

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XXI.—No. 18.

SUNDAY, MAY 5, 1901.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

A Parson Poet.

SOME people seem to imagine that the greatest nonsense is reasonable if it is put into verse. No matter whether the verse be good, bad, or indifferent; if the lines go on feet, and are tagged with rhymes, the printed page looks like poetry, and that raises a glow of pride in the breast of the artificer. Very often the same stuff, set forth in plain prose, would strike the "poet" himself as downright silliness; and in a moment of self-revelation he might exclaim, "What the devil was I doing to write such contemptible rubbish?" But there is a glamor about rhyme that compensates the absence of reason, and invests the blindest folly with a certain grandeur. The author gazes upon his miserable abortion with more than the fondness of a mother for her crippled child. He admires it at first in secret, then he ventures to display it for the benefit of others, and if they fail to appreciate its wonderful merits he ascribes the fact to their grovelling vulgarity of taste. Finally, in many cases, he nurses the delusion that he is an uncomprehended genius, damns the world instead of his own imbecility, and casts a prophetic eye on the verdict of future ages—when he will be as dead and forgotten as any ephemeral insect that crawled upon the ground or fluttered in the air.

We have no doubt whatever that the Rev. C. M. Handley, for instance, regards himself as a true poet. We have received a "second edition, revised and enlarged," of a threepenny pamphlet by this gentleman, published by Richard Poole at Maldon. It is entitled *The Bible Not of Man*, and the verses it contains are almost bad enough to be considered "not of man" likewise. Perhaps it would be accurate to say that they are not of man nor of woman, but of a clergyman—who, to borrow Sidney Smith's classification, belongs to the third sex. Mr. Handley's last couplet, which ought to have been his best, and is really neither the best nor the worst, runs as follows:—

The Bible read with this idea,
And you'll begin that God to fear.

There, now! There's poetry for you! What imagination and melody! And what exquisite prosody! We presume that Mr. Handley pronounces *fear* as "feah," like a languid and affected West-end "swell." And the fault is not occasional but chronic, for he rhymes "Isaiah" with "fire," and "Noah" with "before," and we daresay he would rhyme "Jonah" with "Homer."

Mr. Handley takes for a sub-title the elegant and expressive language of the Psalmist: "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God." Were we to reply in the same fashion, we should say that if there was ever a fool who said that, and who was a bigger fool than Mr. Handley, he deserved immortalisation as the very pick of his species.

Our pious poet opens in this way:—

Gird up your loins, yourselves array,
Ye sceptics, eager for the fray.

But it would hardly take the feeblest sceptic much girding to wrestle successfully with this champion of the faith. Mr. Handley's first blows, as he doubtless considers them, are nothing but playful rib-ticklers. He asks the sceptic to explain how bones and sinews are formed; and, without giving the sceptic an opportunity of replying, he tells him that his "arguments are weak and lean." Mr. Handley then inquires how it is that grass is eaten by different animals, and in one produces "flesh of horse" and in another "flesh of goose." He

might as well ask why a beefsteak helps to produce wisdom in a philosopher and folly in a fool. "Can you reveal this mystery" of the grass-horse and the grass-goose? The poet clearly considers this a poser. But we may ask him in turn to reveal, on his own principles, the mystery of creation, whereby "the Almighty" produces in the same world and at the same time, by the same power working on the same raw material, two such poets as (say) Swinburne and Handley, between whom there is a greater difference than there is between any horse and any goose.

This orthodox rhymster sets up for a good judge of poetry.

Who, uninspired, at any time,
Could write such poetry sublime
As David, or as did Isaiah?

What a fossil of Biblical criticism this gentleman is to be sure! He actually fancies, at this time of day, that David was the author of the Psalms. Why, he could learn better in a common handbook to the Scriptures. But let us deal with the pith of his question. It is always "sublimity," and generally unparalleled sublimity, that is claimed for these Old Testament poets. Now we admit that this is their most striking characteristic, for they have few other excellencies. The sublimity of Shakespeare, to take a supreme illustration, is not so conspicuous, because he displays all the other qualities of a transcendent poet. If you forget these qualities, however, and fix your attention on his sublimity, you soon see how he soars above his "inspired" rivals. He leaves them under him, cawing and grating, while he is "pinnacled dim in the intense inane."

Poet Handley has many other things to say about the Bible. Here is one:—

Who dare deny the Savior's birth?
His mighty acts, his gracious words,
Such as no other book records.

The last line is a fine display of ignorance, for all the "mighty works" of Jesus were recorded of other Saviors before him. As for the first line, we may tell Mr. Handley that it is not only sceptics who "deny the Savior's birth," as it is recorded in the first and third Gospels. Learned men, calling themselves Christians, do the very same thing nowadays. But the rumor of such works as the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* has apparently not disturbed the rural quietude of Maldon. Nor is anything, we believe, capable of disturbing the orthodoxy of this Christian poet. He reminds us triumphantly that—

The nation, family, and town
Of the Messiah's birth are shewn.

Quite so. And at Jerusalem they show two different tombs in which he was buried, and from which he rose from the dead. Mr. Handley recalls to our mind the story of the American who visited Mount Ararat and brought home with him a stone from the locality. Placing that stone on a table in a Sunday-school, he invited all the scholars to walk past and have a good look at it. When they had resumed their seats, he told them that if ever they heard anyone doubt the story of Noah's Flood, and the ark resting on the top of Mount Ararat, they would be able to say that they knew it was true, for they had seen a stone brought from the very spot.

Sceptics laugh at the story of Joshua making the sun stand still. But there is really nothing to laugh at. Mr. Handley provides a rational explanation.

The Bible does not science teach,
But just adopts that form of speech

By which the facts are understood,
As in the present day we should.
The fact which here in truth is taught,
Is that a miracle was wrought ;
Though what exactly did occur
No man can say. But do not err,
A great event is here portrayed.

There is such a delicious naivete in the words we have italicised that we feel like withdrawing any harsh expression we may have used with regard to Mr. Handley. He is quite too simple for this world—at least for the twentieth century. We will, therefore, bring this article to a close with a reference to the paradisaical dream which this gentleman cherishes, after nineteen hundred years of waiting and deception :—

His coming kingdom, reign of peace,
When war and wickedness shall cease,
And nations all, in sweet accord,
With one consent shall serve the Lord.

