

THE Freethinker

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

The Sun's Day.

UNDER the title of *The Day of the Sun*, the Rev. Conrad Noel, curate of St. Mary's, Paddington-green, has published through Mr. David Nutt (57 Long-acre, London, W.C.) a shilling pamphlet against Sabbatarianism. Mr. Noel is apparently a High Churchman and a Socialist. He evidently thinks that his Church will have a place in the coming millennium—which is always to be realised the day after to-morrow. In this, however, we fancy he is mistaken. But that is by the way.

Some journals have noticed Mr. Noel's pamphlet as if it were a novelty, but it is nothing of the sort, except as coming from a clergyman, ostensibly in the interest of real Christianity.

Mr. Noel's object is "to give in small compass an outline history of the Sunday and Sunday observance" for ordinary readers who cannot consult "ponderous and expensive books." For such readers, especially if they are Christians, his little work may be useful. Most of them, perhaps, would listen to a Christian minister when they would turn a deaf ear to the most learned and eloquent sceptic.

Mr. Noel starts by saying that "the origin of the Sabbath is uncertain." If he will study the subject a little more profoundly, he will probably find that the uncertainty is subjective and personal. The origin of the Sabbath is as clear as such a thing can possibly be. The institution could not have arisen amongst a pastoral people, to whom all days were more or less alike. It naturally arose in a civilisation based upon slavery, like that of ancient Babylon; for it was perceived that the slave required a periodic day of rest in the interest of his efficiency, and the only point to be determined was which day should be selected. That was decided on religious grounds. The number seven was sacred for many reasons. First of all, seven was the indivisible number left after halving, and then halving again, the twenty-eight days of the lunar month. In the next place, this number coincided with the central number of days in sexual periodicities, which were intimately related to the first elements of social culture. Then again, the number seven was corroborated by the enumeration of the most conspicuous planets. Reasons like these were sufficient to give this number the mysterious and sacred character which attaches to it in primitive religions. That the seventh day should be chosen as the day of rest was perfectly natural, and in Babylon the day derived its name from the god to whom it was dedicated. The Jews simply borrowed the day and the name together. They did not give the Sabbath to their masters; their masters gave it to them.

The "curious Genesis story," as Mr. Noel calls it, of the Lord making heaven and earth in six days and resting on the seventh, was not the root out of which the Sabbath grew. It was a mythological afterthought. The institution came first, and the story afterwards. Nor is it wise on Mr. Noel's part to refer to the Sabbath as the day which brought to the Jews a successful issue to their "strike against Pharaoh," for there is not a scrap of historical evidence that the Jews were ever in Egypt. Mr. Noel is on surer ground (for him) when he points out that the Sabbath became more and more a day of religious formalism to the Jews. This was the work of priestcraft. The Jewish rabbis carried Sabbatarianism so far as to make it ridiculous in the eyes of Gentiles, as it is ridiculous to the common sense of to-day. Mr. Noel is right, too, in declaring that Jesus

—that is the Jesus of the Gospels, whether he ever lived or not—was a Sabbath-breaker, and was censured by the priests accordingly. He is also right in asserting that Paul and the early Church were anti-Sabbatarian. But he does not seem to see clearly how it was that the Christian Church accepted the Sunday instead of the Sabbath. In turning away from the Jews, and trampling Judaism underfoot as an obsolete dispensation, the Church had to reject the Sabbath altogether. But it was still necessary to meet for religious worship on *some day*, and the only possible day was the Sun's day, as the Pagans called it—or, as we call it now, Sunday. Mr. Noel is wrong in supposing that this was a working day with the Gentiles. It was really a day of rest from ordinary labor. The slave left off toiling, the gods were duly worshipped, and mirth marked the rest of this gracious interval. It is true enough, as Mr. Noel remarks, that the majority of the converts to Christianity in the first ages "were of the working and slave classes." But for that very reason it was only on the Sun's day that they had an opportunity of meeting together as co-religionists. The "weekly festival of the Lord's resurrection" was a mere accident. If the alleged resurrection had taken place on Tuesday or Thursday, the Christians would still have had to avail themselves of the Sun's day for their religious assemblies.

When the Christian Church triumphed over Paganism the Sunday became more and more a Sabbath. What the Jewish priests had made the day of rest it was made again by the Christian priests. Mr. Noel tries to explain this fact away. He argues that the Church was compelled to enforce strict Sunday regulations as a protest against Pagan licentiousness; but every student knows that this line of argument has been immensely overdone by Christian apologists. There is also another influence which Mr. Noel overlooks. As a genial High Churchman, with a taste for the good things of this earthly life, and even a due appreciation of Jesus Christ's wine-miracle, which he slaps in the face of the teetotalers—Mr. Noel seeks to reconcile the flesh and the spirit, so that men may have a jolly time in this world with a pious expectation of endless felicity in the next. But all religion, Christianity included, is ultimately based upon the eternal *opposition* between the flesh and the spirit. Set up a partnership between them, and it will soon be all over with religion. And that Mr. Noel does not see this only shows that he is not as wise as the great masters of the philosophy of religion, from Saint Augustine down to Cardinal Newman. Moreover, if there be any truth in the doctrine of hell—and if there be not, the Bible should be thrown aside for ever—the once-famous John Prynne, the incorruptible Puritan, at whom Mr. Noel sneers, was seriously and solemnly right when he said that "this is no place, no time, no world for Christians to laugh and be merry in." You may give up hell, of course, but if you do that you will have in the long run to give up heaven too. It is only a question of time. And thus it seems to us that Mr. Noel is trying, however unconsciously, to sit upon two stools. For the rest, however, we are quite with him in his plea for a rational Sunday—a periodical day of change and recreation. Generally speaking, he is in this respect on the right side, and we hope he will be able to persuade many of his Christian brethren out of their morose narrow-mindedness.

Before concluding we should like to ask Mr. Noel what he means by branding the theory that self-interest is the root-principle of life as "atheistic and inhuman pessimism." Does he really fancy that an Atheist has no idea of altruism? Has he not so much as heard of

Mill and Comte? One of Comte's mottoes was *Vivre pour autrui*—Live for others. We do not remember reading it in the New Testament. But it may be that Mr. Noel has a special edition of that book which has not yet come under our notice. If he has, we should be obliged by his lending us a copy. Meanwhile, we beg to suggest that he should refrain from using words loosely; for, even if Atheists have no rights, the dictionary has, and it is wrong to fly in the face of etymology.

G. W. FOOTE.

"The Power of the Cross."

THE so-called religious press of this country affords some curious reading to studious minds. Judging from its usual productions, it takes but little wheat to satisfy the theological appetite, inasmuch as chaff seems to be its principal article of diet. With comparatively few exceptions, this is also true of the orthodox press. In both there is, in a greater or lesser degree, the same clinging to tradition, the same desire to retain in some form Christian associations, and the same inconsistent profession of adhering to the shadow of a former faith while entirely disregarding the substance. The Christian press manifests in many instances an inaccuracy of statement and a disregard of the ordinary rules of reasoning that would not be tolerated in any other field of literature. It appeals to a credulous constituency, who seem to be satisfied with assumptions instead of facts, and with forming their opinions upon faith minus demonstration. It is not, therefore, surprising that in the theological world so many "blind lead the blind," and thus perpetuate the mental darkness which for centuries hovered over the Church. In the columns of the weekly religious press we find, in lieu of intellectual food, artificial excitement which for a time intoxicates, but adds no strength to the mental stamina of its recipients. Deep thought and careful examination are seldom evoked by its effusions. Sound argument and correct statements rarely accompany its productions. Hence the majority of professors of Christianity "walk by faith, not by sight."

This is true even of papers professing to advocate "advanced religious views." For instance, the *New Age*, an excellent journal in some respects, is not free from theological recklessness of statement and groundless assumption. Its plea upon behalf of justice and humanity is highly commendable, but when it touches upon Christianity it evinces a lack of the consistency of the true believer and the courage of the honest disbeliever. Its religious policy is not "fish, flesh, fowl, or good red herring." In a recent issue it contained an article, "The Power of the Cross," in which the writer panders to the usual superstitious notions associated with the "Calvary Scene." In referring to Christ, he quotes: "Here, at least, was one whose work for his fellows nothing but death could hinder; we feel drawn to him because, amid the shams and counterfeits of life, he was a man in supreme earnest." He then adds:—

"So men, in effect, have reasoned, and, standing within the shadow of his Cross, they have come to feel that it was no ordinary message for which he died.....If he had stopped short of complete self-renunciation, he would have failed in his mission, and his name would probably have been lost in the chaos of the troubled centuries which followed."

Here we have a sample of that assertion and assumption which generally pertain to Christian literature, and also an extolling of the alleged power of the Cross in which orthodox believers are constantly indulging; for it can be easily shown that for the rash statements here made there is not a particle of evidence.

It may be true that the "message" for which Christ is said to have died was not "ordinary." One such message in the history of the world is quite sufficient. What was that message? Simply this: That a God, who could do all things "according to the good pleasure of his will," placed the human family in such a hopeless condition that, without salvation, it would be irretrievably lost; and to secure this salvation he sent his innocent son to suffer and to die. Thus a "divine" sanction was given for making the innocent

suffer for the guilty—an injustice which no civilised human tribunal would permit. According to this message, "many are called, but few are chosen"; and all must believe one thing, or, in default, be told to "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels." The message proclaims the cheerful news that "No man cometh unto the Father but by me" (Christ); and it also states: "No man can come to me [Christ] except the Father draw him"; which amounts to this: If the Father draw us, we must go; and if he does not draw us, we cannot go; and then we are to be damned for not doing what God has prevented us from doing. A glorious message, truly! Summed up in a few words, it means we cannot do good if we would, for there is no help in us; we cannot be saved unless we have faith; but we cannot have faith unless we pray for it; but we cannot pray for it unless we have grace; but we cannot have grace unless God gives it; but he will not give it unless we ask for it, and we cannot ask for it unless he inclines us to do so.

We are told that, "if he [Christ] had stopped short of complete self-renunciation, he would have failed in his mission." But surely it is not contended that Jesus fulfilled his mission, which was, according to the New Testament, to take "away the sins of the world" and to regenerate society. Have these desirable objects been gained? Certainly not; for "sin" still abounds, and society is far from being regenerated. In proof of our latter statement, we append the following excerpt from the *New Age* of April 11:—

"Quite recently, at a Conference in Camberwell, 'some shocking disclosures,' as the *Daily News* said, were made as to the conditions in which some of the poor of the district exist. The Rev. W. Faulkner Baily, the Chairman of the Housing Committee of the Camberwell Borough Council, stated that 'in Sultan-street a mother and father, with their son and daughter (aged respectively 18 and 17) and a male and female lodger—six persons in all—were found herded together in one room. In a neighboring house of six small rooms twenty-seven persons were living, and in Becket-street there was at least one case in which a man and wife, with their grown-up son and daughter and four younger children, were existing in a single room. From another "black spot" in the same district (the Hollington-street area) came the story of parents with six children living and sleeping in two rooms, and a few doors away were two cases in which parents and eight children lived and had their being in three rooms. Mr. Baily mentioned the cases of fifty-six Italians herded together in a house of three stories, and of eleven persons existing in two rooms.' The Bishop of Rochester, who was present at the Conference at which these terrible statements were made, declared that their first task should be that of arousing public opinion to the urgency of the matter. We quite agree with his lordship, but what hope have we that public opinion can be roused so long as we have a 'Christianity' in our midst which sanctions war? For surely these Camberwell unfortunates are the victims of that social war which is proceeding every day in England between 'the classes'—to which Canon Knox-Little and the Bishop of Rochester belong—and 'the masses.'"

