, however, only to those who seek to blend an unfounded theory with irreconcilable facts. To others it is clear that, were the belief under examination sound, the care of God would be seen most clearly in those cases where men and women are struggling to do right, but fail signally for want of a little timely advice or assistance. It is not merely that right and justice are trampled underfoot, but that even the endeavor to do right often enough leads to failure and disaster. Believers complain of the mere existence of people who have no faith in the existence of God and no belief in religion. But, if they are in the wrong, with whom does the fault lie? Not with them, certainly. Unbelief is usually purchased at a far higher price than is mere belief. Not many Theists have striven so hard to find out in which direction the truth exists as have those who reject all Theism. No; if Atheism carries with it any justifiable stigma—if, after all, the Atheist is in the wrong—the real fault lies with the Deity who has shown himself so indifferent to the welfare of honest men and women as to refrain from showing the right to those that have most earnestly sought it.

Nature, and consequently God, if there be one, is indifferent to human wishes and human welfare. Man's life and death, his hopes and fears, aspirations and degradations, are of no more concern to nature as a whole than is the fate of any other complex of natural forces. The Theist affirms that this belief robs life of all that is valuable. But this is only because he reads nature in the light of an already accepted theory, instead of examining first and theorising afterwards. The Atheist finds no such depressing results from a candid examination of nature. His estimate of the value of human life is not based upon an unprovable metaphysical assumption, but upon the realities of human existence. The indifference of God does not, and cannot, involve the indifference of man. On the contrary, the more convinced we are that man can have no salvation outside himself, and no counsel save that of human experience and wisdom, the more imperative does it become to develop that sense of community of interest and mutual helpfulness which lies at the root of all really civilised communities.

C. COHEN.

What is Necessitarianism?

LAST week I dealt with the theological misconceptions as to the term "Freethought." It is now proposed to show the erroneous notions which prevail in reference to the theory of what is termed "Necessitarianism" and its relation to the Secular view of Freethought. It is often asked, How can a man think freely when the very direction of his thoughts is determined by circumstances over which he has no control? To be a Necessitarian, it is urged, is clearly to be the very reverse of a Freethinker. There is a notable error here in reference to the meaning of both the terms employed. A Necessitarian is not one who possesses no freedom whatever, and a Freethinker is certainly not a person whose thoughts are subject to no law. The truth is that we are necessitated to do what we do by the force of universal and inevitable law. Our freedom consists, not in determining our actions, but rather in conducting ourselves in harmony with the requirements of such actions.

The word "Necessitarian," although it was at one period usually accepted by the philosophers, has been rejected by the greatest advocate of the doctrine it involves that the last century produced. Mr. John Stuart Mill, while contending for the truth of the doctrine of Necessity, held that the word was an objectionable one, because it conveys an entirely false idea to opponents; he therefore proposed—and with good reason—to substitute for it the word "Determinism." The term "Necessity" seems to involve the entire absence of any kind of freedom on the part of

the individual to whom it is applied, which is by no means the idea that its advocates desire to express. Liberty is not excluded altogether from their system; it has, on the contrary, a distinct place assigned to it. Freedom, not only of thinking, but even of acting, is fully recognised, though both must take place in accordance with the will or volition. Jonathan Edwards, whose Necessitarianism was based on very different principles, and also advocated from a different standpoint from that of Hume or Mill, remarks: "The plain and obvious meaning of the words 'Freedom' and 'Liberty' in common speech is power, opportunity, or advantage that anyone has to do as he pleases—or, in other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing or conducting in any respect as he wills." Those who believe that human actions are as much the subject of causation as the falling of a stone or the revolution of a planet can yet find a distinct place in their systems for liberty, and may very naturally object to have their opinions described by any word which would seem to imply the contrary, and lead to the conclusion that men are constrained in their actions by some imaginary law. Mill, therefore, speaks of the "falsely-called doctrine of Necessity," and prefers the "fairer name of Determinism." He wrote: "A volition is a moral effect, which follows the corresponding moral causes as certainly and invariably as physical effects follow their physical causes. Whether it *must* do so I acknowledge myself to be entirely ignorant, be the phenomenon moral or physical, and I condemn accordingly the word 'Necessity' as applied to either case. All that I know is that it always *does*." All, therefore, that the theory usually called Necessitarianism involves is, that the law of causation prevails in mental as well as in physical phenomena. It contends that all events follow adequate causes as certainly in the sphere of mind as in the domain of matter, and that, therefore, volitions and sensations are not exceptions to the universal law. It contends, further, that there is an analogy between the action of the law of causation as it prevails in matter and as it operates in mind, and that the effect may be traced backwards to the cause, and the cause followed forwards into the effect.

It will thus be seen that Freethought does not mean anything so absurd as that a person's thoughts are perfectly and absolutely uncontrolled by anything whatever. In point of fact, there is no such freedom as this existing anywhere, as far as we can judge. All forms of existence—nay, more, all conceivable forms of existence—must be bound together by some sort of bond arising out of the law by which the unity of the great whole is preserved. Men are influenced by the physical universe in its various phases more, perhaps, than they think. Tennyson has said:—

For I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened by the process of the suns.

This we think to be true in the sense that the influences of distant masses of matter may even be felt in the sphere of the human intellect. Man is greatly influenced by his immediate environment, and even by the environment of his embryonic state, ere his consciousness began to be, and his fellow creatures influence him more than he imagines. His mental nature is, in fact, largely made up of impulses, of motions, and of devices arising out of these. Freedom to act he has, but it is only such freedom as his will or volition may mark out; and that is all the freedom that a rational being needs. Let it, therefore, be distinctly understood that Freethought does not mean a freedom of the mind to act outside of, above, or in opposition to law, but it alleges that all men have an equal right to the honest convictions at which they have arrived, and to the expression of their opinions. A Freethinker maintains that society, which has been formed for the mutual protection of its members, has but limited power in this matter; he holds that the promulgation of what the majority may deem to be error is perfectly justifiable, and should be allowed without let or hindrance. Toleration is a term that he decidedly objects to, since it implies a superiority on the part of the one, which is to be shown by a kind of patronising act towards the other. He who tolerates considers that he does a favor to him who is tolerated, and no favor can be admitted between men in a matter where all rights are equal. The power of

* *Stones of Venice*, chap. v.

coercion upon questions of opinion is opposed to that mental liberty which is the birthright of all. Infallibility alone could possess the right to suppress an opinion, because only infallibility could declare for certain that a particular opinion was an error; and as infallibility does not exist, so far as we are aware, such a right is not to be found. A strong presumption that the doctrine it is sought to suppress is an erroneous one will not be sufficient—because, in the first place, a strong presumption is not a proof, and, in the second place, very strong presumptions indeed have existed in the past in favor of the falsity of certain opinions, which only a small minority held, but which afterwards turned out to be true.

Of course, the views here expressed are antagonistic to the orthodox notion of freewill, which assumes a cause which is not an effect. Freethinkers allege that man's motives govern the will, and that his desires arise independently of volition; that "will" is not an entity, and that volition is a mental condition depending for its manifestations upon birth, climate, education, and general surroundings. If a person has the power to call up a desire by the will, it is certain that some prior desire induced him to do so. What, therefore, caused that desire? Suppose one individual says he wills to do a thing, and he does it; he must have had an inclination, or he would not have thus willed and acted. Some inclination must, therefore, precede the "will," and, clearly, the "will" cannot be the cause of that which precedes itself in point of time, and to which, in fact, it owes its existence. If, as certain professed Christians assert, the "will" be an entity, where is it located, and what is its nature? Further, if, as the New Testament and the Church of England teach, man cannot save himself, wherein lies his freedom? If Freethinkers are in error in rejecting the doctrine of the so-called freedom of the will, then St. Paul and the Churches of England and Scotland share in the error.

Some years ago the present writer wrote that virtue and vice are not mere accidents of the time, but are as much the consequence of the operation of natural laws as the falling of a stone or the growth of a flower. Several opponents have severely criticised this remark. They say that I destroy all distinction between the man and the stone or flower. But such is not the fact, and the statement as shown above is still adhered to, with the firm belief that it is based on fact. Each event is the result of the working of natural laws. The flower may be cultivated and made more beautiful, but the process is carried on by natural law; the falling of a stone may be rendered subservient to human advantage by the proper application of the force displayed, but the whole is law notwithstanding. Laws cannot be put aside, whether in the physical or the intellectual world; but they may be rightly directed in both. We do not, it is urged, call the falling of a stone "a vicious deed." No matter what we call it, we endeavor, as far as we can, to prevent it from doing any mischief as it falls, and on the same principle we adopt means to prevent human actions from being so misdirected as to produce harm in society. The course of action that we take in the two cases will differ only in consequence of the difference in the law that is in operation, and the complication of the forces in the one case above those of the other.

CHARLES WATTS.

Pity the Poor Bishops.

SINCE the publication of the work entitled *The Fatal Opulence of Bishops*, various defences have been offered by, or on behalf of, bishops. The author—who is a beneficed clergyman, though *now*, of course, with no prospects of ever being elevated to a prelatical position, or anything approaching it—has been assailed with a great deal of virulence. If he retains his living, it will be to outsiders a marvel. But he had probably abandoned all hope of preferment when he wrote his book, and will not be disappointed if he is simply allowed to draw his present stipend.

That, after all, is not much less than many struggling professional men, with greater abilities, have to subsist upon. The author of this book is tolerably secure where he is. As there is "a divinity which doth hedge a king,"

there are many ecclesiastical buttresses that bolster up a cleric, whether an absolute blockhead or a person given to uttering unpalatable truths, or even somebody who is morally and physically incapable. The author of *The Fatal Opulence of Bishops*, who is really a man of ability, and beyond reproach, except from the bishops he has attacked, is probably secure in his present position, and might reply with some asperity to his critics.

But that is not at all necessary. The facts and figures he presents—easily verifiable by a reference to Whittaker—are beyond dispute. They show that absolutely extravagant sums are paid to the higher clergy, from the two Archbishops downwards, and that all pretences as to the "dreadful expenditure entailed upon them" are pure nonsense. These pretences go as near to lying as it is possible without a too open and flagrant violation of the truth.