Something might have been added about the lion lying down with the lamb—inside. For our part, we desire the reign of peace as much as Mr. Handley ; we should like to see war cease, ay, and wickedness too, though that is "a very large order." But unfortunately it is precisely in Christian countries that some of the very worst forms of wickedness are most rampant, and it is Christian nations that outstrip all others in the art and practice of war. We see two Christian adversaries flying at each other's throats in South Africa. Japan has learnt from Christians how to fight, and China is now acquiring the same lesson from the same teachers. Mr. Handley's dream is a noble one, in spite of the poor prosaic lines in which he tells it ; but it will never be realised through "the Lord" or Christianity. Mr. Handley himself says of the Bible :—

Its wonders are without compare,
Unparalleled its battles are.

We agree with him. They *are* unparalleled, both in vile arithmetic and in viler brutality. Not to the Bible, nor to any other barbaric literature, must we look for the refinement and civilisation of mankind. We must look to science, to freethought, to humanity. These, and these alone, will realise the dream of peace, industrialism, and brotherhood. G. W. FOOTE.

The Silence of God.

A COUPLE of Sundays ago my lecture at the Athenæum Hall, London, on "What is there Left of Christianity?" received the courteous opposition of the Rev. Mr. J. B. Coles—a gentleman who seems to be following up the lectures at the above-named place pretty closely. At the conclusion of the meeting my opponent presented me with a book written by a late Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mr. R. Anderson, C.B., LL.D., bearing the curious title—curious, that is, for a believer—*The Silence of God*. It was given with a request for its perusal, and the prophecy that it would meet many of the objections to Christianity urged during the course of my speech. So far as the reading is concerned, that is a thing of the past ; but of the prophecy I can only say that Mr. Coles has met the fate that seems to await most who set up to predict the future. My opinions remain as they were, with the exception that I am more impressed than ever with the difficulty of getting a Christian to adequately realise the strength of reasoned unbelief.

Let us take one point as illustrative of this. Mr. Anderson is dealing with the question of miracles, and he remarks :—

"Open Infidelity has made no advance upon the arguments of Hume. Indeed, the phenomenal triumphs of modern science have only served to weaken the Infidel's position, for they have discredited the theory that new discoveries in nature might yet account for the miracles of Scripture."

We need not discuss whether "Infidelity" has made any advance on the arguments of Hume or not ; if the statement be accurate, it is a testimony to the clearness of Hume's mind, not a deprecation of modern unbelief. What is worth observing is the author's apparent unconsciousness of the real essence of the unbeliever's

arguments, which is, not that *all* narrated miracles may be explained as misunderstood natural phenomena, but that the belief in miracles is hardly a question of evidence, *pro* and *con.*, at all. Hume himself noted, with his accustomed shrewdness, that "it forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations ; or, if a civilised people has ever given admission to any of them, that people will be found to have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors, who transmitted them with that inviolable sanction and authority which always attend received opinions."

It is this side of Hume's argument against the miraculous that has been developed by more modern thinkers, and it is one which disposes of the miraculous at once and for ever. It is a plain matter of history that the belief in miracles belongs to the same order as the belief in fairies, witches, and similar creations of the undisciplined intelligence. At one stage of social existence the belief is as common as it is unusual at other stages. The child of the most cultured of men would find it a matter of no difficulty to believe that the dead rose from the grave, that men walked on the water, or that any of the scriptural miracles were true ; and in this respect the child is to-day where the race once was. In other words, the belief in miracles is not a question of history, except as registering its existence ; it is a question of psychology. Once grasp fairly the process of mental development, and it is the absence of the belief in miracles that would be surprising, not its presence. If Mr. Anderson will discuss the question from this point of view, he will be at least fairly meeting the sceptic. Otherwise he, in common with many others, is very largely beating the air.

A consideration of the question of miracles from this point of view would have made a great deal of *The Silence of God* unnecessary. Mr. Anderson's explanation of the cessation of miracles as the speech of God is that they were addressed to the Jews, and when these rejected Jesus, and the Gospel was preached to Gentiles, there was no longer any necessity for miracles. But there is no such clear line of division between the miraculous and the non-miraculous period, as the writer seems to think. The early Christians certainly did not think that miracles were a thing of the past. Indeed, during the first five hundred years of the Christian era one could point to scores of narratives of miracles that were parallel in every particular with the Gospel miracles, and which rested upon quite as good evidence. Large numbers of people do not believe that miracles have ceased now. To them there is no "silence of God" to be accounted for. God is always speaking ; and, apart from his theological opinions, one can safely challenge Mr. Anderson or anyone else to bring a single argument against the Catholic miracles that will not apply with equal force against the miracles of the Old and New Testaments.

With Mr. Anderson's arguments drawn from the Bible I have, and can have, nothing to do. These are obviously addressed to Christian believers, and I leave them to answer them or not as they think best. It is useless arguing about what is God's plan with one who does not believe in a God, and it is equally absurd to quote a text as authoritative to one to whom a text from the Bible has no more intrinsic merit than a clipping from a newspaper. The question of why, if there be a God, is he silent in the face of all the misery and wrong and injustice is, however, one that the unbeliever may fairly put, and it is one to which no satisfactory answer has yet been given. Mr. Anderson's own answer must be, I should think, as unsatisfactory to the Christian as it certainly is to the Agnostic or Atheist. It is because, we are informed, we are living under a condition of grace. God spoke once for all through Jesus, and now it is open for us either to accept or reject and take the consequences. But in what way can this meet the unbeliever's criticism? He sees on all sides brute force lording it over weakness, cunning rising superior to honest innocence, the most solemn rights trampled underfoot ; while, whatever may be the inward reward of a life well lived, he sees it often enough the visible registration of poverty and distress. He sees all this and more ; and as he would feel towards a human being who, with full power to prevent it, yet remains callously

silent, so he feels towards a deity who, with none of the limitations of human nature, can yet resemble it in some of its worst qualities. It is this which, as our author says, "tries faith, and hardens unfaith into open infidelity."