In the face of these facts, the most enthusiastic admirer of the supposed Christ is not justified in alleging that his mission has been accomplished. His advice to his disciples was to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Has this been done? Let the fact that, taking the inhabitants of the globe to be 1,470,000,000, not more than 400,000,000 have even heard of this "message" supply the answer. It may be added that where this message has been delivered the majority of the people who have heard it pay no attention to its absurd and impracticable injunctions.

To talk of the "power of the Cross" is simply to indulge in a stereotyped phrase which is both false and misleading. False because its "power" for good is a theological fiction; misleading because it is intended to convey the idea that the beneficial results of other agencies are due to the "power of the Cross." That such an idea is erroneous is evident by the fact that the teachings ascribed to Christ are not heeded to-day in the political, social, or religious sphere of life. For instance, he proclaimed "peace on earth," and war has been the principal feature of the Christian era; he denounced hypocrites, and hypocrisy is too apparent in all theological circles; he taught that poverty is a virtue, but with his professed followers the acquirement

of riches is the ruling passion; and the essence of his whole teachings is that concern in reference to some future life is of greater importance than the consideration of the requirements of the one we now have. There is no Christian denomination known to the present writer whose members attempt to carry out the injunctions above indicated of their Master. Where, then, comes in the "power of the Cross"?

CHARLES WATTS.

Religious Instruction at the Teachers' Conference.

THE question of religion in our public schools is, like the poor, always with us. It may fall out of the public mind for a brief season, but sooner or later it is bound to reassert itself. The rivalries of the sects, their eagerness to secure raw material from which to manufacture future church and chapel-goers, alone would serve to keep the question alive; and, even were an unexpected and almost inconceivable combination of circumstances to reduce the religious bodies to complete unanimity on the subject, the growing body of opinion that is opposed to any form of religion being taught in State-supported schools would suffice to keep the question before the people.

Neither the Christian nor the non-Christian party can, as a matter of fact, afford to lose sight of this subject. To the Christian, the religious instruction of children is a matter of life and death. Experience has shown conclusively that the man who has grown up without religious instruction, while receiving a fair education in other directions, is secure from the influence of both church and chapel. If men and women are to be made Christian believers, the foundations must be laid early; a predisposition in favor of Christianity must be created to which the preacher can afterwards appeal, and this must be effected in childhood or not at all. And to the Secular reformer the matter is of equal importance. He does not wish to create a sect, but he does desire to see young men and young women grow up with a proper conception of life and life's duties, and so learn to judge each other by some common-sense standard of social efficiency, and not by their adherence to obsolete or half-obsolete religious shibboleths.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find this question raised by the new President of the National Union of Teachers in his address to the annual Conference. A president's address without it would have seemed inadequate, although its inadequacy would have been preferable to the speaker's method of dealing with the subject. Mr. Blacker, the new President—a voluntary school teacher, by the way—declares himself in favor of Bible teaching in Board schools on the lines laid down by the London Nonconformist party. But not quite so cautious as the body at whose chariot wheels he allows himself to be drawn, he advocates Bible teaching, not so much on account of its ethical value, as because religion gives the only safe standard and sure foundation by which, and on which, to base the conduct of life.

I do not, of course, challenge Mr. Blacker's right either to hold or express this conviction; but, all the same, one must regret that the President of the N.U.T., which claims some 40,000 or 50,000 members, should take up such a position, and, at the same time, show himself so completely oblivious to the injustice involved both to children and to a large number of adults by the continued use of the Bible in State schools. Mr. Blacker has much to say concerning justice to children and parents, and one would wish that this sense of justice, so keen where the position of the Bible is threatened, were a little more lively in the direction of recognising the iniquity of compelling all sections of the community to pay for the teaching of a set of speculative doctrines in which many of them do not believe, but, on the contrary, hold them to be prejudicial to the best interests of the child and of society.

Is it just, even to the child, to take advantage of its weakness, and force upon it doctrines, ideas, beliefs, that are, to put it as mildly as possible, open to question? Refine religious beliefs as we may, even in their most attenuated form they are not above suspicion.

Mr. Blacker and those who agree with him may believe with the utmost sincerity in certain articles of religious belief; but can he, can anyone, answer with confidence as to the attitude of the next generation towards these matters? The present attitude of many prominent Christians towards their beliefs would have been denounced as Atheistic fifty years since. Can we be certain that there may not be a corresponding modification of existing opinion during the next half century? It is surely not extravagant to suppose that the results arrived at in anthropology will be alone sufficient to alter the position of the general public towards fundamental religious beliefs, as they have already modified the opinions of some of the world's foremost thinkers. And is it more than an act of common justice to the children to say that, until religious beliefs are as unquestionable as moral rules, or the ascertained truths of science and sociology, they shall not be forced upon them as though there could be no two opinions as to their value or validity?

In discussing the alternatives to the present system, Mr. Blacker has much to say concerning the fatal consequences of abolishing religion in the public schools. He asks:—

"Would our country maintain its position amongst the nations, would it exist for any length of time, if, indeed, the schools were 'godless schools'? At the lowest estimate, religion as the foundation of morality is invaluable. In the voyage of life every boat must have a compass immutably pointing in one direction. Without that compass it is lost.....Leaving the consideration of the higher religious life, and reasoning from the comparatively mean motive of utilitarianism, the public weal demands that right shall be distinguished from wrong, and the only safe standard on which a sure judgment may be founded is religion. The Churches, speaking broadly, do not reach the masses, nor do the Sunday-schools draw the most neglected class of children. Therefore it follows that the Bible-teaching on which a national and individual conscience is built must be given in the day schools."

It would be unfair to take such an expression of opinion (or should not one say prejudice?) as being in any way representative. Judging from my own experience and that of many of my friends, I should say that a very large number of teachers are completely opposed to religious instruction in schools, and would welcome its abolition. But teachers, for obvious reasons, do not care to parade themselves as the friends of secular education, and, even were it otherwise, no criticism of the President's speech ever takes place. If Mr. Blacker's opinions were those of the N.U.T., one would feel inclined to ask: Who is to teach our teachers?

I have given Mr. Blacker's opinion in full because I did not wish to disturb its delightful inconsequence. And, having done so, I ask in all humility: What on earth does it mean? Does Mr. Blacker believe that our existence as a nation really depends upon us having Christian doctrines taught in the public schools? Not the teaching of the morality that has become associated with Christianity, mark you—because he assures us in the next breath that "No system of ethics, no mere morality," can take the place of Christian teaching. Have not nations managed to exist in the absence of Christian teaching? Are there not countries to-day that exist in spite of "godless schools"? Surely Mr. Blacker knows that France is "godless" in this sense; that Japan has a complete system of secular education; and even Australia, which is practically a nation, has also abolished Bible teaching in its schools. Or are we to conclude that he is repeating phrases parrot-like, without asking himself what they mean, feeling secure that, being the commonplaces of the pulpit, they would at least *sound* respectable? Why did Mr. Blacker miss the chance of telling the assembled teachers the story of Queen Victoria presenting the Bible to an African chief as "the source of England's greatness"? The story is not true; but still it has a pulpit ring about it that should have pleased Mr. Blacker—and his managers.

What, again, is meant precisely by the "comparatively mean motive of utilitarianism"? Is it that utility is mean when compared with Christianity? Can there be a meaner motive than that of disregarding all human claims and obligations for the hope of reward in heaven or fear of punishment in hell? Is there,

after all, anything ennobling or undignified or unselfish in assisting our fellows, not from any respect or affection for human beings as such, but in virtue of belief in punishment or reward after death? Individual for individual, will not the lives of professed Utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer compare favorably for social work with any three of the saints that can be chosen from the calendar? The essence of Utilitarianism is that actions are either good or bad as they promote or hinder the realisation of the most complete human happiness; that the consequences of actions are what they are, independent of any theological considerations whatever; and that, as we are all indissolubly connected with our fellows, individual happiness can only be realised in and through that of society as a whole. Yet this is the doctrine that is branded as "mean" when compared with the Christian teaching that "If the dead rise not, let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." Is anything meaner than thus resting the value of all human effort upon a future life? Perhaps, however, Mr. Blacker does not know what Utilitarianism is, and this is merely another echo from the pulpit. One begins to wonder whether, being a voluntary school teacher, he is in the position of having to attend church as part of his duties, and has thus been hypnotised by the phrases used there.

But the climax of absurdity is reached by Mr. Blacker in the statement that "the only safe standard on which a sure judgment may be founded is religion." After this one feels that the suspicion of the speaker having been hypnotised by pulpit phrases is correct, particularly as he assures us immediately after that there are about three hundred and eighty-two varieties of religious belief in the country. Will Mr. Blacker please inform us what it is on which the sects agree, and for what religion furnishes a safe standard? Why, there is not a single article of Christian belief upon which the various sects agree, once they begin to talk about it. Protestants denounce not merely Roman Catholic doctrines, but the conceptions formed by that Church concerning the nature of God, heaven, Jesus, etc. The various bodies of Protestants are not agreed among themselves as to which are the right views to be held on the same subjects. In short, the only thing on which the religious bodies agree is that "mere morality" which has become associated with religion. In other words, religious people can agree upon anything—except religion. Yet it is this jangling crew, with their eternal differences, denunciations, jealousies, and hatreds, that is spoken of as furnishing the only "safe foundation" on which to build the education of the nation!

Mr. Blacker is anxious that there should be a cessation of religious warfare in the schools by the "acceptance of a national system of religious education for the primary schools of Christian England." But why "Christian" England? Does he believe that none but Christians deserve consideration in this matter? Have not Jews the same right as Christians to demand that their religion shall be taught by the State? And if Jews, why not Mohammedans? Why not Buddhists? Why not any and every one who claims to possess a religion? Surely Mr. Blacker does not believe that social and legal equality is morally a question of numbers, and that the opinion that cannot count its hundreds of thousands of supporters is undeserving of consideration? It ought to be plain enough that, if any form of religious belief has the right to be taught in State schools, all forms may demand to be represented there. All support them alike, and all should be considered—if any.

But why should any form of religion be taught in our Board schools? The best thinkers are fast reaching the conclusion that it is no part of the State's legitimate functions to inculcate religious beliefs; and, if it is wrong for the State to teach religion to adults, it must be equally wrong to teach it to children. It should be plain to the N.U.T. that the secular policy is the only sound one; not because it is advocated by the Secular party, but because it is the only proposal that gives justice to all without infringing the rights of any. The practice of committing an act of injustice towards a large and growing body of the public in the name of religion, and of forcing speculative dogmas upon children that may or may not be true, in the name of honesty, can lead to nothing but trouble. Moreover,

it is idle to suppose that any lasting peace can be made between even church and chapel. The fight for religious instruction in the schools, it can never be too often said, is a fight by church and chapel for clients. An agreement, therefore, will only be kept so long as it is to their interest to keep it. And, even were church and chapel content, those to whom the future of the child is of more value than the interests of a sect would still work for the rationalising of the schools, in the hope that one day counsels of common sense and equity may prevail.

C. COHEN.

Clerical Jeremiads.

THE *Church Times* is much concerned over the fact that the population of France is diminishing. It finds, from returns just issued, that the decrease during the last five years has been 12,883. It says: "These figures ought to cause grave apprehension." But why? Growth of population in limited areas is rather to be deprecated than to be desired. The *Church Times* has in its mind that old Biblical injunction to "Increase and multiply." That might have been accepted when the world, according to the Scriptural account, was in its infancy. The great demand in our centres of civilisation nowadays is "elbow room."