A "Diocesan Bishop" writes to the *Guardian* in defence of himself against the author of *The Fatal Opulence of Bishops*. He says he has taken out of his banker's book a careful analysis of his expenditure for two years—1899 and 1900—and he gives the results, premising that he has a very large old palace, and not very extensive grounds and garden:—

Paid in cheques (household expenses and outside bills, such as bookseller, doctor, and chemist)	£2,568	14	10
Cash (weekly bills, wages, travelling expenses, gratuities, etc.)	2,596	0	0
Episcopal payments (legal secretary, private secretary, repairs, rates)... ..	1,021	14	3
Education and necessary disbursements for my children	665	9	0
Holidays	140	0	0
Charity and Church objects	2,262	17	1
Total	£9,254	15	2
Income for two years (income-tax deducted)	8,662	10	0
	£592	5	2

Very well. Probably his income is exceeded by £592, after he has paid all the items he enumerates. So would any professional person's income be thus exceeded when he had made the sort of disbursements here set forth. It does not matter whether these payments are made by cheques or cash, though the bishop apparently thinks that cheques are quite different to cash, in the sense, it may be, of "covering a multitude of sins." The first item is rather heavy—£2,568—household expenses, and outside bills, such as bookseller, doctor, and chemist. Well, we all have these expenses, whether bishops or not, though not at quite so high a rate. We don't pretend that our income is only so much, because we have to pay household expenses out of it, and to discharge bills from "the bookseller, doctor, and chemist." Everybody has to defray expenses of that kind.

Then there is the very considerable item of £2,596, put under the head of weekly bills, wages, travelling expenses, gratuities, etc. These two items alone make over £5,000, and would be regarded by any common-sense business man as personal expenses. We will say nothing about the £1,021 for legal secretary, private secretary, repairs, rates. Except, do not ordinary folks have to pay for repairs and disburse something for rates? The next item is a staggerer: "Education and necessary disbursements for my children, £665." Doesn't every man have to pay for the education, etc., of his children?

You see, if all these items are to be deducted, it doesn't much matter what a man receives. If everything which keeps him and his family and an entourage of servants, and provides him with all the accompaniments of a life in a palace, is set down, a man may spend a great deal.

But it is sheer nonsense for this Bishop to pretend that his episcopal income is inadequate, when confessedly he has paid so much out of what he has received for his own and his family's benefit. We all have these domestic disbursements, but that does not affect our income in the eyes of the Income Tax Commissioners. It all amounts to this: he receives so many thousands a year, and he makes payments—necessary payments, say, for legal secretary and private secretary—though even here it must be noticed that most people have to pay their solicitor and private secretary if they want

one. And after he has defrayed all these items, which mean the establishment of himself and his wife in a palace, and the education of his children (at a cost of £665), the poor man is left with a deficiency which he has to meet out of private resources.

It is all pure pretence, and a very mendacious pretence too. What do these "poor bishops" die with? Creighton died worth £29,500. And let us just enumerate the fortunes with which primates and bishops have died (the totals have already been given in these columns, but they will bear repetition):—Walsham How, £72,240; Pelham (Norwich), £12,605; Benson, £35,000; Phillpot, £60,000; Tait, £35,000; Durnford, £37,633; Tozer, £10,449; Trollope, £30,790; Wordsworth, £21,500; Tufnell, £63,805; Thomson (York), £55,000; Goodwin, £19,361; Perry (Melbourne), £33,518; Browne (Winchester), £36,362; and so on.

Did ever one hear of a bishop dying poor? Of course not. He may attempt some pretence of that sort whilst he is alive, but the probate duty shows something very different when all is disclosed at his death.

Some of these bishops talk about "dispensing large hospitality of a simple kind." But we learn from a Church paper of last week (*The News*) that there are dioceses in which young ordination candidates are put to the expense of hotels, instead of finding "simple hospitality" provided by the bishop.

Then we hear of the new Bishop of London advising the clergy to "make the poor feel that we do care about their poverty." Yes, they care about it up to the point of sharing it. The prattle of this new-fledged Bishop about riding on 'buses and talking to his own followers in Victoria Park, and asking if he could let the Fulham Palace and St. James's-square House—as if he ever thought it possible—is mere bunkum. And the whole business is contrary to the reported Gospel of Christ

FRANCIS NEALE.

Catullus.

"The tenderest of Roman poets."—TENNYSON.

Of the imaginative poets, as distinct from the writers of comedy, who lived and wrote in Republican Rome, we possess the complete works of only two, Lucretius and Catullus. They lived in the last days in which it was possible for a poet to express his genuine thoughts and sentiments, and to devote his art to the subjects best suited to his taste and genius; for under the later Empire Rome was widowed at once of liberty and genius. Consequently, they possessed a real advantage over their successors. They could be thoroughly real, and true to their own nature. Acknowledging no authority or influence except that of equal personal friendship, they could lead their lives and follow their natural pursuits unimpeded by the interference of arbitrary power or Court patronage. They were free, too, from the obligations imposed by a State censorship, and from that deference to established opinion which our own perfect Government, twenty centuries later, somewhat too tyrannically exacts. At no other epoch of Roman history do we find the presence of this condition, so necessary to the development of literature and of freedom of thought.

Literary reputations are set up and demolished nowadays with such provoking rapidity that it is with something like surprise that one turns to a writer like Catullus, whose genius has stood the test of the centuries. The life-work of "the tenderest of Roman poets" may be successfully appealed to as a witness of the power and immortality of literature, and proves to us that there is a voice to the heart of the living from the writings of the dead, as of "deep calling unto deep." The actions and the thoughts of those who have long gone down to the dreamless dust may awaken as much ardor and enthusiasm as the impulses of our own age. Across the gulf of twenty stormy centuries, across the far deeper abyss of thought, inheritance, and aim, of art and language—in the lull between the two tempests of Republic and Empire, your songs, O Catullus, sound like linnets in the pauses of the wind.

Catullus lived in the centre of affairs, and at a most exciting epoch of Roman history. Like Cicero and so many men of letters, he subscribed to the Liberal cause.

But it is not his political sympathies that make Catullus so pleasing to us, so much as his lively wit, his kindly disposition, and his appreciation of the beauties of nature. His verses in praise of Sirmio, so beautifully paraphrased by Tennyson, and his elegy for the loss of his beloved brother, ring with a genuine feeling that appeals to us across two millenniums of time.

Few poets loved the sea more fondly, or sang of it more beautifully, than Catullus; its charms and enjoyments, its merriment and life. But in his poems the ocean is more frequently, to the writer, a thing of mystery, rather than of delight. More often his lines express

doubt and something dark,
Of the old sea some reverential fear.

Like the most gifted and earnest men then living, Catullus was a Secularist. His hopes and fears were bounded by the horizon of this world. The other great poet of his time, Lucretius, held the same excellent philosophy. Would that all men to-day had the sanity of these old Romans! Here, after two thousand years later, faith is sick, and superstition but sleeping; gods are a commercial asset, and fraudulent spectres appear at five shillings an interview. Here, Lucretius and Catullus, is room and scope for you. The Jewish gods worshipped by Englishmen are not heroic nor admirable. They are distinctly inferior to the pious, protecting spirits of the hearth, the farm, the field—kindly shades, it may be, of Latin fathers dead, or gods framed in the image of these, with which you, O noble Roman poets, were familiar. Our sacred book, too, is but a somewhat lewd Hebrew anthology.

We have said that one of the qualities which make Catullus pleasing to us is the appreciation of the beauties of nature which we find in his poems. Listen to his song of home-coming:—

"Then welcome, lovely Sirmio, and rejoice with thy lord; and do you, too, rejoice, ye waters of the Lydian lake, and let all the laughter that haunts my home break forth to welcome me."

Equally full of genuine, though more melancholy, feeling is his allusion to the death of his brother, who died at an early age and was buried abroad:—

"Yet be assured that my love for thee will endure for ever, that my songs will ever ring with the sorrow of thy death, as plaintive as the nightingale's lament beneath the thick shadow of the bushes, when she grieves the death of her murdered mate."

In another poem a maiden is likened to—

A flower that springs up in a hidden corner of a fenced garden.

Or, again, the gradual dispersal of a crowd is like—

"The sea whose quiet surface is ruffled by the breath of the morning zephyr, when the breaking waves are driven onward as the dawn rises, and the first beams of the wandering sun shine forth."

The help of a friend is as welcome, in time of trouble, as to a weary traveller "the stream that sparkles on the summit of a lofty mountain, as it leaps forth from its source in the moss-clad rock." Hail and farewell, O Catullus! You bowed not often in the temples of the State religion, and before the statues of the great Olympians. With a heart the most tender, delicate, loving, and generous, a heart often in agony and torment, you made life endurable without any whisper of promise, or hope, or warning from superstition. You relied, rather, on a wise secularism. You refused to be blinded, or to pretend to see what you found invisible. Farewell, O Catullus, of mortals the most human, the singer of so many generations of men, like the nightingale in your immortal poem, forever thrilling the woods with old-world melody. You dwell forever with old Homer and divine Shakespeare, beyond the darkness and the storms which beset us, in regions of eternal quiet:—

Where falls not rain, or hail, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly.

MIMNERMUS.

Where Providence Comes In.

Some incredulous cuss wrote: "If you believe there is a Providence looking out for a chance to save man, just walk across some thin ice when there is no one in sight. Providence may come to your funeral, but not to your rescue."

Acid Drops.

CHRISTIANS have a way of taking advantage of the ignorance and helplessness of little children. They stuff their callow heads with falsehood and superstition before they have a chance of judging things for themselves; and as early impressions are always the strongest and most lasting, this "religion," as it is called, sticks to the little ones in after life, and most of them carry it with them right on to the grave.

We do not mean, of course, that Christians are unique in this respect. The same thing obtains under all the religions in the world. That is the reason why people in the same countries grow up, generation after generation, professing the same religion. It is the religion that is all around them, like an atmosphere; it is forced into their minds in childhood, and they cling to it, and sometimes even die for it, when they become men and women. Thus the average Buddhist believes that Buddhism is the one true religion, the average Brahman believes the same of Brahmanism, the average Mohammedan believes the same of Mohammedanism, and the average Jew believes the same of Judaism—just as the average Christian believes the same of Christianity. Very few ever think the matter out for themselves. So far as the vast, the overwhelming, majority of mankind are concerned, it is safe to say that their religion depends upon the geographical accident of their birth and training.