Now to offer, as an explanation of this difficulty, the hypothesis that God has already spoken, and will not speak again, is almost grotesque in its inadequacy. If admissible, the explanation will only shift the criticism to the "plan of salvation" itself. The objection that God, who might have abolished all misery and wrong, yet declined to do so, loses none of its force when stated in its revised form. For here is the essence of the whole question. Was it the purpose of God that, by the Christian or by any other method, the world should be saved? If it was, then, no matter which interpretation of the Christian scheme be correct, its failure is evident. The world has not been saved—in the sense of accepting Christianity—and, judging from all appearances, never will be. The world is making up its mind to get saved or damned by its own methods, and the fact that this is so, and always has been so to a very considerable extent, reflects but little credit on the wisdom displayed in the plan arranged for its subjection.

It is useless saying that God has given man the terms of salvation, and will not speak again. An opportunity that people will not seize because they do not see it, is no opportunity at all. A belief in the divinity of Jesus is no chance of escape to one whose whole moral and intellectual nature revolts from such a belief. The ultimate responsibility for the rejection of Christianity must clearly lie with the deity who, knowing man's mental constitution, could yet make his eternal destiny depend upon his acceptance of a belief which his whole nature forces him to reject. And to add that God, having stated his terms, is now silent because to speak would mean the "closing of the day of mercy and the dawning of the day of wrath," hardly helps the matter. In the case of a *man* who acted in this way it would be ridiculous enough; but in the case of a God, who knows that people are outgrowing belief in his existence because they fail to find proofs of his presence, and who refuses to make himself known because he took a farewell of our ancestors two thousand years ago, the spectacle is infinitely more absurd.

On the whole, the "mystery of a silent heaven" is hardly dispelled by Mr. Anderson's book. God, "who is no respecter of persons," should be none of generations. We have as much right as our ancestors to demand that there shall be some visible evidence as the basis of our belief. There is as much necessity for miracles now as ever there was; there was no more necessity for them in the year 30 A.D. than in the year 1901. The doubts and perplexities that troubled thinking people then on matters of religion trouble thoughtful people now—only the number of the perplexed has increased a hundredfold. Many of these doubts might be resolved if the same signs were given to-day that were said to have been vouchsafed to our ancestors of two thousand years ago; and if these signs are not given, the responsibility for our belief must rest with the deity who reveals himself only to the "ignorant and the lowly"—or, in other words, to those who lack the critical acumen to discriminate between their own disordered imagination, or want of knowledge, and objective reality.

But, after all, the mystery of "a silent heaven" is, like most theological mysteries, self-made. It is a puzzle to the believer why God does not speak, because his whole hypothesis demands that he should. And, having commenced by stating a theory without any foundation in fact, he is compelled to devote considerable time and energy to explaining why *his* theory and other people's facts do not agree. But there is no mystery, and there are no perplexities, to the man who does not commence with an utterly unwarranted hypothesis. The unbeliever does not expect God to speak, because he does not believe that God ever has spoken; he does not even know that there is a God to manifest himself by "signs and wonders." "A terrible position for a man to be in!" cries the unnecessarily sympathetic Christian; but while we have the assurance of the reality and helpfulness of human knowledge, sympathy, and affection, we can well dispense with the imaginary

patronage of a non-understandable, and possibly non-existent, deity.

On one point at least I find myself in complete agreement with Mr. Anderson. That is in his remarks concerning the unreasonableness of those who "believe in the divinity of Christ while rejecting inspiration and miracles.....who discard belief in the supernatural while they claim to be the true exponents of a system which has the supernatural as its only basis." The author is quite correct in treating such a position as the most absurd of all. Such men, when honest, are simply pandering to their own feelings, after rejecting all upon which those feelings are logically based. There is no Jesus Christ apart from the myth which so many reject. There is no Christianity apart from the supernatural which so many "advanced" Christians are protesting against. Christianity is essentially miraculous; it is essentially supernatural. Without these elements it is a mere string of empty phrases. They are right who urge that the rejection of the supernatural involves the disappearance of Christianity; and they also are right who maintain that the supernatural represents a vanishing quantity in human affairs.

C. COHEN.

Christ an Imperfect Character.

THE imbecility and hypocrisy associated with the Christian profession are becoming more and more apparent, and nowhere is this lack of wisdom and sincerity more evident than in the absurd and erroneous claims urged on behalf of the Jesus of the New Testament. These reckless devotees who profess to follow him are not content to regard him as a man of limited powers and imperfect education, who did his best to expose some of the evils of his time, but they proclaim him either as a God or as a perfect man. What ideas of a God such persons may entertain it is difficult to understand; for, to say the least, the hero of the Gospels displayed no ability greater than has been manifested in ordinary human beings. As to the claim of the perfection of Jesus, it is as groundless as it is absurd. His character can only be judged from what is recorded of him in the New Testament, and here his defects, both as an exemplar and as a teacher, are so glaring that, but for the misleading influence of theology, he would not be looked upon to-day as the "light of the world." His character was weak and vacillating in the extreme, being destitute of that self-reliance which is necessary to true greatness. He lacked all philosophical and scientific attainments, and he manifested no experimental wisdom, political sagacity, or social discrimination. His moral teachings were not original, and many of them were rendered useless by his theological fanaticism. As he said, "My kingdom is not of this world"; and, therefore, he revealed nothing that was of any intellectual, physical, or ethical value to the human race.

When Christ's enthusiastic admirers allege that he was perfect in his character and teachings, do they pause and ask themselves what perfection really is? Is it possible to conceive of a perfect being? If so, such a being must be complete in every particular, and incapable of improvement. Moreover, before a person can decide what is perfection, he should be perfect himself; otherwise his decision would be liable to be imperfect. To test this point, let the reader try to portray what he deems a perfect character, and submit the same for critical examination to a half-dozen intelligent persons, and the probability is that more than one improvement would be suggested. But, supposing a perfect character *could* be conceived, it would not, therefore, follow that Christ possessed such a one. To prove that he did, it would have to be shown that the acts and teachings ascribed to him in the New Testament harmonised with such a conception. After all, what is thought to be a perfect character must be only a matter of opinion, as it cannot be a self-evident fact. Hence many professed admirers of Christ have admitted that he was not perfect. For instance, John Stuart Mill, in referring to Christ's morality, wrote that in many important points it was "incomplete and one-sided, and that, unless ideas and feelings not sanctioned