The Bible spur to propagation is not only inapplicable to crowded cities and continents, but would be highly detrimental if any attention were paid to it. There are, it is true, sections of the globe where people might "increase and multiply" with as much ardor and rapidity as they pleased. But on anciently-occupied ground there are already too many people to make the conditions of life anything like comfortable. For denizens of crowded centres, the question must always resolve itself into a domestic one. On which side lies the balance of comfort—with large or small families?

Of course, there is religious prejudice at the bottom of this quite unnecessary alarm on the part of the *Church Times*. It says: "France has entered upon a course of rebellion against the laws of God." This is very wrong of France, and is a matter that should be inquired into. Perhaps France does not know what the "laws of God" are. Does the *Church Times*? We should like to be assured, before we condemn our continental neighbors, what these divine ordinances really are, and where we are to find them. The Bible just now is more than a little discredited as an authority, and so it is no use referring us to that book for information.

But the *Church Times* says that France, having "abandoned the idea of self-sacrifice in favor of materialism and pleasure, is not likely to amend its ways for the sake even of preserving itself from extinction." What nonsense! Because its birth-rate has dropped 12,000 in five years, is France in danger of extinction? The reference to "self-sacrifice" in this connection is particularly unhappy—if the *Church Times* knows what it is talking about. As for the "materialism and pleasure"—well, we know that, according to Christian religionists, this world is a "vale of tears," with nothing substantial about it. We ought, therefore, to congratulate, and not condemn, our neighbors if they are happy enough to find anything in it that is material and pleasant.

But the *Church Times* has much more behind. It says:—

"We should not allude to the subject here but for the fact that similar tendencies are observable amongst ourselves. We have a diminishing birth-rate, and the time is easily calculable when our population, too, will show a decrease instead of an increase, and then good-bye to all ideas of progress and extension of empire. The facts are well known in certain circles, but they are burked, and treated as if of no great consequence. We regret that amongst the authorities in ecclesiastical and medical affairs there would appear to be a conspiracy of silence on this most vital question, and the few public men who dare speak of it are looked upon as disturbers of the public peace. What we want is a general warning that the deliberate suppression of families of children is a sin akin to national suicide, and that the pursuit of selfish

ideals and love of pleasure are the contributing factors of this national infamy."

What are "these similar tendencies"? An ignorance of the "laws of God" we can excuse because no one knows them. Those who pretend to have any knowledge are always in deadly conflict as to what they are. And the verdict of any impartial person must be that it is impossible to arrive at any absolute knowledge in regard to them. The diminishing birth rate we regard with supreme satisfaction. Also we view with equanimity the approaching period when our population will continue to show a decrease. As to the talk about good-bye to all ideas of "extension of empire," the British taxpayer is, by this time, probably sick of hearing anything about these so-called developments which cost so much to achieve, and eventually become an intolerable incubus. In regard to the facts which are "so well known in certain circles," the *Church Times* has probably more information than we have. The clergy are not to be expected to be always so innocent as they look.

To say that the "deliberate suppression of families of children is a sin akin to national suicide" is rather a strong saying. It is well known that the married curate rarely errs in that respect; in fact, it is one of his chief claims for support, just as we remember it was with the rival candidates for beadship in "Boz."

But how do all these pious phillipics of the *Church Times* accord with the clerical complaints of extreme fecundation and overcrowding in the East-end of London and in all large cities? What about six, seven, and even eight children crowded in one room? The clergy undertake to deal with these cases, and in regard to every little effort they make, somehow or other there is never wanting a big announcement, probably in connection with an appeal for some fund out of which distributing expenses and disbursements are duly paid.

The over-population and the consequent over-crowding and the incessant competition and the cruel cutting down—that is the "national infamy" the *Church Times* should talk about. As for the "pursuit of selfish ideals," what can be a worse exhibition than the pursuit, which is never unperceived, especially by rivals, of some such plum as a premier bishopric at £10,000 a year?

To turn to general principles. The very tendency to limitation which the clergy lament is precisely the agency by which social advancement and prosperity are eventually to be achieved. That, at any rate, is the view of many, though perhaps not of all, Freethinkers; and even those who dissent are hardly likely to regard with favor, or even patience, the religious dicta on the subject which the clergy seem to be at so much pains to enforce. We are concerned with the laws of political economy, and not with any imagined "laws of God." Here all Freethinkers must join in resenting priestly dictation. We can see clearly enough what is in the pious mind by subsequent remarks in the *Church Times*. It says:—

"In connection with this decline of the birth-rate in England and Wales, is it not possible that the parish priests, who omit certain prayers and expressions in the Office for Holy Matrimony, have a good deal to answer for? Possibly public taste may be offended by the plain language of the Prayer Book and Bible; but it does not follow that to ignore the plainness for which we have divine warrant is the better way or more conducive to true morality. We can understand why modern 'society' which, to its shame, tolerates and supports the problem plays of West-end theatres, should be scandalised at the truthful statement of the marriage service. We do not understand the position of the guardians of truth who accommodate the service to the sinful weakness and folly of the age. In a diocese not conspicuous for social morality, a priest who performed a marriage for a neighboring parochus the other day found every reference to child-bearing crossed out in the service-book. If the Church in her public offices is to treat that great function with contempt, no wonder that the world is encouraged in hedonism and contempt for divine law."

Assuredly the parish priests, whose sense of decency impels them to "omit certain prayers and expressions in the Office for Holy Matrimony," have nothing to answer for. It is Convocation—that "assembly of old greybeards," as a Church print recently described them, who are too old to learn and too unwilling to accommodate themselves to the times—who should answer for

the continuance of these out-of-date and much too frank, not to say coarse, expressions in the Prayer Book. We say nothing of the low tone of morality expressed in those charming sentences from St. Paul, who seems to have regarded matrimony simply as an expedient against fornication, nor of the general low estimate of woman which pervades Holy Writ. Obviously the Office for Holy Matrimony wants overhauling. When this is done, we will talk about the Society problem-plays at West-end theatres, meanwhile observing that we have no liking for them and are not at all concerned to defend them.

FRANCIS NEALE.

"There was War in Heaven."

I DREAMED a dream—'twixt me and you,
It must have been my liver—
I dreamt I joined the cringing crew
At home "beyond the river."
With wonderment I stood transfixed,
Near Christ and His eleven;
The Prince of Peace's "few" were "mixed"—
And there was war in Heaven.

I saw a murderer come in,
He'd years ago been "jerked" there;
He'd left behind the fruits of sin,
For many a one he'd worked there.
His rival's wife he sent below,
Her husband died forgiven,
And came aloft and met his foe—
And there was war in Heaven.

A married man came on the scene,
His face looked far from cheerful;
He very much had married been
While in the vale so tearful.
The hapless, wretched mother's son
Had tied the knot with seven;
They gathered round him one by one—
And there was war in Heaven.

I saw Joe Chamberlain arrive;
The Unitarian "ratter"
Belittled Jesus while alive,
But somehow squared the latter.
He saw an angel in the stalls,
An angel "more than seven";
He saw his face, 'twas old Oom Paul's—
And there was war in Heaven.

I saw a bishop near the throne
Where Jahveh's "upper ten" sit;
He gave a smothered curse and groan,
For in came Mr. Kensit.
The candle-hater gazed aghast
(The bishop carried seven),
Some angry words between them passed—
And there was war in Heaven.

They seized each other by the beak,
And used them both like handles.
The bishop shouted, "Curse your cheek,"
And Kensit, "Curse your candles."
Between the two, they doused each glim,
They snuffed out all the seven;
I saw no more—the light was dim—
But there was war in Heaven!

ESS JAY BEE.

"That was a pleasing afterthought of yours," remarked the old preacher, who had listened to a sermon by one of his youngest brethren, "when you drew upon the analogies of nature to prove the immortality of the soul." "An afterthought?" said the younger clergyman, in some perplexity. "Yes. You thought of it about 2,400 years after Socrates."—*Chicago Tribune.*

An old Scotch lady, who could not abide long sermons, was hobbling out of kirk one Sunday, when a coachman, who was waiting for his people, asked her: "Is the minister dune wi' his sermon?" "He was dune lang syne," said the old lady, impatiently, "but he winna stop."—*New Brunswick Advertiser.*

Acid Drops.

In the Crimea, the *Daily Telegraph* says, the people believe that the dead come back at Easter to sing hymns, and otherwise take an active part in the doings of the living. "This is doubtless a very pretty idea," our contemporary observes, "but it is a trifle awkward for those widows and widowers who have married again, and still cling to their faith in monogamy." Precisely so. But has it not also occurred to our contemporary, in reading the Bible, that it must have been "a trifle awkward" when those "saints which slept" rose from their graves at the crucifixion of Jesus, and afterwards went into the Holy City? Mr. Isaacs, perhaps, knocked at the door of his old earthly residence, which was opened by his widow, who ran back into the house, astonished and frightened, to call Mr. Abrahams, with whom she was then living in connubial bliss. Mr. Abrahams, we may imagine, appears upon the scene, and asks the late and now present Mr. Isaacs what he wants. "My missis," replies Mr. Isaac. "Oh, nonsense," says Mr. Abrahams; "she's my missis now." "Dear me, dear me," rejoins Mr. Isaac, "what on earth am I to do?" "What are you to do?" says Mr. Abrahams; "why, go back where you came from, of course. Your conduct is simply disgusting. When a man is once dead and buried, he should stop there. It is positively indecent to get up again, and try to start life afresh at the point where it ended. It can't be done, Isaacs; it can't be done. Go away, go back, go to—anywhere, or there will be ructions on this sidewalk." And poor Isaac slinks away into the night, wondering why that earthquake turned him out of his grave.

A disciple of Tolstoi at Blackburn has been fined twenty shillings for refusing to fill in his Census paper. As a Christian man, he felt he could not assist the Government in enacting and carrying out compulsory laws. But he helps the Government in that way every time he purchases any article on which duty has been paid. Besides, it is not so clear that this gentleman is practising the Christianity of the New Testament—and where else is it to be found? Jesus himself, for instance, paid taxes to the collector, sending Peter to fish for the money; and Paul distinctly says that we are all to be obedient to the powers that be, for they are ordained of God. What the great Tolstoi does, and his little disciples after him, is to pick out certain texts from the New Testament, put them together, and label them Christianity; at the same time ignoring all the texts of an opposite or at least a different character.

M. Yves Guyot has had to abandon his paper, the *Siècle*. Perhaps we should say that his paper has abandoned him. The actual truth is that it does not command a sufficient number of subscribers. M. Guyot is not "patriotic" enough for his countrymen; at least he is not so for the crowd in Paris, which has gone over to so-called Nationalism. He retires from this field of journalism, however, without dishonor. He played a conspicuous part on the right side in the Dreyfus drama, and he has stood all along against the Church-and-Army party, with its reactionary policy and its insane bigotry against the Jews. That he will be heard of again we have no doubt whatever. He will find a hearing whenever the Republic is acutely in danger—which may happen at any hour.

Old readers of Charles Bradlaugh's *National Reformer* will recollect that M. Guyot for some time contributed to that journal. It was after 1870, if we recollect aright, and in the time of Gambetta's great popularity. It goes without saying that he is an outspoken Freethinker.

The *Daily News* has been falling foul of M. Guyot and calling him "Mr. Chamberlain's shoeblack," simply because he did not share the Parisian hatred of England in regard to the war in South Africa. Being reminded by Mr. D. Christie Murray and others of M. Guyot's brave fight for justice in the Dreyfus and other affairs, the *Daily News* half apologized for its attack upon him, and explained that his real offence was trying to obtain English financial assistance for his journal. We must confess, however, that this seems to us great nonsense. All that M. Guyot did was to invite persons of his way of thinking all over Europe—England, of course, included—to take shares in the *Siècle*; and an objection to this policy comes with ill grace from an English journal like that which is now presided over by Mr. Massingham. If a nationalistic paper receives national support, why should not a cosmopolitan paper receive cosmopolitan support?