It is not surprising that a man so full of piety—and enterprise—as Mr. W. T. Stead should turn his attention to the manufacture of little Christians. To this end he has issued in one of his penny series of publications *The Bairns' Bible: A Talk About the Old Book*. This booklet is adorned—if the word may be used of such rude things—with illustrations; one of which represents the late Queen Victoria, with the Prince Consort standing behind her, and a black prince kneeling before her, receiving from her royal hands a large copy of the Bible, which she informs him is "the secret of England's greatness." This picture has done duty for a great many years. At one time it was very popular. But of late it has been allowed to drop out of sight. Mr. Stead, however, thinks it quite good enough for the children. True, the incident which is depicted in it never occurred; Queen Victoria never presented a black prince or chieftain with a copy of the Bible, and never told him that it was the secret of England's greatness. The whole story was long ago officially contradicted. Still, if it isn't true, it ought to be true; and that is all the same to pious gentlemen like Mr. Stead, with whom anything is permissible as long as it serves the purpose of "edification."

This picture is worthy of Mr. Stead's little book, and Mr. Stead's little book is worthy of the picture. What he says about the Bible is best described by his own word about certain objections to it. It is sheer nonsense. He tells the children not to mind because translations from the Hebrew and Greek originals of the Bible differ from each other. But he forgets to tell them that there are thousands of variations in the text of the original manuscripts. He says that the mistakes in the Bible do not matter. It is God's Word "as a whole." It is like a great electric battery. And the light which it makes to shine in the world is Love; and wherever you find the Bible there you find the most love. That is the first great test.

Well now, we beg to tell Mr. Stead that the Bible fails under his first test. It simply is not true that there is less love in India, in Burma, in Japan, or in China, than there is in Christian countries. Those who say that there is are Christians, and they are puffing their own creed at the expense of the "heathen," who have a very different tale to tell. Mr. Stead refers to the native Christians in China who have suffered martyrdom under the inspiration of the Bible. But why does he not act impartially? Why does he not disclose the fact that the Christians who send the Bibles to China have for some time been desolating the country, robbing the inhabitants wholesale, murdering them by the thousand, and violating the girls and women as though they were Midianitish females handed over to the lust of Jewish captors? Why does he not mention that the Christians who send the Bibles to China have been stealing Chinese territory, and that nearly all the Christian nations are trying which can steal the most with the greatest measure of safety?

Mr. Stead says that it was the Bible that nerved Christian boys and girls to face the lions in the old Roman amphitheatres. But even if those stories of the early Christian martyrdoms are true, or half true, it is very unlikely that one in a hundred of those who suffered death had ever seen a Bible. And the fact that they died for their belief in it—supposing that they did so—no more proves its truth than the fact that myriads of Buddhists have died for their faith proves the truth of their sacred writings. Freethought, even, has had its martyrs, as well as the various religions; and if the "martyrdom" argument be pressed all round, it

proves that every belief is right, for every belief has had men and women ready to die for it. Which, as our old friend Euclid says, is absurd. The fact is, that the man who dies for a belief proves nothing but his own sincerity. He is honest, but he may be mistaken. A brave man may be wrong in his opinion, and a coward may be right. Truth is not a question of personality. It is a question of evidence and reasoning.

Following the stupid policy of Dean Farrar, Mr. Stead tells the children the story of Margaret Lindsay, who was fastened to a stake in the bed of the Solway Firth, and allowed to perish by drowning in the advancing tide, because she would not give up her belief. It was the Bible, Mr. Stead says, that gave her the courage to die. But why not say that it was the Bible that gave her executioners the courage to murder her? They were Bible-readers and Bible-lovers too. Indeed, they found in the Bible, as they said, the justification of their cruelty.

We do not propose to follow Mr. Stead through the whole of his "Bairns' Bible." It is not worth while, at least in these columns. We have said enough to show the character of his booklet. And we have only to say, in conclusion, that it is a great pity that men of talent should condescend to practise in this fashion upon the credulity of little children. Mr. Stead should really leave the job to the clergy. It is their business to lie for a living. He need not make it his recreation.

The Indian takes the same material view of the white man's heaven as formerly of his own happy hunting-grounds. A red-man who had been converted to Catholicism committed a murder and was doomed to die. His last hours are thus described: "The prisoner passed a good night, and ate a substantial breakfast. He was fully resigned to his fate. He is said to have apparently placed implicit and childlike faith in the ministrations of the priest. Referring to the death of Pompey, another aboriginal prisoner, in jail the previous week, he said it was all the same for him as for Pompey, and that they would both be in heaven that day. Then he added with a directness which startled the person addressed: 'Will I be in heaven in time for dinner?'"—*Truthseeker* (New York).

The *Boston Investigator* mentions a rather remarkable case which has occurred in the State. It says that a prominent preacher was accused of committing adultery with the wife of a noted writer and lecturer. When the latter was urged to condone his wife's offence in the interest of religion, and was cited to the magnanimity of Jesus when a certain woman who was guilty of adultery was brought before him, he replied: "I have read this account, but the cases are not exactly parallel. The woman whom Jesus forgave was not his wife. It is easier to forgive the wife of another man than it is your own."

A Roman Catholic priest has been remanded at Wrexham on a charge of entering St. Mark's Rectory and stealing £20.

"A Roman Catholic paper relates that a convent school, when visited, was found to be filled with little girls of ages ranging from six to sixteen, with fresh, sweet voices, in childish accents singing:—

Of our passions we are weary—
Weary of the yoke of sin.

A convict prison chapel, when visited, was found with a select and exclusive congregation of forgers, burglars, wife-beaters, etc., in stentorian tones giving tongue to:—

Dear angel, ever at my side,
How loving thou must be,
To leave thy home in heaven to guide
A little child like me."

—*Literary Digest*.

A poet in the *Boston Investigator* thus discourses:—

Somebody said:
"The sharps and sharpers couldn't make their bread,
If all the fools were dead."
"How would the preachers live?" some others said;
"Pastors and priests would pray in vain for bread,
And starve to death, if all the fools were dead."

Which is probably right.

The *Chicago Chronicle* has the following: "Mrs. Maggie Deithorn, aged twenty-six years, walked out on a bridge over the Monongahela river at Pittsburg, Pa., with her two children, aged two and four years, and when in the centre of the structure picked them up and threw them over the parapet. Before she could follow she was arrested. Boats put out at once and rescued one of the children, but the other was drowned. The woman was evidently demented, as she told the police that the act was an inspiration from heaven. She has been under religious excitement for several weeks, and has been almost constantly praying. The boy, who was rescued, was taken to the South Side Hospital. It

is thought he will die from exposure. The body of the girl was recovered."

The "dance movements" amongst the juveniles in the Dumferline Parish Schools seem to have made the Rev. Jacob Primmer quite indignant. He said, at a recent meeting of the School Board, that he had seen boys take the girls round the waist. The members laughed, and the Puritanical Primmer became still more indignant. He said the children should be trained in uprightness. The Chairman said he thought that these dancing exercises tended to uprightness. Exit Rev. Jacob Primmer.

Alderman Manton, speaking at the annual meeting of the Warwickshire Congregational Union, said that during the last seventy-five years not the slightest progress had been made by Congregationalism.

Rev. Jowett, who occupies the late Dr. Dale's pulpit in Birmingham, must be a very moving sort of preacher. His reported sermons do not show any special power. It must all be in the magic of his voice and personal characteristics. We read in the *Christian World* that at the Free Church Council at Cardiff "there was scarcely a dry eye in the Park Hall—even at the reporters' tables—when Mr. Jowett sat down." This is quite too much for rational credence. The male, and especially the female, believers might be affected. But the spectacle of press-men weeping under Mr. Jowett's eloquence is altogether inconceivable.

Then the *Christian World* allows itself to publish, in the hope apparently of being believed, the following statement: "An agnostic journalist remarked to our representative: 'I could listen to a man like that every Sunday. He is so human.' He doesn't talk theology, but he touches your heart."

Agnostic journalists are numerous enough; but we cannot think that they are usually, if ever, disposed to gush in this way about a filth-rate preacher. It would be very surprising, indeed, if they did.

Rev. Campbell Morgan, at the Cardiff Free Church Council, assured his hearers that there was "now a new form of Atheism; the old blatant Atheism was dead." What does he mean by this? Or has he really the slightest knowledge of what he is talking about? Atheism never was blatant, though that term might well be applied to Christian Theism, which has forced itself upon alien races to such an extent that some of them have resented the intrusion by massacre. There is nothing blatant about Atheism, any more than about any other phase of philosophic thought. Mr. Campbell Morgan says there is "a new and subtle Atheism abroad to-day." What he may be supposed to mean is that there is a new name—Agnosticism—abroad. There is nothing else that is new. Atheism itself is the same as ever, though perhaps armed with better weapons for attack and a keener intention to use them.

Canon Barker, rector of Marylebone, fears "that the Higher Criticism is loosening the old ties which bound men and women to the Church."

The *British Weekly* reviewer, who describes himself as "An Ecclesiastical Rambler," is very much disturbed over the new volume of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. He quotes a statement by the Rev. Dr. Grieve, of Forfar, that the contributions of Dr. Schmiedel, of Zurich, are "very rash," and even dogmatic. It is easy to say so. There have been many notes of alarm raised in regard to this volume, but why does not someone on the orthodox side reply, if it is at all possible, to this redoubtable scholar and critic of Zurich?

What is to be done with the thousands of copies of the Prayer-book which were in stock at the time of the Queen's death? This problem faces the retail book trade, but in particular the houses that are privileged to publish the Scriptures and Prayer-book. Suppose a copy is lying bound and all complete. Some eighteen pages in it are affected by the alterations made necessary by the accession of King Edward. To take out these pages and substitute others would be to pull the volume to pieces. This would mean expense, even if the volume could, in the end, be made as good as it was. Altogether, it seems likely that loads of Prayer-books will become so much literary lumber.

The above lament appears in a religious print. Apparently advice, as well as sympathy, is sought. Well, why not send these Prayer-books to the heathen with perfect consciousness that they contain fables and falsities which they themselves have long ago rejected.