by it had contributed to the formation of European life and character, human affairs would have been in a worse condition than they now are.....What little recognition the idea of obligation to the public obtains in modern morality is derived from Greek and Roman sources, not from Christian." Renan, in his *Life of Jesus*, remarks that Christ had "no knowledge of the general condition of the world" (p. 78); he was unacquainted with science, "believed in the Devil, and that diseases were the work of demons" (pp. 79, 80); he was "harsh" towards his family, and was "no philosopher" (pp. 81-83); he "went to excess" (p. 174); he "aimed less at logical conviction than at enthusiasm"; "sometimes his intolerance of all opposition led him to acts inexplicable and apparently absurd" (pp. 274, 275); and "bitterness and reproach became more and more manifest in his heart" (p. 278). The Rev. Charles Voysey admits that Christ could "not have been God, because he was not a perfect man. He had faults which neither I nor my readers would venture to imitate without loss of self-respect. His mind gave way, and he was not responsible for what he said." Instead of regarding Jesus as an impostor, the reverend gentleman said that "he was simply mistaken, and finally insane" (*Fortnightly*, January, 1887). And the orthodox Dr. George S. Barrett, in his recently-published work upon *The Bible and its Inspiration*, confesses that Jesus "was as limited in knowledge as men usually are." Even Christ's personal friends thought he was "beside himself" (Mark iii. 21); the Jews considered "he hath a devil, and is mad" (John x. 20); and "neither did his brethren believe in him" (John vii. 5). Thus it is evident that some of the most prominent admirers and most intimate associates of Jesus regarded him as being far from perfect. Why, then, should we be required to admit that he was free from imperfections? The true answer is, that his supposed followers find that his name is a talisman for success in business engagements and social associations. However deluded the orthodox masses may be, the fact is known, even among the intelligent professors of the Christian faith, that Christ's teachings are never acted upon in daily life. Semblance of adherence to them is a question of personal policy, not of mental honesty.

The imperfections of Christ's character, as given in the New Testament, are made sufficiently clear by an appeal to the book itself. In Hebrews (vi. 1) we read: "Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection." This is an admission that perfection was not in the doctrine. In Matthew (v. 48) a vague idea is given of what a perfect character should be. It is there said: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." According to this, perfection involves absolute knowledge and power; but the Gospels allege that Christ had neither, therefore he could not have been perfect. The writer of the second Gospel states, in reference to the day of judgment: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." Many other passages could be cited from the New Testament showing Christ's limited knowledge, but the one quoted above is sufficient for the purpose. As to his power, he admitted that he could "do nothing of himself," for "there is no power but of God" (John v. 19; Romans xiii. 1). It is said in Matthew (xix. 21): "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor." Now, to relieve those who need help is, of course, commendable; but to do so is no mark of perfection. Persons who are exceedingly benevolent are far from perfect in other respects. To be generous for the purpose of securing personal adherents is not my idea of perfection; yet Jesus is reported to have said to the woman of Canaan (Matthew x. 5), who applied to him to help her on behalf of her daughter, that "it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs." When, however, he thought the woman believed on him, he complied with her request, thus granting to faith what he had denied to humanity. This showed that he had a very imperfect notion of true benevolence.

It occurs to the present writer that, instead of acting as Christ is said to have done, it would have been more useful to the world to have endeavored to discover how the necessity for charity could have been avoided. The prevention of such a humiliating condition is not to be

found in such teachings of Christ as the following: "Labor not for the meat which perisheth. Of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. Give to every man that asketh of thee. From him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Lend, hoping for nothing again. Blessed be ye poor. But woe unto you that are rich. A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth." Such teachings as these are not practicable, for even those who profess to believe them never attempt to carry them out. Teachings that are useless as factors in the regulation of daily conduct cannot be perfect.

The imperfection of Christ is evidenced by the fact that he was subject to such human weaknesses as hunger, anger, and petty passion. Moreover, he failed to practise his own teaching. Hence the Gospels state that Jesus said "Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire"; yet we find him exclaiming, "Ye fools, ye fools and blind." He advised others to "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you," while he himself addressed those who were not his friends as "hypocrites"; "ye serpents, ye generation of vipers." He counsels us to "forgive, and ye shall be forgiven"; but in Mark it is stated: "He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." He tells us to love one another, yet he exclaims: "If any man comes to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 26). "Everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matthew xix. 29).

If Christ's character were perfect, we could emulate his conduct. But who would attempt to follow his example when he showed a reckless disregard of the feelings of his mother, and spoke to her in most contemptuous language; when he cursed the fig tree because he found no figs on it, for the good reason that "the time of figs was not yet"; when he destroyed two thousand swine belonging to an unoffending man; when he drove the merchants out of the temple with a "scourge of small cords," and overthrew the tables of the money-changers (John ii. 14, 15); and when he rode into Jerusalem upon an ass and a colt, which he sent his disciples to obtain in a very questionable manner?

It is not here suggested that the Jesus described in the New Testament is destitute of some excellent qualities, for he had many which are deserving of the highest admiration; but my contention is that his character was in several respects defective, and that his teachings are not in harmony with the requirements of the twentieth century. Moreover, as he was not a husband, a father, a statesman, or an employer of labor, he could be no perfect guide to us of the present generation.

CHARLES WATTS.

Religion and the State.

DR. PARKER, in his recent address to the annual assembly of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, made one good point for which his fellow Christians of the Anglican Church will hardly thank him. Dealing with the King's oath against Roman Catholicism, he said he sympathised with those of his fellow subjects who felt that the terms of that oath were insulting. Then he said:—

"We ought never to forget that it is no more the business of the State to denounce religion than to patronise it. The State must keep its hands off at both ends. In so far as Roman Catholicism is a religion, it is not the business of the State either to approve it or condemn it. If Roman Catholicism is more than a religion, if it is an imperial policy, that is another matter, and with that I have nothing to do as president of this great body of Nonconformists. I will, however, make common cause

with my Roman Catholic fellow-subjects when they complain that their deepest feelings are wounded by the pitiable insults heaped upon their religion by an antiquated and despicable oath. The same oath really includes Dissent and Nonconformity in every form of activity and expression. It is an obsolete oath. All oaths, like all wars, are obsolete."