Pressmen are just as apt to talk nonsense as other people. Mr. Massingham, for instance, posed as a sort of martyr when the proprietors of the *Daily Chronicle* put a stop to what they considered his pro-Boer policy in that paper. His friends were allowed to represent this as an act of persecution. It was at least, they said, a serious interference with the freedom of the press. Just as if Mr. Massingham had any other right in the *Chronicle* than he derived from his business contract with the proprietors. Subsequently, when some rich Liberals, including Mr. George Cadbury, bought up the *Daily News*,

Mr. Cooke was turned out of the editorial chair to make room for Mr. Massingham, who has not been reported as regarding this act as at all reprehensible.

The Archbishop of Canterbury beseeches his clergy to burn all their old sermons. The country would not be robbed of much light and leading if they could be persuaded to burn some of their new ones, too.—*Sunday Chronicle*.

At Wallasey the tram-tickets are completed by texts of Scripture on the reverse side—a practice said to be common in Scotland. Even the *Rock* appears to recognise the incongruity of the device, for it says: "Though one cannot help admiring evangelistic effort in season and out of season, there is 'a danger in this latest development of bringing sacred things into contempt.'"

A churchwarden of a Birmingham suburban parish has bolted with the pew rents. The poor vicar has been in sad straits in consequence, a large portion of the income of the living being derived from the rent of the sittings. A special collection has, however, been made, and the question now worrying the parish is, Where is the churchwarden?

With a fine display of charity, a Roman Catholic paper thus alludes to the illness of the French Premier: "Catholics all the world over will naturally feel disposed to recognise the finger of God in the serious illness which has come upon M. Waldeck Rousseau." This, we suppose, is to be attributed to the dismay created amongst the religious "orders" by the Premier's Associations Bill.

An extended perusal of Easter vestry meeting reports has been decidedly wearisome, and not very edifying, says the *Rock*. In many places the laity betray considerable indifference, and in others seem intimidated by the high-handed action of their vicar. Too many of the clergy appear in the least favorable light on such occasions, assuming dictatorial airs and being a law unto themselves which none dare question.

As a step towards the female parson, we have just had a marriage celebrated at Belper by a lady. The parties concerned were Spiritualists—the presence of the local Registrar gave the ceremony its necessary material value.

Reviewing the second volume of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, the *Rock* says the article on Jesus by the late Professor Bruce "came almost as a shock to us. Renan might have written it, or any other unbeliever in the divinity of the Lord Jesus. We are inexpressibly grieved at the whole tone of the article, as we are by much else in the book generally."

The moderator of the Dundee Presbytery, Dr. R. A. Watson, recently preached what is described as "an impressive sermon" on the subject of Higher Criticism. He said it did not seem to matter to those who were publishing their revolutionary opinions what would be the result. Some were moved by enmity to the Christian religion. Most were, however, in their way—a narrow pedantic way—seekers after truth. But there could be no question that if they succeeded, and Christianity survived, it would be another kind of religion from that now professed. Anticipating the very worst that Higher Criticism could do, he was not afraid for Christianity, but he was sometimes disposed to think that the Churches would go to pieces. The orthodox Churches would either be on the rocks very soon, or they were about to sail forth on a Dead Sea of Moderatism without a gospel.

There is a great deal of sense in this view of the situation, except that one does not see why the critics should be deterred by any consideration as to what may be the result of publishing their conclusions. Let us have the truth, and never mind the consequences. Besides, it is hardly fair to speak of the critics' methods as "narrow and pedantic." Necessarily they are narrow in the sense of being limited to the subject of criticism, and they are also to an extent pedantic, simply because they are of necessity scholastic.

Slowly and painfully Christian believers are beginning to realise the effect of the newer criticism on the reliability of the Gospel records. "Believers," according to the *British Weekly*, "have imagined that they had through the Gospels direct access to the historical Christ.....Does the newer criticism close for us this door of access? Of course the franker criticism of recent generations closes it almost completely, dissolves it into myth and legend, leaves us with a few uncertain fragments. And this is the method, so far as we can understand it, of Schmiedel and Cheyne. All that remains as historical fact about the life of Jesus, all that we can be sure of in his words, is a very small residuum, while the Gospels as a whole are so untrustworthy that, read without guidance, they can do little but mislead."

As if this was not disturbing enough, Mr. James Moffatt, B.D., has written, from another point of view, a work called *The Historical New Testament*, the result of which seems to

be but very little different to that of Black's *Encyclopædia*, in the opinion of the *British Weekly*. "The question his [Mr. Moffatt's] discussion raises is whether we are at any given point in the Gospel history in true communication with Jesus. Others have given us the story as it stands, and they have transfigured it and expanded it, and even transformed it, till no one knows what belonged to the original Christ. They have put into the lips of Christ what their experience of him had put into their hearts, so that at best we have indirect reflections of the mind of Christ. A 'Church' character is ascribed to what have been supposed the most precious words of Jesus."

The *British Weekly* points out that real belief in Christ must die of starvation if these views are accepted, and "a heavy haze" is allowed to hang over the Gospels with "uncertainty as to their original contents." The *B. W.* is chiefly concerned over the fact that "among writers of the rationalistic school in general we find a deep uncertainty as to the resurrection of Jesus.....Strauss did not believe in the miracle of the resurrection, but he had the eyes to see that without it Christianity was maimed beyond hope of survival." Therefore, the *B. W.* insists that "we are entitled to expect perfect candor on this question, no quibbling with phrases, no talk about the resurrection of the spirit as if the spirit were ever buried, but a plain declaration as to whether or not the writer holds the ancient faith of the Church."

This seems to be a reasonable requirement, but whether the modern critics within the Church are sufficiently courageous to openly declare what they vaguely indicate as present in their minds is quite another matter, on which we have our own opinion.

If Hall Caine should happen to glance at a recently-published novel called *Bunter's Cruise*, he will be interested in the following scrap of dialogue: "The lunatic asylums are full of persons who imagine themselves to be gods, kings, prophets, and even literary characters. There is a man in the Dock-haven Asylum now who insists that he is the author of *The Christian*. 'Perhaps he is,' suggested Bunter, innocently. 'Do you mean to say that they locked him up for that?'"

That great evangelist, Mr. Henry Varley, has been trying to minimise the damaging criticism he offered recently at Aberdeen on the Christian College at Madras. He has been apparently moved to this step by deference to Sir William Henderson, who, it may be remembered, walked out of the meeting as a protest against Mr. Varley's remarks. Varley, the evangelist, now says that he was not correctly reported. But how does that mend matters? Sir William Henderson marched out upon the evidence of his own ears, and not because of any report which appeared next day. Mr. Varley now states that what he did say was that he had spent a month in Madras, "and after much inquiry, not being able to hear of any additions, by baptism or profession of Christianity, for ten years in that Christian College," he had commented upon it.

Well, that is pretty much what was attributed to him. As, in this particular instance, evangelistic Varley was probably speaking the truth, he would have done well to ignore the snobbishness of Sir William Henderson.

More Providence. An explosion took place in the Church of St. Michael, Berlin, and three persons were severely injured. The tower of Stradhola Church has been badly damaged by lightning. A Burnley J.P., while visiting Ely Cathedral, suddenly fell dead at the feet of the Rev. Albert Bishop, who was drawing his attention to the painted ceiling of the nave. Churches and cathedrals, though solemnly dedicated to the worship of God, do not seem to be safer places than ordinary secular buildings. Providence is perfectly impartial.

A local preacher and Sunday-school teacher, of twenty years' standing, was sentenced at Sheffield to twelve months' imprisonment on a charge of receiving stolen property. He was alleged to have bought £600 worth of stolen jewellery for £9.

Earl Spencer, as Lord-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire, has sent an appeal to each town and village in the county on behalf of the Queen Victoria Memorial Fund. His lordship asks for small sums—pennies from children and sixpences from adults. Mr. J. H. Buxton also suggests a "direct and powerful appeal to the children of all ages throughout the Empire." As we have asked before, Why don't the people who proposed the Memorial pay for it, and leave the little children alone? The *Methodist Times*, to its credit, appears to think it undignified to solicit children's help for such a purpose. The proposal isn't made merely that children shall have a share in the Memorial. Lord Spencer assigns as a reason that "it may be difficult for individuals who have received many other appeals to find substantial sums for this fund." As if he could not, easily enough, supply from his own purse as much as is

likely to be collected from children. Court flunkeys, and not "kids," are those who should shell out.

Protestants have certainly some right to retort upon Roman Catholics who object to the King's declaration against Popery. A correspondent of the *Record* draws attention to "the strange ceremony in St. Peter's at Rome on Holy Thursday, when the Pope, under his title of 'My Lord God the Pope,' sits on the High Altar and solemnly curses all heretics, 'and all who shall in any wise receive, defend, or favor them.'" The idea of toleration entertained by the Romish Church has always been the right to do as she pleases, and the further privilege of summarily suppressing all who are outside her pale. For this reason it is, perhaps, just as well that the declaration provided by the Bill of Rights should be preserved, with some emendation of its phraseology, which is needlessly offensive as it stands.

The *Evening News* makes rather a good joke out of an advertisement in a morning contemporary. A sub-editor is required: "Versed in Protestant controversy preferred. State lowest terms. Address, etc." The *E. N.* observes: "No doubt any who heard the language used at the confirmation of the Bishop of London are in a position to state the lowest terms used in these controversies."

"A Freethinker at the Cross" is one of the flaring announcements in the *War Cry*. It appears under the general heading of "A Blazing Outbreak of Salvation," which seems rather to suggest small-pox than spiritualisation. Well, this is a capture, indeed. Fancy General Booth roping in a real live Freethinker. But is he a real live Freethinker? His name and address are not given. We only know that this surprising conversion occurred at Acton. And the *War Cry* correspondent may have his, or her, own notion as to what constitutes a Freethinker. Very likely he, or she, may so describe Dr. Schmiedel or Canon Cheyne—perhaps, even, the editor of the *British Weekly*.

All the information we have about this Freethinker who has thus succumbed to the Cross is that "he turned out his papers, pipe, and tobacco, and fully surrendered." There is nothing distinctively Freethinking about a pipe and tobacco. If he had given up all his spare cash as well, that might have been some evidence of sincerity—acceptable, at any rate, to the Army funds, through Adjutant Taylor, who effected his conversion; but even that wouldn't prove that he had ever been a Freethinker. As we cannot identify him, we can't be expected to be overwhelmed with regret at his secession.

Did they think the Day of Judgment had come at last when, at Communion Service in Pitlochry Free Church the other Sabbath afternoon, there was a crash from the roof, and a sound "resembling a peal of thunder"? Anyhow, the faithful made a rush for the doors. Afterwards it was found to be, not the Second Coming, nor even a descent of the Holy Ghost, but simply a fall of plaster from the ceiling. We can imagine the One Above grimly smiling at this needless alarm of his worshippers.

A little time ago we mentioned the sensation created by the enforced retirement of Mr. Marshall-Hall—a brother of the London K.C. of that name—from an important musical directorship at Melbourne. He was admittedly a man of genius in regard to music, but the pious were terribly shocked by his heresy. Now the *Sydney Bulletin*, just to hand, writes: "That wicked man, Marshall-Hall, is making use of his free leg now that Professor Peterson, the new, convention-fearing music-maker of Ormond, has landed in Melb. The other evening the author of *Hymns and Hears, Ancient and Modern*, delivered a rash, fervid lecture on 'Joy' to a push of absorbed disciples of both sexes, and preached a lengthy sermon on the wisdom of chasing pleasure as she flies, and grabbing her with both hands."