"Vexatus" writes as follows in the *Sunday Chronicle* on Church attendance: "It is said that the total seating accommodation of all the places of worship in Great Britain gives places for twenty-five millions less than the population. That

is to say, that if all the men, women, and children in England and Scotland and Wales were to take it into their heads to go to church to-night, twenty-five millions of them would not be able to gain admittance. And yet even the few churches do not seem to be overcrowded. In fact, more than half of them are half empty every service. It seems to be very, very difficult to persuade people to go to church at all. What a tribute to the power of the clergy!"

"They try all manner of experiments, and endeavor to attract congregations by devices which would not disgrace a showman. The free after-service lunch idea belongs to America so far; but the cyclists' services, with free stabling for machines, are known here, and pleasant Sunday afternoons are guaranteed to all attending certain places of worship with a coin for the collection. Now a West-end parson has announced that he is going to hold a second service after ordinary evening service on Sundays, so that those who are busily dining at the time of the ordinary service may attend at their own convenience. They are told that they will be welcome in evening dress, so that the broad white shirt and the decollete dress will be seen in the pews—that is, if the wearers can tear themselves away from the coffee and cigars or the drawing-room. What a commentary on the devotionism of the race! Yet there is a constant demand for money to build more churches, although those which exist cannot be filled unless by assiduous advertising."

Plymouth has been polled on the question whether there should be a Sunday service on the Corporation tramways. The proposal was strongly opposed by various religious bodies. The result of the poll, however, was—For, 7,633; against, 4,817.

Birmingham anglers seem to have given grievous offence to pious people at Perthshire by holding Sunday fishing contests in the locality. The anglers rightly resent the objections raised as mere pharisaical nonsense.

An attempt has been made to stop Sunday concerts at Southport, but fortunately has failed. Commenting on the ridiculous endeavors which have been made at Darlington to help the cause of religion by depriving the people of ice cream and tobacco, the *Sunday Chronicle* asks: "Why should not the assailed traders do as they did at Swansea—combine to institute retaliatory prosecutions against cabmen, bus drivers, railway officials, and others? That is the best way to hold the crusade up to ridicule. In Manchester, too, at least one man is in a frenzy of indignation because the Corporation is spending money to provide bands for the parks on Sundays. He says this is 'to our shame and disgrace as a professing Christian city.' But what is worse, it is 'part of a Satanic huge infidel device and propaganda for the promotion of lawlessness, vice, crime, and immorality, godless socialism, anarchy, superstition, and the general inauguration of the corrupt sway and universal reign of the speedy coming and fast approaching anti-Christ of prophecy.' This is quite appalling. But what a mighty power of penetration the author of the nonsense must have when he can see so much evil proceeding from the playing of a few sacred airs in a public park on a Sunday evening in summer."

The *Sunday Chronicle* quotes the following observations by this Manchester Sabbatarian bigot: "What with our disgraceful and abominable Sunday newspapers, our Sunday opened shops and public libraries and parks, our Sunday opened public-houses, and Sunday travelling by train, tram, and cab, and large amount of Sunday bicycling, pleasuring, and neglect of all public worship and gospel preaching and teaching, Manchester and other cities and places in the United Kingdom are fast becoming infidel, and are rapidly going from bad to worse, and may expect ere long to arrive at a thorough-going and out-and-out Continental Sabbath, and work for seven days alike." The *Chronicle* righteously vents its wrath in scathing terms on "these dull dogs who crave a monopoly to make the Sabbath as deadly dull as they themselves are."

The Peculiar People at Barking have fallen under further judicial censure for following the plain teaching of the New Testament. An inquest was held on a child that had died suddenly from acute pneumonia. The father said that, being concerned for the child, and having love for it, he laid his hands on it more than once, and prayed specially and earnestly to the Lord. A special prayer meeting, too, was held. This was the fifth child they had lost. A doctor had not been called to any of them. The jury found that the death was accelerated by the want of attention by the parents. They were unanimous that the N. S. P. C. C. should be asked to take up the case, in order that justice might be meted out. The coroner, addressing the parents, said it seemed to him to be a brutish thing for people to allow five children to die. He hoped they would have to suffer for their neglect.

A Mohammedan Mahdi has proclaimed himself in Uganda. He professes that an angel visited him in the desert, and gave him authority to declare himself a prophet. His followers

are allowed three new wives, with permission to discard those whom they possessed previous to the "new revelation."

The Bishop of Winchester should be a proud man now. He has been appointed Clerk of the Closet to his Majesty the King.

The vicar of St. Luke's, Barrow-in-Furness, has hit upon a new idea. After the sermon on Sunday evenings, he divests himself of surplice and, vacating the pulpit, proceeds to catechise the congregation with reference to the sermon just preached, and also on that of the previous Sunday. This is rather rough on the congregation. To hear the sermon in the first place must be something of an infliction, but to be catechised afterwards as if they were a number of children must be enough to drive the strongest-hearted and most patient listeners away. How would it be if some Rationalist hearer were to reverse the arrangement and catechise the rev. preacher?

The *Rock* recently complained of the "offensiveness" of Freethinkers. The Caxton (Cambs.) bench of magistrates appear to think that Mr. Kensit, junr.—a special *protégé* of the *Rock*—so "offensive" that they have imposed a fine upon him of £3 and costs for "brawling." He and some friends attended service at Gamlingay parish church, and, it was stated, "their behavior throughout was most unseemly. They were laughing, talking, and making fun of the whole thing." But this, of course, is not offensiveness in the estimation of the *Rock*. It reserves that description for Freethinkers who have the temerity to express their ideas in print.

The Rev. Dr. Porter, of Southport, has on various occasions afforded, with his objections to Sunday traffic, mild amusement at the shareholders' meetings of several railway companies. He went the other day to the chief officer of the Midland Railway with a petition against Sunday traffic. He does not appear, according to his own account, to have had a very favorable reception. The chief officer seemed to think he knew as much about the working of his railway system as the Rev. Dr. Porter, and perhaps, by chance, a little more. Dr. Porter, be it understood, has ceased to base his objection to Sunday traffic on religious grounds. He wants to argue the question out on purely business lines. There, of course, the chief officer was able to meet him. He told Dr. Porter that it was of little use for him and his friends to come there year after year and receive the same reply. And he seems to have fired off a few jokes at the expense of the Rev. Porter.

Since this interview Dr. Porter has had a brilliant inspiration. He and a Mr. Fox Wilson now invite, through various religious prints, *lady proprietors* to interview the Chairman of the Great Western Railway on the Sunday traffic question. Imagine the poor chairman receiving these "lady proprietors," and listening with as much politeness as he may to all the pious and inconsequential outpourings of his feminine assailants. If they get anywhere within talking distance of the chairman, it will be extremely surprising. But Carrie Nations are not in demand in this country.

Stands Scotland where it did? Nae mon! It is a thousand miles from where it used to be in the matter of Sabbath observance. Indeed, the desecration of the Lord's Day has become so scandalous that the Hawick United Free Presbytery has arisen in all its majesty, and sworn a solemn oath (on the meenister's stipends, ye ken) that such wickedness shall be sternly resisted in the name of the Most High God. While this noble body is reducing the ancient kingdom of Scotland to order, it is as well to note the grievous things of which it complains. Farm servants rarely enter a church, but visit their friends or lounge about the roads on the blessed Sabbath. Card-playing goes on on the hillsides. Numbers of young men stroll about the fields. Cycling for pleasure (mark that now, *pleasure!*) is practised on an enormous scale, and the road to Moss-paul (holy and far-famed Moss-paul) is like a city street. And then the drinking clubs! Oh fie! Men go there to partake of whiskey instead of the Holy Spirit, and chat with their "pals" instead of listening to a sound and saving sermon. Really, it is horrible. Thrice horrible! So here's a health (in cold tea) to the Hawick United Free Presbytery. Long may it wave!

A couple of tourists, staying at a town in close vicinity to Loch Ness, had a fancy one fine Sunday to go for a row on the Loch. They accordingly sallied forth in search of the boatman, whom they met just leaving the house in a complete suit of glossy black, and a big book under his arm. "We want to go for a row," said one of the tourists. "Did you no ken that it is the Sawbath?" was the reply. "Ye'll no get a boat frae me the day, forbye I hae ye tae ken I'm a member of the kirk." "Yes, yes," expostulated the tourists, "that's all very well with you, but we don't require you with us. You can go to church; we can row ourselves." "Ay, ay," said the Scot; "but just think what'll the meenister say!" "Never mind the minister," was the reply; "he will know nothing about it, and we will pay you well." "Ah, weel," said the boatman, "I'll not let ye the boat; but I'll tell ye

what I'll do for ye. Dae yae see yon green boatie doon among the rushes? Weel, she's ready wi' the oars inside. Jist ye gang doon there an' row out tae the middle, and I'll come doon to the bank an' shout at ye; but never ye mind, ye jis' row on, an' I'll call for the money on Monday."

What a lot of ridiculous fuss and excessive laudation has been indulged in over the appointment of Dr. Winnington-Ingram to the Bishopric of London. Of course, when a man is appointed to a position which, apart from social status, represents a palace and town house, and £10,000 a year, congratulations from his particular friends are natural enough. What, however, is not only objectionable, but absolutely contemptible, is the way in which the *Church Times* and other religious journals have tried to build up a reputation for the new Bishop as a controversialist by unauthorised and unwarrantable references to his "old opponents in Victoria Park." Positively the *Church Times* asserts that these opponents—meaning, of course, Freethinkers chiefly—have sent him "letters of congratulation on his elevation." No real Freethinkers would do anything of the kind, and none but a mendacious print would pretend that they had done so.

The *Christian Age* talks of Dr. Winnington-Ingram "debating with Atheists" in Victoria Park, and adds: "As a smart open-air debater he soon came to be *dreaded* by the most skilled Rationalist casuists." Could anything be more absurdly wide of the truth?

The new Bishop of London is boasting through his friends—or his friends are boasting for him without his permission—of his wonderful exploits amongst the sceptical working men in East London. According to the *Sunday Companion*, he has been presented with a beautiful inlaid cabinet by "fifty working men determined to show him some mark of their friendship and gratefulness." "Nine years before," the writer continues, "they had been indifferent, or wholly antagonistic, to Christianity; but the influence of the bishop had changed them from opponents to supporters of religion." And now for the climax. The beautiful inlaid cabinet was made by a man "who gave twelve days of his time to it, and who himself a few years previously had been a keen young Agnostic."