It is to the first part of this extract that we would draw special attention. Most people, who are not ultra-Protestants, have agreed that the royal diatribe against Roman Catholicism needs revision if it is to be retained at all. We have at present, as Dr. Parker points out, Roman Catholics in the Government, Roman Catholics on the bench, and Roman Catholics in high council and office of nearly every kind, and to these the declaration, worded as it is, must necessarily be offensive. We should think that, however aggressively ambitious the Papacy may be, it can hardly, in its wildest dreams, entertain the possibility of establishing a Roman Catholic on the throne of Great Britain—at any rate, for many centuries to come. And if, at any time in the distant future, such a possibility came within measurable distance of realisation, we can be sure that the Bill of Rights would not be allowed to offer any effective obstruction. Such part of it as presented a bar to Roman Catholic accession would be swept away.

The adherents of the Established Church, however, will be anything but grateful to Dr. Parker for laying down the general principle that the State has no business to "patronise religion" any more than to denounce it. "The State must keep its hands off at both ends." Undoubtedly, that is the true policy for an Empire comprising inhabitants of so many, and such widely varying, creeds. Dr. Parker, of course, laid down that principle with a special view to the State support and patronage of the so-called "Church of England." But the principle has a wider application; for, if it is not the business of the State to either denounce or patronise religious belief, it is not its business to patronise or denounce religious unbelief. We need not, as unbelievers, stop to consider, or to renounce by anticipation, any State patronage of unbelief. This is even farther out of the range of ultimate possibilities than the accession of a Roman Catholic monarch. But unbelievers, while they would scorn any proposed patronage by the State, have a real present grievance in that they are practically "denounced" by the State by being placed under most unjust disabilities. The laws detrimentally affecting unbelief are vastly more insulting and offensive to us than the merely formal oath of the King could be to Roman Catholics, who practically possess every right they could reasonably desire except the occupation of the throne.

What our grounds of grievance are will be gathered from the following "Immediate Practical Objects" of the National Secular Society:—

"The Legitimation of Bequests to Secular or other Freethought Societies, for the maintenance and propagation of heterodox opinions on matters of religion, on the same conditions as apply to Christian or Theistic churches and organisations. The Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, in order that Religion may be canvassed as freely as other subjects, without fear of fine or imprisonment. The Disestablishment and Disendowment of the State Churches in England, Scotland, and Wales. The Abolition of all Religious Tests and Disabilities in schools, colleges, municipalities, parliament, the executive, and the judicature. The Abolition of all Religious Teaching and Bible Reading in Schools, or other educational establishments supported by the State."

It is true that bequests for Freethought purposes may be safely made to, and realised by, the Secular Society, Limited. This fact has been established beyond dispute, and in the best possible way—that is, by practical instances. But there should, under equitable State control, have been no need for Mr. Foote's special and carefully devised scheme. We have to congratulate ourselves upon its success, but at the same time we have a right to complain that, generally, we are not, in this matter, under "the same conditions as apply to Christian or Theistic churches and organisations." The iniquitous Blasphemy Laws are not nowadays enforced—and every year that passes renders their enforcement less likely in view of the growth of advanced opinion—but they are still unrepealed. It is a mistake to describe them as obsolete. There is an "obsolete" Act of the

reign of Charles II. against Sunday trading, but from time to time we find that prosecutions are instituted under it, and that penalties are inflicted.

What we say is, that in these matters and others that have been indicated the State should, in the words of Dr. Parker, "keep its hands off." Especially we say, upon the broad principle laid down by Dr. Parker, the State has no right to support with national funds the public schools in which Bible-reading and religious teaching are carried on. If the State should neither patronise nor denounce, but remain strictly neutral, in regard to religion, it should do so all round. It is not sufficient for it to abolish, say, the King's oath against Roman Catholicism and to sever the connection between itself and one particular Church. That might satisfy Dr. Parker and others. But it must do more. It must be consistent and deal even-handedly with all—unbelievers included. Why are Roman Catholics to be spared the pain of listening to a mere formal statement which can only be made at rare intervals, whilst Freethinkers are allowed to remain under ever-present and practical disabilities? Why is the State to terminate its connection with the Church, and at the same time to vote large sums to the support of Church schools? Why is the State to profess strict impartiality towards all the religious sects, and yet keep in its national educational establishments the very text-book over which all the religious sects are squabbling?

Dr. Parker, it will be noticed, says that *all* oaths are obsolete. That is true in the sense that they are out-of-date; but legal swearing goes on daily all over the country to an extent which would startle people if they cared to form an estimate. Why does not Dr. Parker agitate for the total abolition of oaths? That would be one way, and a ready if a small way, in which the State might withdraw its patronage from religion, and display, to some extent at least, a desire to confine itself to its proper and legitimate secular functions.

FRANCIS NEALE.

M. Anatole France on Religion.

M. ANATOLE FRANCE, one of the most brilliant of French writers, in his new work of fiction, *Monsieur Bergeret à Paris*, makes his hero address a dog called Riquet in the following fashion—as we learn from a review in the *Academy*:—

"Thou also, poor little black being, so feeble in spite of thy pointed teeth and thy deep chops which, by the apparatus of force, render thy weakness ridiculous and thy cowardice amusing—thou also hast the worship of the greatneses of the flesh and the religion of antique iniquity. Thou also dost adore injustice through respect of social order, which assures thee thy nest and thy food. Thou also wouldst hold an irregular judgment for time, obtained by fraud and lying. Thou also art the toy of appearances. Thou also art seduced by falsehood. Thou art fed upon coarse fables. Thy tenebrous mind finds its pasture in darkness. Thou art deceived, and thou deceivest thyself with a delicious plenitude. Thou also hast race hatreds, cruel prejudices, contempt of the unfortunate."

And, as Riquet turned a glance of infinite innocence upon him, M. Bergeret continued with even greater sweetness:—

"I know; thou hast an obscure kindness, the kindness of Caliban. Thou art pious; thou hast thy theology and thy morals; thou thinkest to do well, and then thou knowest not. Thou dost guard the house even against those who defend and decorate it. That artisan thou wouldst have chased hence has in his simplicity admirable thoughts. Thou wouldst not listen to him. Thy hairy ears hear not him who speaks best, but him who criest loudest. And fear, natural fear, which was the counsellor of thy ancestors and mine in the age of Caves, fear which created gods and crimes, turns thee against the unfortunate and hardens thee to pity. Thou dost not want to be just. Thou regardest as a strange visage the pale face of justice, new divinity, and thou crawlst before the old gods, black as thou, the gods of violence and fear. Thou admirest brutal force because thou dost believe it the sovereign force, and thou dost not know that it is devouring itself. Thou dost not know that all irons fall before a just idea. Thou dost not know that real force lies in wisdom, and that through it only are the nations great. Thou dost not know that it is not stupid clamor upon the public place which makes the glory of peoples, but august thought hidden in some garret which, one day cast upon the world, will change its face. Thou dost not know that those honor their land who for justice sake have suffered prison, exile, and outrage."