But this is not all. "The 'very best' have recognised this sermon as desperately heathenish, and there is evidence in respectable circles of the profound regret of the Mrs. Grundies in skirts, trousers, and bishops' breeches that there remain no more effective bricks to aim at the head of the solemn scoffer. Meanwhile Hall's conservatorium is going well, and will probably rake in every musical student with a ha'porth of artistic sense, leaving to the clergy-ridden institution of Ormond all those who desire to play a little and sing a little as part of the equipment of the domestic drawing-room."

A little girl was asked by an Irish priest: "What is the sacrament of matrimony?" She replied: "It's a state of torment into which souls enter to prepare them for another and a better world." "That," said the curate, "is purgatory; put her down to the bottom of the class." "Leave her alone," said the parish priest; "for anything you or I know to the contrary, she may be perfectly right."

A certain parson, having been sarcastic about the fairy tale of Jonah and the whale at a Melbourne Wesleyan Conference meeting, has been moved by the resulting scandal to announce

his firm belief in the truth of the story, declaring that the Lord, if he chose, could lodge Jonah for three days in the belly of a whale. After all, it was not so astonishing for the whale to swallow Jonah as it is to find an educated man in the twentieth century capable of swallowing both Jonah and the whale.—*Sydney Bulletin*.

The New York *Churchman* publishes a sermon by the Rev. Dr. S. D. McConnell. The text is quite enough. It is the declaration attributed to Christ: "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my father who is in heaven. Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father who is in heaven." We are not at all affected by this threat; certainly we are not going to wade through five columns of Dr. McConnell's twaddle which seems to be based upon it—more or less.

Apparently in good health, a well-known resident of Derby started off to attend the usual meeting of the Young Men's Christian Association in St. Peter's Churchyard. He suddenly dropped down, and died. Except that the Lord thought he was probably better in heaven than on earth, it is difficult to derive any lesson from this occurrence. Perhaps if the deceased had remained quietly at home and read the *Age of Reason* he might have been alive now.

"A Helpless Worldling" writes in these terms to the *Brighton Herald*: "In regard to those noisy juveniles, the Church and other Lads' Brigades—whose musical instructors seem to have about as much idea of music as a tom-cat at midnight—I find that the Church's Lord made a very strong stand against the military spirit, even when it was directed to serve Himself. 'Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword.' Now, I should like to know how the fighting parsons and jingo Nonconformist ministers manage to explain away these words. It seems to me that any attempt to put a gloss upon them jeopardises the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, on which the whole fabric of Christian ministerial authority hangs. 'All they that take the sword shall perish by the sword': this is plainly a condemnation. And if Christ didn't mean what He said, I challenge the vicar of St. Savior's, the vicar of All Souls', and all the other pugilistic men of peace, to explain what he *did* mean."

Truthful Talmage keeps on asserting that Freethought leads to suicide. All the time the newspapers are recording the suicides of Christians, and not once in a blue moon do we hear of the suicide of a Freethinker. The latest to be added to the list of Christian suicides is the name of a poor lady, the wife of a clergyman at Ifield, Sussex, who hanged herself in a fit of depression.

Brighton is in the throes of a controversy on Sunday trams. The parsons, of course, are to the fore with their solicitude for working people who have to labor on the Sunday. This solicitude, as we have shown over and over again, is pure sham. Now let us look at the tram question. There are two working-men engaged running each tram, but there are, perhaps, forty working-men and their wives and children who are using that tram. Of course the two tram employees, and perhaps some stable-men, are engaged on the Sunday. But are the forty to be sacrificed to the two? It is for the tramway company to see that these two and other of their employees who are engaged on a Sunday have a consolatory week-day off. If they don't get that equivalent, then it is for the parsons and other pious people to go at the Company—not at the public. This is as plain as a pikestaff.

A Brighton cleric, of the good old stupid type, the Rev. Gausson, seems to have been airing his petic notions on the subject. He is now invited in the correspondence columns of a Brighton paper to "influence the railway company to stop running their trains, also the pier companies and steamboat companies to suspend business on Sunday, not omitting the gas company, also electric light, the postman, the milkman, the policeman, the verger, organ blower, and other Church officials of St. Mary's. If he cannot perform all this, will he kindly desist in his opposition to the Sunday tram?"

"Freethought for Women" was the curious heading of some paragraphs in Tuesday's *Daily Mail* (London). It appears that when a certain castle in the air is brought down to the earth, there is to be special provision in it for the peculiarities of the fair sex, who are to be first attracted by concerts, dramatic entertainments, and social gatherings. "Having got them," said the promoter of this scheme to the *Mail* interviewer, "we shall essay the even more arduous task of teaching them the meaning of a syllogism, and of training them to reason intelligently and logically on the great issues of free thought and Christianity." Of course the

speaker was a man. That is just how too many of his sex speak of women. But it is not likely to be very attractive to the ladies themselves. Perhaps it is a hard task to teach them the meaning of a syllogism, but there are lots of men who don't know it either. After all, does it really matter? Many people reason very soundly who couldn't tell a syllogism from a parallelogram. Judgment is an innate faculty. A person may have it highly developed who never saw a book on logic; and a person may have it feebly developed after reading Aristotle, and the Port Royal Logic, and Whately, and Mill, and Hamilton, and Mansel, and Jevons. Perhaps it will be found that women have, in their own way, and according to their opportunities, quite enough judgment to be able to decide between Freethought and Christianity, and that men are not so much wiser than women as they seem to fancy.

According to the *Daily Mail* interview "a serious effort" is now to be made "to instil the principles of Freethought in the minds of the masses." We rubbed our eyes when we saw this announcement. Then we looked again. But the words were still there. So we concluded that somebody was suffering from "swelled head." Thomas Paine appealed to the masses; Carlyle, Southwell, Hetherington, and Holyoake appealed to the masses; Charles Bradlaugh appealed to the masses; and some whose names need not be mentioned have appealed to the masses since his death. What is the National Secular Society doing? What are its Branches doing wherever they exist? Why, appealing to the masses. What is the *Freethinker* doing? Does it not appeal every week to a wider circle of readers than all other Freethought organs in the country put together? Is it meant, then, that such efforts are not "serious"? Or what is meant? Or is anything meant at all?

While some people are talking about the "serious effort" that is to be made, others are occupied in making it. Yes, even in London. The National Secular Society's Executive has just organised an open-air propaganda of Freethought in the London parks and other open spaces during the summer. Thirteen lectures at least will be delivered every Sunday in various districts, besides special Demonstrations to be addressed by the leading speakers of the movement. Indoor lectures are also carried on, except during the Dog Days, in the Camberwell Secular Hall in South London, and in the Athenæum Hall in West London. For nearly five years Mr. Foote has personally borne the responsibility of the Sunday evening lectures at the latter place. Every lecturer has been paid for his services, at least as well as he is paid elsewhere, whatever were the takings at the door. And during the whole of that five years Mr. Foote has not asked a penny's assistance from anybody. All he has received in that way is one £10 which was voluntarily voted by the Secular Society, Limited, some twelve months ago. On the whole, then, it would be just as well to stop this cackle about serious efforts and reaching the masses. Not that we mean to notice it any further; but for this once, considering through what journalistic agency it reached us, we have given it perhaps more attention than it deserves.

The poor old Pope has been fulminating against the French heresy on the question of divorce. It is sought, he says, to profane the sanctity of Christian marriage, and to destroy the bases of domestic society. What he means is that nobody should be divorced without his sanction. He is always willing to oblige wealthy and powerful Catholics—for a consideration. That is right and proper. But it is infamous that common people should be freed from ill-assorted unions. Those whom God hath joined together let no man (except the Pope) put asunder—even if they have come to biting and scratching, and cruelty and adultery.

The household of faith is divided in a certain suburban Birmingham church. It appears that the choir got up a Good Friday evening concert, and held it at the local theatre. This was too much for the nerves of the curate, who solemnly banned the wicked entertainment. One young man remonstrated with the man of God, and asked whether he had not a right to do as he liked on Good Friday. "Your place is outside," said the curate severely. The young man took the hint, and so did the rest of the choir. On the following Sunday the curate had to act as choir himself, and—his voice spoiled it.

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

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, April 28, Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints, Manchester: at 11, "Tolstoi and His Excommunication"; at 3, "Where is God?" at 6.30, "The Fable of Jesus Christ."

May 5 and 12, Athenæum Hall, London.

To Correspondents.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS.—April 28, Camberwell, May 5, Glasgow; 12 and 19, Sheffield.—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.

JOHN F. HARDEN.—The pamphlets have been forwarded to you. We are pleased to hear that you have derived so much profit from reading the *Freethinker*. There is very little in that parson's "reasons." (1) The Incarnation has not regenerated the world, for the world still wants regenerating; and there is more drunkenness, prostitution, and other vices, and far more crime, in Christian countries than in "heathen" lands. (2) What does he mean by saying that the Bible is not inspired? If he believes that, he should renounce the clerical profession as he deems it disreputable. (3) Paul's testimony to Jesus is of questionable value. He never knew Jesus personally, and could only repeat what he had heard others say. See the chapter on "The Resurrection" in Mr. Foote's *Bible Romances*.

A. WEBBER.—You waste your time in troubling yourself about the utterances of Mr. Waldron at Plymouth or elsewhere. His manners are worthy of his ability, and his veracity of both. We may add, though, for your sake, that his wonderful eloquence has not put a stop to the Freethought meetings in Victoria Park. Those meetings are only held in the summer, and they are attended by large numbers of people.

W. B. THOMPSON.—Pleased to hear that Mr. Watts had a good audience on Sunday evening at New Brompton, and that you expect another for Mr. Cohen this evening (April 28). We are sorry to hear, though, that you find it so difficult to obtain new members, and to make the progress you desire. Your experience proves that big new schemes are fantastic when existing agencies are so badly in need of assistance.

W. H.—We are too busy to answer you by post. Your letter is marked "private," but the initials will not reveal your identity. (1) There is really no contradiction in Mr. Foote's pamphlet, the *Sign of the Cross*. What your Christian friend points out is simply the fact that something Mr. Foote says himself does not absolutely agree with a casual remark in a quotation he makes from another writer. Moreover, the quotation does not refer specifically to the alleged Neroic persecution, but to the persecution of the early Christians generally for two hundred years. (2) We are much pleased to hear that you derive "pleasure and instruction" from our writings. Such letters as yours are our best reward.

F. E. WILLIS.—Thanks for cuttings.

H. (Liverpool).—There was a body called the Legitimation League, but it was broken up by the Bedfordshire prosecution. We had no sort of connection with it.

ALTCAR.—What do you refer to? The only new Company we have established is the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited.

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

S. P. FURNIVAL.—We reviewed Mr. J. M. Robertson's book on *Christianity and Mythology* at some length on its publication, and a passage from our criticism has appeared in advertisements of the book since. You see, therefore, that we have not "ignored" it. The truth seems to be that you have not kept your eyes open.

OLD PAINITE.—Glad to hear you are so delighted with the Twentieth Century Edition of Paine's *Age of Reason*, and that you consider it more than realises the expectations raised by our announcements. When it falls into the hands of Freethinkers, as it is doing already, we feel as sure as you do that they will be filled with a desire to circulate such a beautiful production.