Now we don't want to tell the *Sunday Companion* that it lies, nor the Bishop that he lies, nor the fifty working men that they lie. Oh dear no! We should be very sorry to offend the chaste ears of Christians with such improper language; although, for that matter, it is Biblical enough. What we prefer to do is this. We beg to ask for the name and address of any one of those fifty converted infidel working men? We should be delighted to make his acquaintance—and still more delighted to make the acquaintance of the other forty-nine. It would give us so much pleasure to hear them tell us when and where they were infidels, and who knew them as such, together with the precise circumstances of their conversion. Perhaps the Bishop will oblige us himself. Our office is very near the St. Paul's Chapter House, and we should be happy to drop in with a view to pursuing our inquiries into this "cabinet" question. We should like to get to the bottom of it, as we got to the bottom of that Atheist shoemaker business in connection with the great and revered Hugh Price Hughes. Not that we mean that the two matters resemble one another. We are quite willing to believe that the Bishop was a stranger and somebody took him in.

According to the *Australian Financial Gazette*, a certain Mr. John Bryatt is now adorning that part of the world with his presence. He came from London as an organising teacher in manual instruction. It does not seem to follow, therefore, that he is necessarily a great authority in matters of religion. He is credited, however, with informing the antipodeans that "Since religious instruction classes had been started in London no fewer than seven large prisons had been closed, and one was about to be pulled down." That he attributed to the religious instruction given in the schools. Well, on the face of it, he differs from the Church party, who say that the religion taught in the Board schools is worse than no religion at all; to which the Catholics would say "ditto." Moreover, it might be pointed out that there is *secular* as well as *religious* instruction given in the schools; and it might be remarked that furnishing children's minds, and inducing them to think, had a good deal to do with the diminution in the forms of crime that spring from mental vacancy. It is just these forms of crime that have been steadily on the wane. Real, ingrained crime has not been diminished in the slightest degree. It is upon the congenital criminal that the supernaturalists should try their hands. If the priest can only cure what the schoolmaster cures, there is very little virtue, after all, in his special prescription.

Dolly—"That young minister seems rather guileless."
Madge—"Yes; he appears to know more about the next world than he does of this."

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

March 31, Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, London, W.: at 7.30, "Christ's Descent into Hell."

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.
- PERPLEXED STUDENT.—See our criticism of the famous Josephus passage in *Crimes of Christianity*—the chapter headed "Pious Forgeries." The history of Christian treatment of this passage is very amusing. It used to be paraded as incontestable evidence of the historical basis of the Gospels. After the time of Lardner and Gibbon the practice began of saying that the passage had perhaps been doctored, but was, nevertheless, substantially what Josephus wrote. Now we have Dean Farrar treating it as "interpolated, if not wholly spurious," and declaring of Josephus that "no one can doubt that his silence on the subject of Christianity was as deliberate as it was dishonest." What Josephus said—or rather what was said for him—was advanced as a proof of the Gospel story. When the forgery is thoroughly exposed, the fact that he said nothing is advanced as an equally good proof. Speech or silence serves the turn of the Christian apologist. It is the same old game—heads we win, tails you lose.
- A. A. READE.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks. Our readers do us a service by sending us newspaper cuttings on which we can write a paragraph.
- L. K. WASHBURN (Boston).—We much regret to read in the *Investigator* of your sad bereavement. In remembrance of our delightful foregathering with you in December, 1895, we send you now an expression of our heartfelt sympathy.
- T. PERKINS.—We have handed your postcard to Miss Vance. All orders for literature should be sent to her direct. We have other matters to attend to.
- H. HEWSON.—Inserted as desired. We regret to read it.
- F. E. WILLIS.—Thanks for cuttings. We note your gladness at learning that the Freethought Publishing Company has done fairly well in its first year. It would do far better if it commanded more working capital. Freethinkers all over the country ought to give the enterprise their support. A few people work very hard for the movement, and their energies and abilities are half wasted for want of the necessary material means. This is not as it ought to be, and we should like to see a change—and that quickly.
- J. HAMMOND.—See "Sugar Plums." We are very much pleased to see that the Liverpool Branch means to uphold the old flag as gallantly as ever, and to know that our "words of encouragement" have helped in this direction.
- A. G. LVE.—Your letter received, and contents noted.
- E. R. WOODWARD.—Your letter was dated the 25th, but only reached us on Tuesday afternoon.
- W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for your cuttings.
- D. SHARMAN.—We received a book by M. Pobiedonostzeff a year or two ago. As Procurator of the Holy Synod, and the bitterest persecutor in Russia, it is not astonishing that he has been fired at by a Tolstoi fanatic. The wonder is that the friends of some of his numerous victims have not settled his account before. It is evident that the repressive agencies in Russia are preparing a strong revolt, which may sweep away a good many things in the end.
- A. L. (Douglas).—The explanation is that the Prime Minister is only the *first* Minister, the one called to form a Ministry by the Sovereign. He holds a specific office in the Government, which carries with it the salary he receives. Of course he usually takes one of the £5,000 jobs. We are glad to hear that you so much enjoy reading the *Freethinker* every week.
- FREETHOUGHT TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND.—Dr. J. Laing, £1.
- M. E. PEGG.—Mr. Foote has written you as to a date for Manchester.
- ALTCAR.—No doubt the least "offensive" word is Agnostic. Perhaps your parents would not be alarmed if you called yourself that. They might even hardly understand it. We note your suggestion re the Twentieth Century edition of Paine's *Age of Reason*.
- J. WALKER.—(1) There is a Life of Mazzini published, though we have not the particulars at hand. If you send the 4s. to Miss Vance, she would forward you the book, and either charge or return you the difference. (2) Perhaps there is something in what you say about that grandiose scheme.
- J. W. DE CAUX.—We are overcrowded with matter this week, and regret that your letter has perforce to stand over till our next issue.
- J. YOUNG.—Will try to find room for it in an early issue.
- J. E. STANNARD.—There must be a mistake somewhere. The firm of John Heywood, Manchester, has an account with us, and takes a considerable number of *Freethinkers* weekly. If it was a book or pamphlet your newsagent did not supply, you will probably find that the reason was negligence. If it occurs again, perhaps you will send us full particulars.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Public Opinion (New York)—Blue Grass Blade—People's Newspaper—Alderley Advertiser—Berwick Advertiser—Liberator—Truthseeker (New York)—Freidenker—El Libre Pensamiento—Sydney Bulletin—Secular Thought—Western Mail—Lucifer—Chicago Progressive Thinker—Boston Investigator—Crescent—Yorkshire Evening Post—Torch of Reason—Two Worlds—Christian—Sunday Chronicle—Bolton Evening News.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

MR. FOOTE had a first-rate audience at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday evening, when he lectured on "The Fable of the Crucifixion." Some courteous opposition was offered by the Rev. Mr. Coles. Unfortunately there was only time for one brief speech by the reverend gentleman, but if he will come again (as he hinted) this evening (March 31) a longer time will be arranged for him. Mr. Foote's subject is "Christ's Descent into Hell." This is asserted in the Apostles' Creed, and there is some very curious early Christian literature about it, besides the teaching of divines of a later date. Mr. Foote's audience will be told what Christ did when he went to hell, and also what he might have done, but forgot to do. They will also have shown to them the mythological significance of the story. Altogether, this lecture should be both interesting and amusing.

MR. FOOTE concludes this special course of lectures on Sunday evening, April 7, when he will deal with "The Fable of the Resurrection and Ascension." April 7 is Easter Sunday, and this lecture will be just exactly seasonable.

MR. CHARLES WATTS lectures to-day, Sunday, March 31, afternoon and evening, in the Spinners' Hall, George's-road, Bolton. Subjects: "Scientists of the Victorian Era" and "Will Christianity Survive the Twentieth Century?" We hope the Lancashire friends will muster in full force, as the subjects afford a good opportunity for discussion.

MR. COHEN delivered three lectures at Manchester on Sunday, on easy terms to the Branch through the headquarters' scheme. He had an excellent audience in the evening. Mr. Cohen lectures at Camberwell this evening (March 31).

THE National Secular Society's Executive has organised the open-air lecturing in London on fresh lines. The Executive, in concert with the Branch secretaries, has made up a list of lectures for the various stations throughout the metropolis for the whole of the summer. The lecturers will all be paid by the Executive, and the collections at their meetings will all be paid over to the Executive. A common monthly program will be issued, and the public into whose hands it falls will have a better idea of the extent of our outdoor propaganda. The new arrangement begins with the first Sunday in May.

THE Camberwell Branch will hold a special Conversazione and Ball on the evening of Good Friday. Tickets are 1s. each, and may be obtained from the Secretary, Mr. T. Wilmot, 27 Lorrimore-street, Walworth, S.E.

THE Liverpool Branch held its annual meeting on Sunday, and, thanks in part to the *Freethinker* "Sugar Plum," there was a good attendance. The past year had been a rather gloomy one, and a few members displayed a pessimistic spirit, but the majority were for keeping the flag flying, and one gentleman made a generous offer with regard to the Branch debt, which will enable a fresh start to be made hopefully. Mr. J. Hammond was elected president, Messrs. Munroc and Pacey vice-presidents, Mr. J. Ellis secretary, and Mr. E. Rhodes (3 Drysdale-street, Liverpool) treasurer. The new committee are Messrs. Waring, Edwards, Bristow, Allen, Russell, Small, Seddon, Woods, Howard, Hope, and Billing.

An Ingersoll Memorial Meeting was held at Washington on the evening of March 7. It was got up, organised, and managed by enlightened negroes of that city. A negro presided, the music was furnished by a negro pianist, a negro cornetist, two negro soloists, and a glee club of ten negroes, and the principal and best speech was made by a negro Congregational minister. It is pleasant to see that the colored people do not forget one who was always their good friend. Ingersoll himself would value their remembrance.

Mr. Cohen's thick pamphlet of eighty pages on "Foreign Missions" will be on sale next week, and orders can be placed at once with Miss Vance, at the Freethought Publishing Company's office. Mr. Cohen has gone very thoroughly into the matter, and his little work is replete with valuable information. In every case he has gone to original sources. His facts and figures are all taken from official reports of the various Missionary Societies. He also shows conclusively what a farce the whole Missionary business is, and what a danger it is to us in our political and civil relations with the "heathen."