Acid Drops.

THE debate in the House of Commons on the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill brought up the High Church party with their talk about "incest." Surely this is very ridiculous, for there is no blood relationship in the case. These pious opponents of the Bill are believers in the inspiration of the Bible. Well, now, there is only one person in the Bible, with the exception of Jesus Christ, whom God is said to have loved, and that person was Jacob. This patriarch married two sisters, and he did not even wait for the funeral of the first before marrying the second. He connubialised with both of them at the same time, and perhaps went out for a walk with them, one on each arm. What a scene would have ensued, and what language would have flown about, if Jacob, with his brace of sister-wives, had met Lord Hugh Cecil or Earl Percy! It would have been worth seeing and hearing, especially if Rachel and Leah had joined in, as they probably would, when it was two to one against their old man.

Alarmed at the prospect of the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill eventually becoming law, the *Church Times* says: "If, as seems only too likely, resistance to the change will finally (not immediately) be overborne, we consider ourselves justified in demanding a Commission to inquire into the whole question of the marriage laws with a view to enforcing civil marriage on all parties alike, and leaving the Church free to administer her own discipline in the case of those who contract marriages she does not and cannot recognise."

Now, this is a most sensible proposal. And the *Church Times* would be entitled to much credit if we could only think that it meant it seriously, and was not employing it simply as a spur to the clerical party to continue their resistance. It would, indeed, be a move in the right direction to "enforce civil marriage on all parties alike." But where would the clerics be landed then in regard to the "sacrament" of marriage? How many of the thousands upon thousands who now go to church to have the "knot tied"—without being church people in the real meaning of the term, but because it is customary—would find their way thither if they had first to go to the Registrar's Office, where all that was legally necessary would be done? The clergy would immediately find a tremendous falling off in fees. And that is the lever which the *Church Times* seems to be using to move the bishops and others to increased opposition to a most necessary reform.

The new policy is not to imprison the Peculiar People, but to fine them heavily. We call this distinctly hypocritical. It was laid down by the late Lord Chief Justice Russell, supported by three other judges, that parents who did not call in a doctor to their sick and possibly dying children were guilty of manslaughter. Now to fine a man for such an offence is perfectly farcical. But the fact is, the judges see the hole they have put themselves and Christian England into, and they want to get out of it as gracefully as possible; so they fine the Peculiar People, no doubt in the hope that a tax upon their pocket will be more deterrent than the pains of martyrdom.

John Kensit is not altogether a reckless martyr in the cause of true-blue Protestantism. In a letter to the *Standard*, reprinted as a Tract, he states that "last year an appreciative public subscribed close upon three thousand pounds" for his crusade. No wonder the gallant crusader turns up dramatically in High Churches every now and then. The worst martyrdom he need fear is being chucked out. Should he get a scratch or two, that £3,000 would go a long way in lotion and plaster.

"Why did our Reformers die?" asks John Kensit. We guess the answer is, because the other fellows wouldn't let them live. That's about the size of it. Our opinion of John Kensit is that he wouldn't have been one of the dying ones. His lot is cast in easier times. He finds it nicer to make faces at Bishop Ingram and rake in those handy shekels. Not that we have any particular love or respect for the Bishop of London. He is a dignitary of the blessed-be-ye poor religion with £10,000 a year. But we haven't the slightest doubt that John Kensit would very gladly accept the bishopric, and the salary too, if they were offered him.

As the Catholic Church is so committed to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, it naturally looks with an evil eye upon Cremation. Archbishop Bruchesi, of Montreal, has just been fulminating against that wicked practice. First of all, he declares that the erection of a Crematorium there is an outrage, and ought not to be tolerated. In the next place, he warns Catholics that they, at any rate, must avoid it as they do the Devil. "Cremation," he reminds them, "is formally prohibited for all the children of the Church. None of them may encourage it or take any part whatever in it. Let us cling to the ancient and pious

customs bequeathed to us by our fathers in the faith. Let us be chary of all innovations that do not harmonise with our holy dogma." This is a frank—some might say a *too* frank—confession. Archbishop Bruchesi knows very well, of course, that rotting a body away in the grave, and burning it to ashes in a crematorium, are substantially the same process. The body disappears in the end; quickly in one case, and slowly in the other. That is all the difference. But it makes a great difference to the *imagination*, and that is what the Church is anxious about. You can fancy the body lying in the grave and waiting for the resurrection, but you can't do that when you have actually seen it reduced to a few handfuls of ashes. Therefore the illusion must be kept up in the interest of the dogma.

One of the Alexandra Palace bye-laws says that "No person shall hold any public meeting, deliver any public address, or preach, pray, or sing aloud in any part of the pleasure ground." According to the local *Sentinel*, this "will dash the hopes of the Free Church Council, which was hoping to hold mission meetings there." Done again.

Years ago Mr. Foote wrote a *Freethinker* article on "Adam's Breeches." We now see that the clergy don't mean to let the blasphemers have all the Bible fun to themselves. A bill lies before us announcing a discourse by the Rev. G. Robinson Lees, vicar of St. Andrew's, Lambeth, on "Adam's First Suit." Only males over eighteen were to be admitted to hear this address, so we suppose the preacher meant to sail pretty close to the wind. Mr. Foote's article had no such drawback.

Mr. Horatio Bottomley is writing smart paragraphs in the *London Sun* (an evening paper, in spite of its title) under the heading of "The World, the Flesh, and the Devil." One paragraph in a recent issue referred to some nonsense in the *Christian Budget*; not plain nonsense, but colored nonsense—hypocritical, blasphemous nonsense. Mr. Bottomley remarks that "Mr. Foote went to prison a few years ago, under the Blasphemy Acts, for the publication of matter much less 'indecent and contumelious.'" Of course this is a fashion of speech. Mr. Bottomley knows very well that there was nothing "indecent," in the common sense of the word, in Mr. Foote's "blasphemy." It was clean "blasphemy," anyhow. And, by the way, the "few years" are really eighteen. Mr. Foote was imprisoned in 1883. Whew! How the time flies! Even the much-experienced Mr. Horatio Bottomley was then a callow lad.