THE REV. J. B. COLES has sent us a reply to the letter by Mr. Drewell in our last issue. Unfortunately it arrived too late for insertion in this week's *Freethinker*. It will appear in our next.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Sydney Bulletin—War Cry—Northern Daily Telegraph—Secular Thought (Toronto)—The Churchman (New York)—World's Advance Thought (Oregon)—Dunfries and Galloway Advertiser—The Guardian—Sheffield Telegraph—Brighton Herald.

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. \dagger

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'S visit to Birmingham on Sunday was marked by a fresh departure. He had been asked to deliver an open-air lecture in the Bull Ring, but he had to decline. He promised, however, that he would speak for a moderate time at an outdoor Demonstration. Accordingly this gathering was arranged for, and several speakers mounted a brake shortly before eleven o'clock in the morning. People gradually flocked around it, and there was a tolerably good meeting when Mr. Andrews, the chairman, rose to initiate the proceedings. Mr. F. E. Willis, Mr. F. Hanks, and Mr. T. H. Griffin then delivered brief addresses, which were listened to attentively and heartily applauded. Mr. H. Percy Ward followed, and his reception showed that he has won golden opinions at Birmingham. By this time the meeting had grown into large proportions, and Mr. Foote had the pleasure of addressing a very fine assembly. He was received with enthusiasm, and his speech, which lasted about half an hour, was marked with a running fire of laughter and cheers. We understand that a good collection was taken up before the meeting closed. Altogether it was a very successful experiment, and the Branch committee are thoroughly satisfied with it.

In the afternoon Mr. Foote lectured in the Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms on "The Fable of Jesus Christ." This title had proved too strong for the local *Daily Mail*, which had refused to advertise it. All that paper would insert was "Jesus Christ," and Mr. Foote remarked that Jesus Christ without the Fable was a very small matter. Considering the sudden hot weather—and it was quite sultry in the afternoon—the meeting was an extremely good one. In the evening Mr. Foote lectured again to another good audience on "Priestcraft on the Birmingham School Board." This title also had been too strong for the *Mail*, which felt obliged to alter "Priestcraft" to "Clericalism"—a remarkably fine distinction. Mr. Ridgway occupied the chair at this lecture, and it was pleasant to see the noble old veteran at the post of honor once more, in spite of his age and infirmities.

On Monday evening Mr. Foote paid his first visit to Coventry, where he lectured in the Assembly Hall to a very attentive and appreciative audience on "Religion in the Light of Science." Mr. Ward and Mr. Sumner travelled over with the lecturer, and the former had to take the chair in the absence of a local occupant. Several "saints" stopped after the meeting with a view to forming a Branch of the National Secular Society, of which Mr. Lye has undertaken to be the secretary.

Mr. Foote delivers three lectures to-day (April 28) in the Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints, Manchester. It is to be hoped, in view of the sudden hot weather, which may continue, that the local Freethinkers will do their best to advertise these meetings.

Mr. Charles Watts lectured last Sunday evening to a highly appreciative audience at New Brompton. He had a hearty reception, and was urged to "come again" as soon as possible. To-night, Sunday, April 28, Mr. Watts lectures in the North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road, taking for his subject "The Evils of Christianity."

Freethinkers all over the country should be getting ready for the National Secular Society's Annual Conference, which takes place on Whit-Sunday at Glasgow. The Conference itself will be held in the Glasgow Branch's hall in Brunswick-street, but a larger hall has been engaged for the public meeting in the evening. Visitors will find plenty of holiday attractions before and after the Conference. There is the Glasgow Exhibition, which will then be in full swing, and will certainly be very magnificent. Then there is the splendid Clyde and Lake scenery within easy reach of the city. The Glasgow Branch, we hear, is organising an excursion on the Monday, particulars of which will doubtless appear in an early number of the *Freethinker*.

We hope our readers will do the best to circulate copies of the Twentieth Century Edition of Paine's *Age of Reason*, which is advertised on our last page this week. It is a marvellously cheap sixpennyworth, and the low price—as low as it is ever likely to go—places it within the reach of the widest possible public. Freethinkers can buy copies for distribution amongst their friends and acquaintances at the rate of 4s. 6d. per dozen, direct from our publishing office. Carriage, of course, will be an additional charge when sent by rail, post, or express.

With the object of enlivening the indoor meetings next winter, Mr. Herbert, of the Camberwell Branch, is holding a Singing Class at the Hall every Saturday, from 7 to 9 p.m. He has already received considerable support, and will be glad to see other ladies and gentlemen willing to assist. All necessary instruction will be supplied without any sort of charge.

The veteran Mr. J. Umpleby, of Blackburn, the oldest of the N.S.S. vice-presidents, who sent the first £20 to the Freethought Twentieth Century Fund, writes to us that he is prepared to make that £20 up to £50 if ten others will subscribe £50 each to the Secular cause generally, including the Freethought Publishing Company, in which Mr. Umpleby is already a Shareholder. Our venerable friend thinks that something of this kind is more practical than larger suggestions which are beyond the grasp and resources of the party.

While the pen is in our hand we beg to press, firmly and seriously, upon the attention of our readers the claims of the Freethought Publishing Company. If the *Freethinker*, for instance, did not exist, it would make a great difference to the movement—far greater, we venture to think, than some persons imagine. Now the *Freethinker* has to be sustained and its circulation to be promoted, and the latter effort is impossible without the command of a reasonable working capital. There is also the publication of books and pamphlets, for which in part the Company is established. This side of the enterprise is also of great importance. We appeal, therefore, to Freethinkers all over the country to take up Shares in this Company. We do not hesitate to tell them plainly that it is their duty to do so. It is no use mincing matters. We repeat that it is their duty.

This evening (April 28), at the Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, the Rev. J. J. B. Coles will occupy the platform. This is certainly a novelty, and we hope it will "catch on." Mr. Coles is anxious to address Freethinkers, but he is also anxious to hear what they have to say in reply. His subject on this occasion will be "The Mistakes of Ingersoll," with special reference to his answer to Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Coles will allow ample time for discussion, and we have no doubt that he will find a good many friendly opponents.

The Vampire.

(With apologies to Rudyard Kipling.)

"A FOOL there was, and he made his prayer
(Even as you and I)
To a cross and a ghost and the empty air
(We called It the God who did not care);
But the fool he called it his Savior dear
(Even as you and I).

"Oh, the years we waste, and the tears we waste,
And the work of our head and hand
Belong to the Godhead that did not know
(And now we know that it never could know),
And did not understand.

"A fool there was, and his goods he spent
(Even as you and I),
Honor and faith and a sure intent
(And it wasn't the least what religion meant);
But a fool must follow his natural bent
(Even as you and I).

"Oh the toil we lost and the spoil we lost,
And the excellent things we planned,
Belong to the Vampire that didn't know why
(And now we know that It never knew why)
And did not understand.

"The fool was stripped to his foolish hide
(Even as you and I),
As the Priest might have seen when he threw him
aside
(But it isn't on record the good man tried);
So some of him lived, but most of him died
(Even as you and I).

"And it isn't the shame and it isn't the blame
That stings like a white hot brand;
It's coming to know that God never knew why
(Seeing at last It could never know why),
And never could understand."

G. GUARDIABOSCO.

King David took a census of his people, and the Lord immediately reduced them by seventy thousand. That number of Jews were killed by Jehovah to mark his anger at such impious presumption. Fortunately that old deity has changed in temper since then, or has lost his power for mischief. We have just taken a census in England, and the population still increases.

The Nine Muses.

HEBREW and Christian mythology, as represented by the religious fables of the Old and the New Testaments, has a good deal of picturesque interest. Taken simply as myths (and that is the only way in which they should be taken) one can find a certain charm in the tales of Adam and Eve, the Flood, the adventures of Samson, and the magical career of Jesus. In time to come school children will be taught the Bible legends on precisely the same basis as they are now told the legends of Zeus and Apollo; and journalists will allude to the Transfiguration or the Ascension of Christ with no more real faith in those events than in the oft-quoted cleansing of the Augean stable or the judgment of Paris. And we shall have a Dictionary of Biblical Antiquities (I wish our friend J. M. Wheeler could have lived to compile it), in which stories now orthodox will be treated as allegories and folk-lore, and pictures of Bible-wonders will be no more regarded as historically accurate than pictures of the dog Cerberus at the gate of Hades, or of old Silenus fondling the infant Dionysus.

The Bible-myths have nothing like the energetic fancy and graceful variety of the Greek myths. There is not a single poetic creation in the Bible, for example, which so prettily and happily symbolises the round of human faculties as the conception of the Nine Muses.

In the first rough idea the Muses were supposed to be maidens who dwelt by holy springs, whence they who drank derived sparkling wit and wisdom. Afterwards they became specially the patronesses of song, and Homer presents them as fair goddesses, who sit at the tables of Olympus; and, when Apollo fingers the lyre, they join their voices in a choir which makes music in the halls of Zeus. The first of the Muses is Calliope (the sweet songster). She holds a pencil and a wax tablet on which to write epic songs. She it is who inspires Homer to narrate the moving story of the siege of Troy and the long travels and sorrows of Ulysses. When Milton opens his *Paradise Lost*, he can find no Biblical device with which to arrest the reader's attention, and so he uses the classical machinery:—

Sing, heavenly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Horeb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,
In the beginning how the heavens and earth
Rose out of chaos; or if Sion's hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
Fast by the oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song.

The second nymph is Clio (the eulogist), who, on a scroll, records the words and deeds of heroes and cowards, noble and base, and the wars of nations, and the policies of cities, and the teachings of the sages. Third comes Euterpe (the maid who makes glad), with her double flute and her musical treasury of lyrics. In the lyrical verse the poet's soul flashes into a message of love, grief, tender reminiscence; and the reader's emotion replies in quick sympathy. Listen to the poetic wail of Simonides as he watches the weeping Danaë float on the dark sea with her child, prisoned in the ark in which her father has sent her to doom:—

When, in the carven chest,
The winds that blew and waves in wild unrest
Smote her with fear, she, not with cheeks unmet,
Her arms of love round Perseus set,
And said: O child, what grief is mine!
But thou dost slumber, and thy baby breast
Is sunk in rest,
Here in the cheerless brass-bound bark,
Tossed amid starless night and pitchy dark.
Nor dost thou heed the scudding brine
Of waves that wash above thy curls so deep,
Nor the shrill winds that sweep—
Lapped in thy purple robe's embrace,
Fair little face!*

Such were the tuneful verses that Euterpe whispered in the ear of her lyrist.

The fourth muse is the florid Thalia, lady of rustic chants and of sprightly comedy; she carries the mask of the comic actor, the wreath of ivy, and the staff of the shepherd. She lurks amid the laughing audience who crowd the theatre to listen to the satires of Aristophanes. Our fifth maid is the singing Melpomene, who appears with the solemn mask of tragedy, and the

* From vol. i., chap. x., of J. A. Symonds's *Greek Poets*.

sword or club of the dauntless hero. She will show us Orestes slaying his faithless mother, and then flying, with bloodshot eyes, from the screaming Furies; or she will reveal the fair figure of Antigone, bending in the twilight of dawn over the corpse of her brother, and sprinkling on it the earth which will lay his spirit to rest. Then Terpsichore trips by—the dancer; and she bears the lyre with the sunny strings; and, as she flits on the scene, the youths and maids make gay rhythm with their feet, and all the world seems a-leaping, a-smiling, a-wooing, and a-litling. The seventh nymph is Erato, the composer of lovers' lyrics. Her lyre is smaller than that of the goddess of the dance; and well it may be, lest too full a flood of the mad music quite dissolve the soul of youth. More sober is the patroness of sacred music, Polyhymnia, she of the many hymns. On a pedestal she leans, deep in meditation, and a veil droops over her lovely face. And when the young men stand round the altar and chant an ode to the gods, the veiled lady gives manly harmony to the notes, and sweetness to the twang of the cithara which accompanies. Lastly, we discern, on the hill lit by the crescent-moon, the studious Urania; her eyes are lifted towards the unquenchable stars, and at her feet is the astronomer's globe.