The Twentieth Century Edition of Paine's *Age of Reason* will probably be ready next week too. Some delay has been occasioned, as we formerly remarked, by correcting the many editor's and printer's blunders that had crept into the later English editions. Mr. Foote's annotations have also exceeded the length he anticipated. In the last place, there has been a wait for a beautiful woodcut portrait of Paine, which is going on the cover, and will be a great attraction in itself. Altogether, this edition will be by far the best ever published in England. And the price is only sixpence! We congratulate the Secular Society, Limited, on its enterprise in putting such a boon before the public.

Nearly a hundred and twenty fresh Shares have been taken up in the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, during the past week. We hope a still larger number will be taken up during the next week. Some of the present Shareholders could easily increase their holding without inconvenience, and some who are not yet Shareholders could as easily become so. We make an earnest appeal to all who can do anything to do it at once. It seems to us that the promotion of existing useful agencies is better than rushing after grandiose new schemes. The *Freethinker* is not a project, but a solid reality. It is by far the most widely circulated organ of Freethought in this country, and all that is wanted to push its circulation still further into the outer circles of liberal-mindedness is a moderate supply of working capital. It would certainly seem very odd if Freethinkers could not supply this, while Christians expend thousands and thousands of pounds on periodicals advocating their views.

We could easily improve the quality and the usefulness of the *Freethinker*, partly by enlarging its scope, if only the necessary capital were forthcoming. The small amount at present paid to contributors should be considerably increased. In that case we could provide reading matter—not of a partisan kind—on scientific, sociological, and literary subjects.

Reasons might be multiplied why the Freethought Publishing Company should be well supported. What is wanted is not so much good wishes, though they are valued, as solid financial assistance. Freethinkers should write to the Secretary—Miss E. M. Vance, 1 Stationers' Hall Court, London, E.C.—for Application Forms, and return them duly filled in for any number of Shares from one to one hundred. Even one Share is better than none at all. The Shares are £1 each, and are payable in easy instalments; namely, 2s. 6d. per Share on application, 5s. on allotment, and the balance on calls as may be required, with at least one month's notice.

The Vital Choice.

Or shall we run with Artemis,
Or yield the breast to Aphrodite?
Both are mighty;
Both give bliss;
Each can torture if derided,
Each claims worship undivided;
In her wake would have us wallow.
Youth must render on bent knees
Homage unto one or other;
Earth, the Mother,
This decrees:
And unto the pallid Scyther,
Either points us, shun we either;
Shun or too devoutly follow.

—George Meredith.

Dusky Parson—"Why, Ephraim, I'm sprised to see yo' stealin' chickings; an' on de Sabbaf, too!" Boy—"Huh! Sunday's jes' ez good ez any odder day. I ain't supus-titious."

The Methods of Popular Religious Defence.—II.

LAST week I dealt with some samples of religious argument taken from America. This week I shall take some from Ireland. The Rev. Father Finlay is a well-known Irish Jesuit, a man of academic honors and reputed to be very "learned." In Lent, at the Jesuit Church in Dublin, a series of sermons is generally given by one of the order which is supposed to be the best thing in the way of Christian and Catholic argumentation that can be produced, and the Rev. Father Finlay often occupies the pulpit on these occasions. Like the specimens of American religious exposition, the chief point to note in these discourses is that they, too, are mostly directed at "unbelief" and "infidelity," and the irreligious character of the age; and this is even more remarkable in Ireland than in the United States. For Ireland is reputedly, and probably is also in fact, one of the most religious countries in Europe. When Irish Jesuits take to delivering long harangues against unbelief, it would really appear as if things were brightening even in Ireland. The present series of sermons is entitled "From Unbelief to Catholicism," and beyond that the matter is rather weaker than the average, since almost everything in dispute between the Freethinker and the Catholic is gaily taken for granted, and no attempt is made to even pretend to defend or sustain the premises—beyond this the general argumentation is like unto Dr. Parkhurst's or Mr. Dam's. Some years ago the present writer was induced to listen to a sermon of Father Finlay's on some similar topic, and the chief point he remembers is that the preacher dealt with the case of Cardinal Newman and his Atheist brother, and—lamenting the terrible plight of the latter—hinted or insinuated that the Cardinal would have the supreme satisfaction of surveying from his heavenly abode the tortures of his brother in hell. For my part, I left the church wondering which was more insulted—the memory of the Cardinal or the memory of the Atheist brother.

In the first of the present sermons, the report of which I take from the *Irish Catholic* of March 2, Father Finlay sets out by declaring that his purpose is to describe the "steps by which.....an unprejudiced inquirer may be reasonably led to embrace in its fulness the Catholic religion." And he goes on: "I shall suppose such an inquirer without any religious belief at all; without any definite conviction even that there exists a personal God." One would suppose, from this preface, that we were going to be treated to an argument from the foundations; that nothing in dispute was going to be assumed; that everything was going to be rationally established step by step. Of course, lest this preface should create too sanguine hopes in the breasts of his hearers, Father Finlay at once proceeds to tell them that they cannot expect a perfectly convincing or a perfectly complete proof. Here is what he says, and it may be quoted, because, as will be shown, it virtually destroys the whole Christian case at its very foundations:—

"I would not, of course, be understood to assert that the chain of reasoning, either as a whole or in its separate parts, is so absolutely convincing as to compel assent. In the general conduct of our lives, and in almost all the more important natural details of them, we are guided by simple probabilities, or at least by certainties which fall far short of strict evidence—of that clear and overmastering apprehension of the truth which destroys our liberty of judgment, and extorts our acceptance of it. And such is the case also with revealed religion. God has authorised it by proofs so varied and of such efficacy that, when duly weighed, they must dispel all reasonable doubt. But we may still doubt unreasonably, if we will."

The concluding words of this passage, of course, are meaningless. In philosophy a given proposition is either certain or it is not certain. If it is not absolutely certain, it is open to doubt. In matters of practice, in affairs of politics, we may speak of reasonable or of unreasonable doubt. If a dozen observations seem to lead to one conclusion, and the opposite conclusion involves out-of-the-way or unlikely circumstances, we may—and, indeed, we must in practice—act on the

probability, and we might then speak of unreasonable doubt. But we are not now dealing with trivial, or comparatively trivial, matters of every-day practice; we are, on Father Finlay's view, dealing with propositions which are the most momentous with which a human being can be confronted. It is not enough for Father Finlay to say or argue that there are great "probabilities" these propositions are true, or that there are strong considerations in their favor "which fall far short of strict evidence." A man is not going to be damned eternally on "probabilities"; on such a momentous question he does require "strict evidence"; he does demand that "clear and overmastering apprehension of the truth" of which the preacher speaks. Indeed, when Father Finlay says that the evidence for his religious propositions is not so "absolutely convincing as to compel assent," that it falls "far short of strict evidence"; that the "clear and overmastering apprehension of the truth, which destroys our liberty of judgment," cannot be asserted of it—in all this Father Finlay is virtually saying that his religious propositions are merely speculations, which he probably thinks true, but which he admits are not demonstrable, and about which there is at least the philosophical possibility of error. And that admission, howsoever reservedly made, destroys the whole of his case. As Mr. Leslie Stephen has said somewhere, a man is not going to stake his highest and deepest interests on the truth of propositions the assertion of which is never more credible than the assertion of their contradictions. And if the Christian propositions are what they claim to be, the revelation of a being of "Infinite Truth," they ought to carry, not merely a high degree of probability, but the most convincing and compelling proofs, which no human being could possibly ignore or doubt.

Thus for a theoretical criticism of Father Finlay's admissions. As a matter of fact, of course, so far from the reverend apologist indicating the enormous probabilities in favor of the Gospel story, which render doubt unreasonable, he makes no attempt whatever to establish the most elementary points; everything is assumed which is the subject of dispute, and modern Biblical criticism is ignored as if it were non-existent. In one part of his discourse the preacher tells us that

"National feeling, educational influences, personal prejudice, worldly motives, may all warp our judgment; we may even neglect or refuse to consider all arguments for religion whatsoever."

He speaks the truth, and exemplifies it himself, since educational influences have so warped his judgment that he is incapable of appreciating the arguments and discoveries of modern scholars; whilst there are undoubtedly many persons who refuse to consider any arguments against the religious position whatsoever.

Let us take one example. The sub-title of the first of Father Finlay's discourses is "The Divinity of Christ," which strikes one incidentally as not quite the starting-point of the inquiry as sketched out. For the inquirer "without any definite conviction even that there exists a personal God" is thrown overboard, after the first words of preface, and we are found discussing, not whether or no there be a personal God, but whether Christ and the assumed personal God are identical. That is assumption number one. Then we proceed to the following easy assumption:—

"We are not now concerned with the Divine inspiration, nor even with the individual human authorship of the New Testament writings. It is sufficient for our present purpose that they should be what they claim to be, and what the uninterrupted traditions of eighteen hundred years declare they are—historical documents, of unimpeachable authority, substantially correct in the account they give us of Christ and of His work. So much we shall assume. Our limits of time forbid any present investigation of the subject, and, though the authenticity of the Gospels and of other New Testament writings has been called by some in question—what has not?—the verdict of even unbelieving criticism, and of the best modern scholarship, is becoming more and more in favor of the views supported by tradition."

The most polite way of describing Father Finlay's statement, that the verdict of "unbelieving criticism and of the best modern scholarship" supports the orthodox view, is to say that it is probably the outcome of "personal prejudice" or "educational influences" not of a common order. Father Finlay, it will be noted,

has no time to mention even one of the "unbelieving critics" or the "modern scholars," and in the new Christian logic we make up for gaps in our argument by declaring ourselves in a hurry. A man in a hurry of that kind can, of course, accomplish prodigies of demonstration. Having, however, a moment or two to spare, we turn to a few samples of the modern scholarship which is supporting the traditional view of the Gospels. In the new volume of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, which is exciting such attention in Christian circles, there is an article on the Gospels by Professor Schmiedel, of Zurich, and, after quoting some texts on which the author lays stress, he proceeds:—

"In reality, however, they [the texts referred to] prove not only that in the person of Jesus we have to do with a completely human being, and that the divine is to be sought in him only in the form in which it is capable of being found in a man; they also prove that he really did exist, and that the Gospels contain at least some absolutely trustworthy facts concerning him."*

This, be it observed, is not "unbelieving criticism"; it is modern Christian scholarship.