The Catholic *Universe*, one of the organs of the Great Lying Church, denies that men were burnt at Smithfield "for religion." It declares that they were burnt for "crimes against society." But how curious it was that every *criminal* burnt by the Catholics was a Protestant—unless he was a still worse heretic. Of course we cheerfully admit that the criminals burnt by the Protestants were Catholics. But two blacks do not make a white, and the persecutions of Protestantism do not justify the greater persecutions of Catholicism.

The Irish members of Parliament are demanding a Roman Catholic University for their country. This demand is, of course, instigated by the priesthood. It is rather strange, therefore, to see it supported to some extent by some Englishmen who should know better. We think the following comments by the *Daily Graphic* are most pertinent:—"This demand of the Irish priesthood is objectionable not only because it is unjust to the British taxpayer, but because it would be fatal to the best interests of Ireland. Every country in Europe has learnt that when education is controlled by a priesthood there is little chance of any scientific advance, and that even sound scholarship is less valued than orthodoxy upon obscure points of ecclesiastical doctrine. With the exception of Spain, every country in Europe has emancipated its universities from clerical control. Our own are no exception. Fifty years ago Oxford and Cambridge were almost a close preserve for the clergy of the Church of England, and in many respects they were an intellectual disgrace to the country. They maintained their reputation through their social prestige. In Ireland the doors of Trinity College have happily been thrown wide open, though the clergy of the Church of Ireland still possess certain privileges to which the Senior Fellows appear to cling. It is possibly in this fact that the secret of the support of certain Irish Unionists to the Nationalist demand is to be found. There is still a desire in some quarters to retain Trinity College as a bulwark of Protestantism, and possibly the men who have this desire would not be sorry to buy off the Roman Catholics at the expense of that patient milch cow, the British Exchequer. The purchase will also be effected at the cost of the Irish people, for two Universities, each run on theological and sectarian lines, will never give to Ireland that width of education which might be obtained from one University in which all creeds were represented."

Dr. Ingram, Dean of Peterborough, who died recently after a five months' illness, was first seized with paralysis during a special Advent service. There is no moral in this

from a Freethought point of view, except that Providence and paralysis are no respecters of persons—or places; but what pious morals would have been deduced from it by the religious journals if the blow had fallen upon a Secular lecturer in the midst of an "infidel" address.

Bailiffs levied a distraint on the Methodist New Connexion Church, Springfield-road, Blackpool, on account of the tithere charge. It was one of God's houses, but the Philistines had descended upon it and were prepared to carry off and sell, even for profane uses, whatever holy articles they could lay their hands upon up to the value marked in the distress warrant. Such fellows have no sense of religion in their souls. They would levy a distraint in heaven if they could only get there, and lug off the Lord's golden footstool to the auction-room.

How small a part of the map of the world is shown as Christian! This reflection was recently made by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the annual meeting of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. His lordship did not draw the natural inference that Jesus Christ was a very bad missionary. It certainly seems very odd on the face of it that Almighty Power, guided by infinite wisdom, should take nearly two thousand years to persuade the inhabitants of such a small part of the globe that the only true religion is true. And now that the missionary societies are lending a hand, with heaps of money and lots of men, the progress does not seem to be much accelerated. Mr. Cohen's pamphlet on *Foreign Missions* must be sad reading for candid Christians who want to know the truth.

Not only has Count Tolstoi been excommunicated; the Russian Government has actually forbidden the exhibition of his portrait at Moscow. It is pretty clear to us, at any rate, that Count Tolstoi would be settled in some way or other, if even the Russian Government were not afraid of the public opinion of the civilised world in his case.

An absurdly ignorant reference to the Biblical criticism of the late Mr. Bradlaugh appears in last week's issue of the *British Weekly*. It occurs in an article headed, "Mr. Hector Macpherson and the Higher Criticism." Mr. Macpherson is the writer of a number of sparkling leaderettes in the *Edinburgh Evening News*, in which both orthodox believers and the higher critics have come in for some rather biting observations. The *British Weekly* is probably right in describing Mr. Macpherson as "not even a believer in Christianity." But that gentleman is quite able to take care of himself. We do, however, protest against the following allusion of the *B. W.*: "The objections which made the stock-in-trade of lecturers like Mr. Bradlaugh thirty or forty years ago have practically ceased to be heard."

This is arrant nonsense. The objections which formed Mr. Bradlaugh's "stock-in-trade" are heard to-day with tenfold force. They were so comprehensive that they covered nearly all the ground of later Biblical criticism. Indeed, there is little doubt that they suggested most of it. If the *British Weekly* writer imagines—as it would seem—that Mr. Bradlaugh confined his "stock-in-trade" to the merely trivial errors of Holy Writ, he is stupidly mistaken. The slightest acquaintance with what Mr. Bradlaugh wrote and said would leave it apparent that he dealt with the Bible and Christianity on the broadest grounds. And the *British Weekly* itself to-day is hopelessly battling with fatal objections that Mr. Bradlaugh advanced.

The same statement is true of the *Age of Reason*. It presents proofs of errors in the Bible which modern believers are obliged to admit. But, what is of more importance, it goes beyond these into the very vitals of Christianity—the heart and life of the Christian faith as it is now accepted. And in that sense Paine is not out of date, nor is Bradlaugh. It is a miserable expedient on the part of modern Christians—who, as a matter of fact, owe so much to both of these pioneers—to suggest that neither ever travelled beyond the point at which these latter-day, self-styled believers have now arrived.

Says the *St. James's Gazette*: "Apropos of the episcopal changes in the metropolis, it is a humiliating confession to make, but it is the fact that he who presides over this diocese must be practically a bishop in *partibus Infidelium*. The churches and chapels of East London are attended by something like one per cent. only of the inhabitants."