Often I pass a building on the stately portico of which is inscribed the simple word, *Museum*—the Muses' home. It is significant that the house devoted to science, to concrete fact, and to the truth written in the roll of Nature should be known by a Pagan name. The Hebrew religion gave us no such institution; nor did the Christian. Three centuries before the Galilean rustics began to shape the rudiments of Christian myth, Ptolemy Philadelphus founded the celebrated Museum of Alexandria. This noble structure, which joined the temple of the Muses, was dedicated to science, literature, and the arts.

These gifts of imagination and learning the world received from Greece.

I have heard Christian critics bemoan the darkness of Greek Paganism.

I have never heard the voice of Balaam's ass. She lived before my time. But I have heard echoes of her immortal music.

F. J. GOULD.

On the Present Status of the "God" Question, and on Life and Substance.

A Lecture by DR. ROBERT PARK.

IV.

THEN in Exodus xxii. we find: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Do the infallibilists realise what a revelation of ignorance, as well as cruelty and injustice, such an injunction reveals of the character of the utterer? Or was "Thus saith the Lord" a mere formula, having only an esoteric meaning to the "inspired" writers? If so, what again becomes of infallibility? The evolution of the idea of God finds its apogee of moral perfection in the man Christ Jesus, said to be God himself in the dogma, but not *by himself*; and it again is a complete antithesis to the earlier and earliest conceptions. It is not, therefore, possible, consistently with reason, common sense, or the moral consciousness of justice, as it exists to-day, to believe that these books are, in any true sense of the term, an infallible revelation throughout of an unique personal Deity. On the contrary, it is obvious that the Deity is *man-made* throughout, evolving in all respects as his own intellect and emotional nature evolved; and, harmoniously likewise with the evolution of the priestly craft, compelled in its turn to accommodate its ideas to the needs of the time. In fact, what happened then is exactly what has been happening here and now during the past half century, only events move much faster now than then. The only way in which priestcraft now can save its cult is to do as the Jew did of old—viz., "discover" a new "book of the law."

But, it may be said, you have made no allowance for the progress of knowledge, and the widening and deepening of the conception of God which has proceeded therefrom, and which is evidenced in the pulpit utterances and theological publications of to-day. Certainly

not. These will be dealt with immediately under the third head—viz., of Philosophical Conceptions. But let me tell you that neither ecclesiastics nor theologians have anything to do with these conceptions as such; and, in order to make this point perfectly patent and obvious, I will quote to you a passage from a very straightforward and honest minister of the Episcopal Church—to wit, the Rev. C. H. Beeching. Writing in the *Monthly Review* for November, 1900, and there on page eighty-five, he says: "There can be no religion without dogmas. The existence of God is a dogma quite as much as the Incarnation.....the idea of God, as a God of love and righteousness, which is, after all, what the layman [N.B.] means by God, comes to him, *not from philosophy, but through the Christian revelation.....What has convinced HIM falls very far short of proof.....*The crucial point, then, to determine for men now, as it was for the apostles.....is the possibility of worshipping Christ..... since to worship anything lower than God is idolatry. Undogmatic Christianity, therefore, is a meaningless phrase, and the test of Christianity is worship." Mr. Beeching is right; but it is a pity that he, and many good men, do not see that to make a meaningless formula or dogma a God, and then to worship it, is quite as foolish a thing as to worship a clay, or wooden, or stoney handiwork. And that is precisely what we have just seen that they do. Not only so, but they claim that, by eternal decree, angels and men are predestinated and foreordained, particularly and unchangeably designed (there is no mistaking the meaning of the language here), unto everlasting life or everlasting death; and that the number so designed either way is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished! What benefit or advantage, then, can possibly accrue to the individual, or society, or the nations, from the worship of a deity, supposing it a reality, who, for "the pleasure of his goodwill," or for the "sake of his glory" (whatever that may be), has so ordained things from all eternity?

Coming now to the third, or philosophical, conception of God, we find that it imports a totally new element, and, at the same time, displaces, *more or less*, a previous element. It imports the element of impersonality and displaces that of personality. It behoves us, therefore, to consider accurately the meaning of the word "person." Like many of our English words, it comes to us direct from the Latin tongue, its form there being *persona*; and its true inwardness of meaning is exhibited by its secondary signification in that language. By conventional usage *now* it simply means, with us, an individual, male or female, in a species or community, one separate from others. But its peculiar appropriateness arose from the early, primitive, and at that time *legitimate*, belief that a person was bodily the mask or vizard of an inward unseen spirit which gave life and maintained life in all its phases. So long as that belief held, even though unverified and unverifiable, then it was an extremely apposite designation, because the secondary meaning of the Latin word was "mask" or "vizard." We all know now, however, that life and mind and emotion, the three elements assumed formerly to be maintained by an indwelling spirit, are not so maintained, but, on the contrary, are the outcome of, and in absolute dependence upon, physico-chemical actions and reactions in the body itself, and that these again are in greater or lesser degree (according to the state of equilibrium or health) in complete dependence upon the outward environment. The idea of an indwelling spirit, of a particulate or individual sort, is, therefore, simply a myth, and has absolutely no basis outside the imagination of man himself or a discredited revelation, so-called. The term "person," therefore, is no longer, etymologically, an appropriate appellation for man. Conventionally, no doubt, we will continue it in use, but, like so many other terms, it will be shorn of its original meaning. It is doubly inappropriate for Deity, which cannot possibly be a mask, but is that thing, whatsoever it may be, which is masked in all the varied forms of nature.

Having got a clear idea of this, we are now in a position to ask was the term (person, to wit), in any sense of the word, properly applicable to such a God as is outlined for us in the dogmatic concepts? Was it simply a symbol hiding or masking the Cosmos and all its

phenomena, including man himself; and is the term still applicable to the great cosmic energy; and to man as well, being the embodiment, in the highest perfection, of his energy? Well now, these questions very entirely cover the whole status of the God question as it at present stands. Is the cosmic energy God? And, if God, is it personal or impersonal? And, if personal, is it capable of response to worship? Our answer to these questions is that we do not know, we have no, or few, data to go upon; but we will be glad to submit any data that may be forthcoming to very respectful consideration. We are Agnostics in relation to this conception.

(To be concluded.)

Grains of Salt.—II.

SALT is pungent and appetising. It is a preservative; it stops the process of decay, and hence is an emblem of incorruption and imperishableness. It implies durability, fidelity, purity. "A covenant of salt" was an indissoluble covenant. "Faithless to salt" is the Persian term for a traitor.

Leaven, on the other hand, is a symbol of corruption, and it is worthy of note that there is not a single instance in the Bible in which leaven is used as an emblem of anything good—it *always* indicates evil.

Leaven is fermentation, spontaneous decomposition—an initial stage in the process of disintegration, corruption, and decay. How often do we meet with "leavening the masses with sound principles," and other similar expressions? From what source is this confused metaphor derived?

Christ said: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened." His teaching, and the teaching of the early Church, was soon leavened by the introduction of sour and contaminating doctrines and principles. Christianity was poisoned at the outset, and changed into the "religion of Christendom," than which nothing more dreadful has as yet been seen in the history of mankind. Religions, in their decline and fall, have had a very sinister influence in the past, and will have a still more terrible effect in the future, until at last mankind will rise in rebellion against all religions which have deceived and corrupted humanity, which have sinned against love and light, and defiled the pure breath of heaven and all that is sweet and lovely in human life. False religion will meet with its richly-deserved retribution from the hand of man, whose emotions, aspirations, and fears it has preyed on, and its end will be a righteous one in the sight of heaven—where its doom has already been decreed.

"Till the whole was leavened." Has not this prophecy well-nigh been fulfilled? "As for the religious beliefs of the world, there is nothing too crude, too wild, too false, too monstrous, to find enthusiastic adherents. And wherever a great teacher has appeared, and has sought to elevate the religion of men, his system has soon been perverted and depraved."* It has ever been so.

Egypt.

"Of the early Egyptian religion, all that was sublime was demonstrably ancient, and its last stage was the grossest and most corrupt."

China.

"In China the lofty system of ethics formulated by Confucius has suffered the utmost degradation."

India.

"In India the pure nature-worship of the Vedas has ended in superstitious puerilities. And the teaching of Gautama, sublime in its rejection of all idolatry and priestcraft, has ended in the gross asceticisms and superstitions of modern Buddhism."

Judaism.

"The Divine revelation of Judaism was degraded to the level of 'the Jews' religion,' which made that race the common enemy of God and his people."

Christianity.

"And Christianity itself has been almost swamped by the 'religion of Christendom,' that tangled skein of Divine truth and Pagan superstition"—which we can see all around us.

The whole history of the race records no exception to the rule. "It is a law like that of gravitation that religion ever tends to degenerate, and, in its decadence, to corrupt and deprave mankind."

I ask, What explanation can be given of facts so patent and yet so extraordinary?

I seek an answer from your readers, and I will then myself offer suggestions in future issues of the *Freethinker*.

* See *The Buddha of Christendom*. By Robert Anderson, C.B., LL.D. (Hodder and Stoughton.)

When man sets up a religion and institutes a code of ethics; when he aspires to a perfect system of philosophy, science, and religion—he presumably has honest intentions and upward desires.

How, then, are we to account for this universal failure in the sphere of man's "higher self"? How can those who affirm that "all things come from within" account for this signal failure in the evolutionary process? Those who depend on the instruction and guidance of "Masters" and Initiates must see that it is a question to put to them which should be fully answered before enrolling additional disciples.

The philosophy of Secularism, which is "naturalism in morals as distinguished from supernaturalism, and which affirms that the criterion of morality is derivable from reason and experience, and that its ground and guarantee exist in human nature, independently of any theological belief," gives no satisfactory reason for this failure in the highest sphere of the evolutionary process.

The Christian, the Theosophist, and the Freethinker are deeply interested in this problem. He who can suggest the best solution, in a manner that will appeal both to friends and opponents alike, will perhaps help them to explain one of the most perplexing questions which has ever exercised the mind and heart of man—*i.e.*, the origin of evil—and the injury inflicted on man's spiritual nature in the childhood of the world. The question of the origin of man's physical organism is one which all thoughtful men consider worthy of mental effort and patient research, the evolution of mind and of moral ideas no less so; but evolution should not stop here: it should be able to account for, or at least formulate, a hypothesis as to this universal degradation and corruption of religious beliefs with which man's "higher self" or spiritual nature has to do.

Has the true solution been obscured by false analogies, or have those who had the key of knowledge refused to enter in themselves, and also hindered others from entering in, by planting a labyrinth of noxious vegetation before the gate of Wisdom? If so, then, as one of your brilliant writers justly affirms, "the destroyer of weeds, thistles, and thorns is a benefactor, whether he soweth grain or not." I venture to quote another saying: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." If weeds, thorns, and thistles are still being cultivated for evil purposes, then let all who love Wisdom's ways, and are watching daily at her gates, unite in honest efforts to clear away opposing obstacles, to cut down all noxious growths, and, if nothing else will avail, to sow the ground with salt and burn the weeds and refuse with the fire of sarcasm, irony, and stern rebuke. Salt and fire are both useful, but they must be used with discretion. We do well, also, to remember that grace and forbearance ought to characterise our actions and regulate our zeal. Righteousness will reign at last, and truth eventually prevail.

J. J. B. COLLES.

St. David.

The Man after God's Own Heart.