In the same volume there is an article on "Jesus" by the late Professor Bruce, which opens with the following summary:—

"Jesus Christ, the author and object of the Christian faith, a Jew by race, was born in Palestine towards the end of the reign of Herod the Great. The home of his childhood was Nazareth, a town in the lower division of the province of Galilee. The family to which he belonged was of humble estate. In early youth he worked at a handicraft. On arriving at mature manhood he became a public teacher, rapidly gained fame, gathered about him disciples, offended the ruling classes by a free criticism of the prevailing religion, and ended a brief but extraordinary career by suffering crucifixion."†

If Rev. Father Finlay is satisfied with the verdict of modern scholarship—modern Christian scholarship—that the Gospels do really contain something trustworthy, and that Jesus was an enthusiastic youth who came to grief for a too free criticism of the prevailing religion, he cannot be difficult to please. As a matter of fact, modern scholarship shatters the only evidence on which Father Finlay or any other such expositor can profess to found his assertions. We have quoted Professor Bruce's laconic summary of Jesus's career, but in the very next paragraph Professor Bruce explains what meagre warrant there is even for his summary. He says:—

"This short summary of facts is taken from those books in the New Testament which bear the name of Gospels and are our main source of information for the history of Jesus. These documents are of varying value from a historical point of view. Critical opinion is much divided as to the fourth, that which bears the name of John, the judgment of many critics being that it is the least trustworthy as a source whether for the words or for the acts of Jesus. By comparison, the first three, from their resemblances called synoptical, are regarded by many as possessing a considerable measure of historical worth."‡

And, in the article on John, Professor Schmiedel tells us of the reputed author of the Fourth Gospel:—

"We have to deal with a writer from whom we neither can demand strict historical accuracy, nor have any occasion to do so. Just in proportion as this is frankly recognised, however, we find in him a great and eminent soul, a man in whom all the ruling tendencies of his time meet and are brought together to a common focus."§

Setting aside the interesting thesis that we have no occasion to demand historical accuracy from a writer who professes to describe historical events, it will be seen that the very point which Father Finlay was in such a hurry as to assume off-hand is really more than disputed—it is disproved. It may truly be said that only the grossest ignorance or the grossest duplicity can dispute that the almost universal verdict of skilled criticism to-day has shattered the claim of the Gospels to be valid historical documents.

To return to Father Finlay; of course, having got his personal God and the authenticity of the Gospels, "and of other New Testament writings," the rest is plain sailing. But now the point arises: Father Finlay is not

* *Encyclopædia Biblica*, vol. ii., column 1881, § 139.

† *Ibid*, column 2435, § 1.

‡ *Ibid*, column 2435, § 2.

§ *Ibid*, column 2554, § 55f.

an ignoramus. He has knowledge. His brother, who is said to be even inferior as a speaker, is a member of the Senate of the Royal University, and a colleague of Mr. Horace Plunkett in his agricultural schemes, and has, in that connection, I believe, done good work. Yet this man gets into a pulpit and, professing to argue a case, takes for granted everything in dispute, makes claims which only ignorance could grant, and builds a fabric of pseudo-reasoning on a foundation of fancy. It requires a certain amount of "faith" to believe that such a man is quite sincere; and at the best we can only acquit him of insincerity on the ground that he is unfitted to deal with the problems he handles. Verily the methods of popular religious defence to-day are quaint. And the quaintness is ominous.

FREDERICK RYAN.

St. David.

The Man after God's Own Heart

By G. W. FOOTE.

(Continued from page 189.)

DAVID's slaying of Goliath is a pretty story, only it occurs more than once in Scripture. Giants appear to have turned up conveniently, in order that heroes might dispatch them. Abishai slew one who nearly overcame David (2 Samuel xxi. 16, 17), and two others are polished off in the same chapter; one of them being a twenty-four fingered and toed giant, who was slain in single combat by David's nephew Jonathan. Goliath himself was twice killed; first by David, and secondly by Elhanan. The Authorised Version calls the second victim *the brother of Goliath*, but the words are in italics, showing them to be an addition. They are properly omitted in the Revised Version. Consequently "Who killed Goliath?" is a question like "Who killed Cock Robin?" and David's heroism is as real as that of Jack the Giant-killer.

According to the story in Samuel, the giant Goliath was about ten feet high, yet he exhibited himself for nothing. He was accoutred in brass mail, his coat weighed a hundred and fifty pounds, his spear was like a weaver's beam, and its head weighed twenty-eight pounds. This ridiculous guy strutted in front of the Philistine army, defying the hosts of Israel, who were all terrified. Even Saul and Jonathan shared the universal fright! Whereupon it was proclaimed that whoever slew the braggart should marry the king's daughter.

David seized the opportunity. Armed with a sling and stones, he advanced to the combat. The stones were five in number, and selected for their smoothness. Scripture says they were taken from a brook, but the Rabbis give them a curious history. With the first Abraham drove away Satan, when he tempted him from sacrificing Isaac; on the second Gabriel's foot rested when he opened the fountain in the desert for Hagar and Ishmael; the third was used by Jacob in his wrestling match with Jehovah; and the two others were flung by Moses and Aaron at God's enemies. No doubt this is as true as Gospel.

Presuming David to be a good slinger, the odds were greatly in his favor. By keeping at a distance from Goliath, and watching his opportunity, he could send a stone at the giant's head, and if that missed he had four other chances; nay, if they all missed, he could still take to his heels. The courage in this case was on the part of Goliath, who made himself a target for David's missiles. Rare old Ben Jonson showed more bravery than Saint David. When the English were fighting the Spaniards in the Netherlands, a Spanish champion strutted forward, flourishing his weapon, and defying the whole enemy. "Ben stept forth," says Carlyle, "fenced that braggart Spaniard, since no other would do it; and ended by soon slitting him in two, and so silencing him."

Goliath was settled with the first shot. It pierced his forehead, and he fell on his stomach. David ran up, drew the giant's sword, and cut off his head with it. This dismayed the Philistines. They fled, the Jews pursued them, slaughtered them wholesale, and captured large quantities of spoil.

According to his own account, David had eclipsed this feat. While he watched his father's sheep "there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock." Lions and bears do not usually hurt together, and if the ill-matched couple seized on the same lamb, at different ends, their subsequent division of the plunder would have been an interesting problem. But David spared them the trouble. He ran after them and recovered the lamb. "And when," said David, "he rose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him." David confuses the two animals. Perhaps, like certain people in the proverb, he needed a better memory; or perhaps he clutched both the lion and the bear by the beard, and knocked their heads together. On the whole, the story is mixed, and whoever

wishes to get at the actual truth must seek the Lord in prayer.

The prowess of David is extolled by the Rabbis, who allege that he had transfixed eight hundred Philistines with one arrow. Had this incident been recorded in the Bible, David's arrow would have ranked with Shamgar's goad and Samson's jawbone.

David's praises being in the mouths of the women of Israel, Saul eyed him with jealousy. He gave him Michal to wife, but exacted a dowry of a hundred Philistine fore-skins. David brought two hundred in "full tale." Voltaire suggests that Michal wore them as a necklace. Josephus politely substitutes six hundred heads for two hundred fore-skins. But the Septuagint, like the Syriac and the Arabic, agrees with the Hebrew. Let us hope the Jewish manners were not, like David himself, after God's own heart. Jehovah did not lift his chosen people above the bestial mutilation of their enemies, nor did he guard the Bible from the pollution of this disgusting story. With what expectations do the clergy place such obscenity in the hands of children?

Michal loved David, and saved his life. Saul cast his javelin at the harpist one day when the music had lost its charm; but David slipped aside, and the weapon pierced the wall. Messengers were sent to his house to kill him. Michal heard of this, and warned him to flee. When the messengers came she took them to his bed, where she had placed an image, and covered it with the clothes. The word translated image is *teraphim*, a plural term, used here in the singular. It was a household god. "These great wooden *penates*," says Renan, "were found, as we see, in the houses one might suppose the most devoted to pure Jahvehism. No one yet regarded them as objects of blame, or saw in these sculptured gods any insult to Jahveh."

Tradition gives this story a ridiculous turn. David invented chain-armor, and made himself a complete suit. Saul stabbed him in the night, but the weapon did not penetrate. After this a big leather wine-bottle was put in David's bed. Saul crept in and stabbed with his knife, and the wine ran out. Smelling it, the royal assassin exclaimed, "How much wine the fellow drank for his supper!"

David fled to Samuel at Ramah. After a pathetic interview with Jonathan, who "loved him as he loved his own soul," he fled to Nob, where the priests fed him and his followers with hallowed bread, only edible by the Levites, and gave him the sword of Goliath. From Nob he fled to the court of Achish, King of Gath—that is, he sought refuge among the deadliest enemies and hereditary oppressors of his country. Here he feigned madness to avoid danger; scrabbling on the gate-doors and dribbling on his beard.

From Gath he escaped to the cave of Adullam, where he led the life of a bandit. His brothers joined him, as well as every unfortunate, bankrupt, and malcontent in Israel. Four hundred of these worthies soon owned him as captain.

(To be continued.)

A Call to the Nations.

Oh, cling not to the old beliefs,
Like ivy to the crumbling wall;
Untwine the tendrils of thy mind,
And stand aside to watch them fall.
The brightest hopes of worn-out faiths!
What are they in the dawn of Truth?
Decrepit age as well might ape
The elasticity of youth.
The death-shrouds twine around each creed,
Beneath them yawn their long-last beds;
While year by year the death-bell tolls
O'er worshippers' unconscious heads.
Strong Reason strides across the earth,
The staff of Freedom in his hand;
Men shrink away in frightened groups,
Or curse him deeply where they stand.
Pale Superstition shakes her fist
High in his stern, unyielding face,
While Murder hovers in his rear,
And Scandal stabs him with disgrace.
But high he holds his fearless head,
Big with its keen, illumined brain,
And calls the nations from their dreams
To action strong and feeling sane.
While steadily the Dawn of Truth
Is bursting into full-orbed day,
And, though men love their fetters well,
This night of death must roll away.

WALTER K. LEWIS, B.A.

Missionary (to cannibal): "Brother, I have come to save you." Cannibal—"You're just in time, old man. There's been a famine on the island for a month."—Chicago American.

Correspondence.

ARE ALL GODS MAN-CREATED?

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The question with which I head this letter is, practically, that to which Mr. Alcock was desired by me to address himself, when I asked him to offer any evidence—if such he believed he had—to prove that *any* God was other than the creation of man's imagination, acting under the influence of certain stimuli. Whether Mr. Alcock's contribution to your correspondence column adequately, or even slightly, deals with this question I will not presume to decide; but I may say that it does not to me appear to do so. Indeed, so far as it goes, that contribution argues rather for my position—*i.e.*, that no alleged gods or god are other than the figment of man's mind, and that the gods are created by man, and not man by the gods. For Mr. Alcock states that he is not certain of the existence of his God, but that he believes that existence to be "probable," and states that probability is a rule of life by which we mainly act. Yet he offers no evidence of the probability of such an existence, and even probabilities rest on evidence, just as what we term facts also do, though the evidence for a probability lacks that completeness which we admit equal to demonstration in the case of facts. If, then, Mr. Alcock can offer no evidence of the fact of the existence of a God, or evidence even of the probability of such an existence; he remains the creator or adopter of his God—that is, his God is an entirely phantasmic creation of Mr. Alcock's mind, or a fancy adopted by him of the mind of some other human being.

Such, at least, seems the position Mr. Alcock mentally occupies, with one reservation, perhaps, which I will now deal with as well as I can; though in this matter Mr. Alcock has me at a disadvantage, in that he introduces the *ipse dixit* of himself and of others in place of evidence, and by so doing seems to beg the very question in discussion between us. "Religious experience," writes Mr. Alcock, "is the great evidence to devout persons of God's existence, through the spiritual intercourse they are enabled to hold with him. Of this [intercourse] let it be frankly said no proof can be given, save assertion and apparent results." But as neither "assertion nor apparent results" are proof, or even evidence, what Mr. Alcock's statement really comes to, to my understanding, is this: A number of human beings assert that they have spiritual intercourse with a God—of whose existence Mr. Alcock asserts merely the probability and admits the uncertainty, but yet offers no evidence even of the probability. But of this alleged intercourse, Mr. Alcock adds, there can be no proof given.

So many people claim that they have this intercourse that, says Mr. Alcock, their joined and several allegations amount to a probability, and he urges that all Atheists should be guided by it, probability being a good guide in life when certainty is not to be had.

You see I am following Mr. Alcock a long way from the question originally proposed, but that is hardly my fault, and it seems a pity to leave Mr. Alcock's contention, although it is quite outside our first plan, unexamined. This personal intercourse with a God is precisely what is claimed by the lowest savages, as well as by the most self-deluded mystics—*e.g.*, Brahminists, Stigmatists, Mohammedans, Jews, Buddhists, Mormons, Roman Catholics, Manitousists, Osirians, *et multis aliis*.

Now, as Thomas Paine points out, these assertions are all mere hearsay to others, whatever they may be to those who make the assertion—and Paine's arguments against revelation are precisely as valid against intercourse, which is only another name for revelation; for if any god, even if merely a probable god, can and does have intercourse with a man, then to that extent he is revealed to that man; but, as Paine shows, what may be a revelation to Jones is, when told by Jones to Brown, to the latter merely hearsay. "Jones told me so," says Brown, and, though in common-place occurrences Brown might take Jones's word, in events of such uncommon character and supposed transcendent importance Brown would be a fool not to demand as good reasons for believing what Jones said as Jones affirmed that he himself (Jones) had for believing it; the more so as such reasons could be as easily given direct to all men as to any one man!

Consequently, this intercourse is only our ragged old humbug, private revelation, which no one is entitled to believe in until he has experienced it. I notice that Mr. Alcock does not affirm that he has any private spiritual intercourse with his God; but, seeing that Mr. Alcock's God is merely probable, perhaps it is not to be expected that Mr. Alcock could be so illogical and absurd as to claim to have any sort of intercourse with a probability.

Here I think I may stop, just adding a word on Thomas Paine's God—one of Paine's few failures. Thomas thought that, after having destroyed the often-malignant, obscene, treacherous, and bloodthirsty Jehovah of the Christians, he could offer an unobjectionable substitute. But Watson and Butler routed Paine's argument for a decent God of Nature, and a Bible of Nature; for they showed that the

God of Paine, who in his natural beneficence had invented cancer, earthquakes—the Lisbon disaster came in as handy for them as for Voltaire—and famine, was about as bad as the Christian God, and that arguments which disproved the existence of Jehovah just as effectively disproved the existence of any omnipotent and all-good personal God at all. Thus was Paine, through the mouths of controversial Christians, one of the means of spreading Atheism though this land of ours, for Butler and Watson to beat Paine had to accept the old Atheistic arguments, and to destroy Paine's God made no scruple of sacrificing their own disgraceful deity.

Finally, "That man made God, in the beginning, in His own image in the image of man created He him, male and female and epicene created He them," sums up my original statement. Mr. Alcock has not impugned it, and I have written you a long letter, mainly beside this point, because Mr. Alcock left the point unexamined and unattacked.

It is for you, Mr. Editor, to decide whether to print a letter which may be described, I fear, as being "very much to the point about what is nothing to the point," as old Montaigne somewhere cites.

CRANKY CRITICISM OF AGNOSTICISM.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The strictures of Dr. Parkhurst, as quoted by your contributor Mr. Frederick Ryan, in the last issue of the *Freethinker*, are particularly inept; but it seems to me that such an attack is to be welcomed, as showing that the tall hat of the Agnostic is as odious to "our gentle shepherds" as the cap (black cap, I suppose they would say) of the Atheist.

With your permission, I should like to offer a few remarks on Dr. Parkhurst's propositions, although Mr. Ryan does not think them worth taking to pieces. The proposition that Agnosticism is a lazy philosophy, and makes no demand upon the brain, may be negated by referring to "that prince of Agnostics," David Hume, one of our greatest philosophers; Herbert Spencer, the greatest of living philosophers, perhaps the greatest of all ages; Huxley, the father of the term, who studied all the great philosophers, especially Hume and Kant; and Darwin, who revolutionised human thought, to mention only a few of the most celebrated Agnostics.

With regard to the "hosts of people," it seems to me only honest for people who have not studied a question to be Agnostics, and confess that they "don't know," especially when learned men like those cited above are in the same position. The Churches, however, demand absolute assent, even from a little child, to the most stupendous dogmas. Common sense and learning are both on the side of the Agnostic. Contradictory philosophical systems are fairly abundant, and the average man has no time to test them—he simply "doesn't know."

It is better to have no creed than to hold an obsolescent one (or three) affirming contradictories and propositions for which there is no justification.

It is obviously absurd to write about the "indolence, cheek, and intellectual conceit" of that great and good Englishman who said, "The problem of the ultimate cause of existence is one which seems to me to be hopelessly out of the reach of my poor powers," and who coined the term Agnostic because it was suggestively antithetic to the "Gnostic" of Church history (the Parkhursts), who professed to know so much about the very things of which he was ignorant. Some of us find the "intellectual conceit" elsewhere, likewise the "bamboozling of the public."

Let us carry the war into the enemy's camp. It may be truly affirmed that, to the majority of the nominally Christian, Christianity is a lazy philosophy, making no demand upon the brain. These people never trouble about the foundations of their belief, but shut their eyes and open their mouths to receive whatever is given them—in England it happens to be Christianity, and the upshot is that "not only those of adult years, but children repeating their catechisms," affirm knowledge of a number of things concerning which a wise man is convinced of his own "utter ignorance."

I do not wish to re-open the question, lately so ably discussed in the columns of the *Freethinker* and elsewhere, of Atheism *v.* Agnosticism; but I may say that Dr. Parkhurst will find Agnosticism "a far more robust kind of thing" than he expects. The Agnostic will have nothing to do with the tribal God Jahveh; it is not a case of "merely unbelief," it is "disbelief."

In conclusion, I think it is a matter for congratulation that Agnosticism is becoming "the badge of robust Freethought," and that the *Freethinker* has no objection to the term.

AGNOSTIC.

Obituary.

DIED, on March 20, Mrs. Rothera, wife of Mr. Rothera, Kirkburton. She lived and died a Secularist. The Secular Service was read over her in Kirkburton Churchyard by the undersigned. Her loss will be deeply felt, for she was a good wife, mother, and friend.—H. HEWSON.

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, "Christ's Descent into Hell."
CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, C. Cohen, "Religion and Insanity."
SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell-road): 11.15, discussion opened by D. Naoroji, "India"; 7, Miss Margaret Noble, "Hindoo Social Life."
WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, High-street): 11, Dr. Coit, "Kant on Moral Education."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, W. J. Ramsey.
HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): E. White—11, "The Crucifixion"; 7.30, "The Ascension."

COUNTRY.

ABERDEEN (Northern Friendly Society's Hall): 6.30, Mr. A. Sangster, "Socialism and Science."
BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): H. Percy Ward—11 (in the Bull Ring, if fine), A lecture; 3, "The Origin of Man"; 7, Concert by Mr. Davies and party.
BOLTON (Spinner's Hall, St. George's Road): Charles Watts—3, "Scientists of the Victorian Era"; 6.30, "Will Christianity Survive the Twentieth Century?"
CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school; 7, R. P. Edwards, "Folk Lore as an Aid to the Study of Religion."
GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): Ex-Rev. E. Treharne-Jones—12, "Priestcraft"; 6.30, "Is the Bible out of Date?"
HULL (2 Room, Friendly Societies' Hall, Albion-street): 7, F. W. Booth, "The Cry of the Children."
LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, Cantata by the Children of the Sunday School.
LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, L. Bergman, "Kit Marlow."
MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): Mrs. H. Bradlaugh-Bonner—3, "Freethought in the Old Century and the New"; 6.30, "Vengeance." Tea at 5.
SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Mr. Wallis, "The Character of Christ: An Ethical Study."
SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7, "Humanitarianism."

Lecturers' Engagements.

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

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham.—March 31, Birmingham. April 28, Glasgow.

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