By G. W. FOOTE.

(Concluded from page 237.)

BEING in Jahveh's good books again, and knowing that "the Lord is a man of war," David prosecuted the siege of Rabbah. Having captured the city, he "brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln." All the Ammonite cities were served in the same way. Justly does Bayle ask whether Turks and Tartars are not more humane than Saint David. Josephus omits these barbarities, but he says the Ammonites were "tormented, and then destroyed." Whiston, in a footnote to that author, argues that David must have put them to work with saws, harrows, and axes, and at brick-making, without taking away their lives; for such cruel methods of putting men to death are not found elsewhere in the Bible, or in any other ancient history. But Whiston must have been very ignorant or very shameless to advance such a statement. Many Fathers allege that Isaiah was sawn in two by Manasseh; and Paul, in his panegyric of the ancient martyrs, distinctly says that some "were sawn asunder." The punishment is alluded to in other parts of Scripture. It was also known to the Greeks and Romans. According to Suetonius, it was inflicted on several persons in the reign of Caligula. Calmet alleges that, not many years before he wrote, a Swiss criminal was put into a coffin, and sawed in two from head to foot.

Violent disorders now broke out in David's kingdom. Amnon, one of his sons, ravished his own half-sister; an act which Milman and others ignorantly designate as "incest," although this idea is plainly refuted by Tamar's own language. Her brother Absalom avenged the insult in the violator's blood; but, like a true son of David, he consulted his own safety by letting his servants assassinate

Amnon while drunk. After three years' banishment Absalom was pardoned, for he was his father's darling. He was the handsomest man in Israel, with a magnificent head of hair, which was cut once a year, and yielded a crop of nearly seven pounds!

Absalom fomented the popular discontent, headed a rebellion, drove David out of Jerusalem, and, according to the oriental custom, signified his own accession to the throne by appropriating his father's harem. With the exquisite taste of his age and country, he spread a tent on the roof of the palace, and "went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel."

General Joab sided with David and saved his throne. Absalom's army was routed in a pitched battle; and the gay pretender, being caught by his hair in an oak tree, was righteously slain by Joab's own hand. David never forgave his general for this offence. His fond old heart doted on his wicked son, and all he could think of was that Absalom was dead. Joab reproached him for mourning his domestic loss, when so many loyal subjects had perished in defending his crown, and threatened to leave him if he did not rise and act like a king.

Another formidable rebellion under Sheba was likewise suppressed by the valor of Joab, who once more preserved David's throne. How the saintly king rewarded him for these services will be seen presently.

The ten concubines whom Absalom had abused were imprisoned for life. Agreeable as it is to the policy of oriental despotisms, such an act is grossly unjust, for the women were victims and not offenders. But men after God's own heart have peculiar views of right and wrong.

Saint David soon committed a worse crime. There was a famine for three years, and when Jahveh was asked the reason of the visitation he answered, "It is for Saul." Saul's two sons by Rizpah were therefore hung, with the five sons of his daughter Michal. And "after that the Lord was entreated for the land." A just God requires the murder of seven innocent men to stop a famine! Such is the morality of this atrocious story. Perhaps the Lord had no share in the business; it may be that David followed the oriental custom of extinguishing his rivals, and disguised his bloody crime with a veneer of piety.

The tragedy has one redeeming feature: a mother's love shines through the darkness of superstition and the mists of blood. Rizpah sat under the corpses of her two sons, through the long sunny days and lonesome nights, guarding them from birds and beasts, until their bones were allowed to be buried. Readers of Tennyson will remember that this pathetic episode furnishes the *motif* of his divine poem *Rizpah*, which more than merits all Mr. Swinburne's praises.

Peace and plenty being restored, David determined to take a census. The Lord moved him to do this, according to the earlier account; but, according to the later account, it was Satan. Whichever it was, the consequences were dreadful. Jahveh told David to take his choice between seven years' famine, three days' pestilence, or three months' flight before his enemies. David chose the pestilence, and Jahveh slew seventy thousand Jews because their king counted them like a flock of sheep. Fortunately the Lord is now used to the census, or every ten years there would be the Devil to pay.

Joseph throws a little light on this story. According to the Jewish law, when the people were numbered, half a shekel was to be paid to God, that is to the priests, for every head. Otherwise there would be a plague. Evidently, then, the priests invented this story to illustrate the law, and enforce the necessity of "shelling out."

David was now getting old. "They covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat," and the courtiers prescribed a novel remedy.

'Tis written in the Hebrew Chronicle,
How the physicians, leaving pill and potion,
Prescrib'd, by way of blister, a young belle,
When old King David's blood grew dull in motion,
And that the medicine answered very well.

They sought him out "a young virgin," to cherish him and lie in his bosom, and "the damsel was very fair." David had many wives and concubines, but none of them would do for the purpose. Dr. Gill says that young virgins have more natural heat than women who have had children, and that Galen prescribed this remedy in a similar case. David "knew her not," but this was because of his impotence. Gill argues that David married the damsel to make everything square, and she "enlivened his spirits by her amiable countenance, her graceful behavior, and especially by bedding with him." Adam Clarke is less luscious, but he chews the savory morsel, and refers to Friar Bacon's enigmatical work on "The Cure of Old Age."

Abishag's cherishing could not render David immortal. He died at the age of seventy. His last words were full of cursing and hypocrisy. He had sworn not to injure Shemei, who had railed at him and afterwards apologised; but he enjoined Solomon, who was under no vow, to bring down this man's "hoar head to the grave with blood." A similar injunction was laid on Solomon with respect to Joab, who had grown grey in David's service, and been the mainstay of

his throne. David feared and hated him, and, not daring to kill Joab himself, he left the legacy of murder to Solomon. Instead of dying at peace with the world, and letting his son ascend the throne in justice and benignity, he breathes out slaughter from his pallid lips, and, under the most hypocritical pretexts, enjoins his successor to pollute his early reign with lawless bloodshed.

Renan justly remarks that David had as little as possible of the sense of justice, while his religion was only a pious pursuit of self-interest. "We shall see," he says, "the brigand of Adullam and Ziklag assume gradually the airs of a saint. He will be the author of the Psalms, the sacred choræus, the type of the future Savior. Jesus must be the son of David! The evangelical biography will be falsified in a multitude of points by the idea that the life of the Messiah should reproduce the traits of David's. Pious souls, while enjoying the sentiments, full of resignation and tender melancholy, of the finest of liturgical books, will fancy themselves in communion with this bandit. Humanity will believe in a final justice on the testimony of David, who never thought of it, and of the Sibyl, who never existed. *Teste David cum Sibylla!* O the divine comedy!"

Correspondence.

GOD AND KRUGER.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Your correspondent, Mr. Ryan, has seized upon a humorous interlude of my lecture (which was criticised at the time of its delivery) to express his own views of the matter. I do not object. "Old Roberts" and "Old Kruger" are upon the same plane as to their belief, but not as to their modes of utilising the same for the purposes of the war. It was the salient fact that Kruger, from the very initiation of the war, professed a firm belief that "God" was on his side, and was bound to see him victorious; and that the public press of this country has made his simple-minded trust in the letter of the Bible, and his constant perusal thereof, a matter for jibes and flouts and jeers, that made me—justified me—in referring to him in the course of my lecture. Every war, of course, has its victories and its reverses; and the Boer war has been no exception. The fact simply goes to prove that what Christians think of as "God Almighty" takes no more to do or to think about their wars than the Sphinx of Egypt or a derelict iceberg. If Jahveh had been on Kruger's side, the latter would not now be a fugitive (by the grace of his enemies), away from his own land, and his generals would not be in such a hurry to run when our soldiers put in an appearance. Our general has given credit to "God" for his victory rather too previously, perhaps; but it is quite obvious that *in his case, as in that of others*, the returning of thanks and giving of credit is a purely professional and conventional proceeding. Kruger's attitude cannot be viewed in this light. His and his people's attitude in this regard is constitutional and sincere, and ought to have evoked profound sympathy and regard at the hands of a people and press presumably worshipping the same "God," and believing, even with a difference, the same Bible to be His inspired word. Instead of that, we know that preachers, and the religious press especially, have been foremost in fomenting the jingo fever which has completely submerged the calm intelligence of the British people for the past two years, and has enabled the Government to saddle us with a debt of an enormous sum, for which, as a nation, we will never get a red cent.

On p. 307 of *Problems of Evolution*, by J. W. Headley (Duckworth), relative to Moral Evolution, the author writes: "Patriotism that has no religious basis is apt to degenerate into mere jingoism, and then to evaporate." The book was written only last year, and may be said to be thoroughly up to date as an astute apology for a sublimated Christian religion written from the scientific side. But the very exact contrary has been proven by our Boer war experience. It is the religious basis of patriotism which *in both cases* has proven to be the foundation and the main support of the war.

ROBERT PARK, M.D.

Justice—"You say that you doubt the statement of the previous witness, that the defendant squandered his inheritance. Please give the reason for your doubt." Witness—"I tried three or four times to get him to visit a church fair, but it was useless. He always smiled, and informed me that he was not born yesterday."—*Boston Transcript*.

"Yes, sah," said Uncle 'Rastus, "I preached fo' dat cong'gation two yeahs, and all I evah got f'm de membahs wuz ten dollars. Ten dollars, sah, not a cent mo'." "That was miserably poor pay," replied the listener. "I don't know," rejoined Uncle 'Rastus, scratching his head reflectively. "Did yo' evah heah me preach, boss?"

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, Rev. J. B. Coles, "The Mistakes of Ingersoll."
CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, C. Watts, "The Evils of Christianity."
SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell-road): 7, Stanton Coit, "Our New Shakespearean Poet, Mr. Stephen Phillips."
STREATHAM AND BRIXTON ETHICAL INSTITUTE (Raleigh College Hall, Effra-road, Brixton Hill): 7, G. H. Perris, "Can we Civilise the World?"
BATTERSEA ETHICAL SOCIETY (455 Battersea Park-road): 3.15, H. O. Newland, "Science and Sentiment in Morality."
WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, High-street): 11, Stanton Coit, Ph.D., "The Biglow Papers."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, A lecture.
HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, W. Hunt, "The Bible and the Monuments"; 7, W. Ramsey.
STATION-ROAD (Camberwell): 11.30, W. Heaford.
PECKHAM RYE: 3.15, C. F. Neve.
BROCKWELL PARK: 3.15, W. Heaford.
MILE END WASTE: 11.30, W. J. Cox.

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): 11 (the Bull Ring), F. Hanks; 3 (Camp Hill), T. Griffin, "Christian Want of Evidence"; 7 (in Assembly Rooms), Concert, by Social Volunteer Choir.
CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school; 7, C. Cohen, "Atheism and its Critics."
FAILSWORTH (Secular Sunday School): F. J. Gould—2.45, "Thomas Paine"; 6.30, "Tolstoi's Religion." Singing by the Choir; music by the Failsworth String Band.
GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): H. Percy Ward—11.30, "An Explanation of Hypnotism"; 2.30, "Christian Ministers: What they Preach and what they Practise"; 6.30, "Who Made the Devil?"
HULL (2 Room, Friendly Societies' Hall, Albion-street): 7, A lecture.
LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, Mr. Jordon, "Home Influence."
LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, A. Despris, "Anarchistic Communism."
MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): G. W. Foote—11, "Tolstoi's Excommunication"; 3, "Where is God?" 6.30, "The Fable of Jesus Christ." Tea at 5.
SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Lecture or reading.
SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7, A reading.

Lecturer's Engagements.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham. —April 28, Glasgow. May 4 and 5, Stanley; 12, Birmingham; 19, Birmingham.

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