Rev. Dr. Horton and some other "men of grace" have discoursed a great deal of late on the evils of betting and gambling. Their diatribes have lacked effectiveness from the fact that it was evident they knew little or nothing of what they were talking about. Hence the merciless chaff to which they have been subjected by some of the sporting papers, which, in moments of playfulness, have taken them in hand, and "wiped the floor" with them. Now they have a fair chance to leave the betting men and Monte Carlo

maniacs alone for a time, and look a little nearer home—in their own religious circles. A circular has been issued from the Welsh Congregational Church, Pontygwaith, Glamorgan-shire, sending for sale five books, containing sixty lottery tickets, price threepence each, numbered from 20,161 to 20,220, for a "Grand Prize Drawing," to take place at Soar Vestry, on October 18th next. There are to be forty-six prizes, including a cheque value £20, Ellicott's *Commentary on the New Testament*, and a pair of "trousers to measure." The prize drawing is stated to be under the patronage of five J.P.'s, one County Councillor, and three District Councillors, and an appeal signed by four of these gentlemen accompanies the circular. As it is all in the cause of religion, perhaps this lottery arrangement is sanctified, and exempt from pious rebuke.

In this connection, we may reproduce the following from the Church Evangelical weekly, the *News*: "We know, to our shame, that many churches have not hesitated to enrich themselves by the ill-gotten gains of rich men—money won over the gambling-table or on the racecourse. But in such cases the benefaction has been kept very quiet. It seems to be otherwise with the Church of St. Mary, Swaffham Prior, for the 'patrons of the Turf' are openly invited to contribute towards its restoration for this reason: 'The church was once a familiar object to all frequenters of the headquarters of the Turf. Its steeple was visible from the grand stand, exactly in the centre of the course where it turns through the Devil's Ditch at the Running Gap; but, since its wanton destruction in the early part of the last century, its truncated tower scarcely shows above the hill.'"

Can we wonder, asks the *News*, that the Turf journalist scoffs? "Who can say," writes one critic, "how much of an elevating suggestion has been lost to the occupants of the grand stand by their looking in vain through the Devil's Ditch for the tapering spire of St. Mary's?" The book-makers, too, might, when seeing it, have infused something of choral rapture into their worldly calling. The welshe *in posse*—not the *posse comitatus*, but the welshe about to welshe—might have paused (instead of leaving) before it was too late. Even American jockeys might have done better. It is well, therefore, that the "frequenters of the headquarters of the Turf" should be called upon to rebuild this sacred edifice. Cannot they arrange a benefit race? Or, failing that, a bazaar might do some good—and the risks of the raffle would make them feel at home.

The Presbyterian Church, in its annual report, laments once more a serious falling off in the number of Sunday-school scholars, the total reported being about three thousand fewer than two years ago. We are glad of it. Why should children on Sundays be caged up, especially in the summer-time, in schools where they are simply badgered and bewildered with pious nonsense, which must be an intolerable infliction after their week's confinement in day-schools, where at least they learn something that is useful?

Those fussy busybodies, the Lord's Day Observance Society, who are not content with observing the "Sun's Day" themselves, but must try to force other people to do so as well, have issued a tract of which they seem to be immensely proud. It is a warning addressed to Sunday cyclists, who are represented in an illustration as riding recklessly down a steep hill at the bottom of which is an abyss, which is probably meant for hell. There is a notice aboard: "To Cyclists—This hill is dangerous." The burden of the letter-press is indicated in the first sentence: "Sunday cycling leads to partial or total neglect of public worship and religious instruction." Well, suppose it does—whose loss is that? No one's loss, we should imagine, but the parson's. And that's just where the boot pinches with the bigots, who would have no place open except their Gospel shops, and no pastime engaged in except listening to their sanctimonious whines or reading their pious trash.

The tract mentions, with holy horror, that the police superintendent of a Thames-side town reports that on one particular Sunday no fewer than 20,000 cyclists passed through his district. That should be rather a subject of satisfaction than of regret. It means healthy exercise and a beneficial change of air and scene. Some Christians of the more rational sort condone Sunday cycling if accompanied in some part of the day by an attendance at "divine worship." But that does not suit the Lord's Day Observance Society. Oh, dear no; they must go the whole hog. They say in this tract: "Attendance at an 'early service,' followed by a day of amusement, does not comply with God's rule that the whole day shall be 'kept holy.'" Archbishop Benson was no 'Puritan,' but he pronounced this practice a 'ridiculous fashion' borrowed from France."

Certainly, it is a "ridiculous fashion" to bolster up the men of God, even to that extent, in their intolerable conceit. It has been said by Sabbatarians, in the way of retort, that Secular lecturers expect their adherents to attend Secular meetings on Sundays. But there is a vast difference between

the two cases. Secularists who attend these lectures or outdoor demonstrations do so willingly, and as a pure matter of choice. They are not hectoring and bullied into attendance, or threatened with eternal damnation if they stay away. They have no angry God who demands the whole day to be devoted to his service.

Wonderful is the inventiveness of many preachers of the Gospel in the way of story-telling when they want to enforce some religious moral. Rev. Edward W. Moore, of Emmanuel Church, Wimbledon, has been story-telling at the expense of unbelievers. He says that, on his late voyage to America, he had daily discussions with a Freethinker, and when he left him it was with the request that he should read certain chapters of the Bible. On the return passage he met the Freethinker again, and asked: "Have you read those chapters?" "No," he said, "I have not, but I tell you what I have done. I have gone through Ingersoll again."

This is the way the Rev. Moore tells the story. Perhaps, if we could hear the version of the Freethinker, the incident might present itself in a different light. No genuine Freethinker, we imagine, would think of rejecting the claims of the Bible without having first carefully studied the book itself, or would not turn to it again upon invitation or on his own volition. The great trouble with Christian apologists is that Freethinkers have too intimate an acquaintance with "Holy Writ." As to re-reading Ingersoll, that is easily understood. There are dazzling flashes of light in his writings by the side of which the bulk of the Bible "pales its ineffectual fire."

In support of the recent editorial notes in the *Church Times* on the declining birth-rate, a correspondent of that journal offers some comments on what he describes as "a national danger." This "national danger" arises, he says, from neglecting the first commandment with blessing—Genesis i. 28—"And God blessed them [that is, Adam and Eve]; and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply," etc. Now, whether one inclines to Malthusianism or not, is not the citation of this "commandment" as applicable to the conditions of to-day an almost incredible instance of pious imbecility?

The British and Foreign Bible Society are beginning to discover that the French Premier's Religious Associations' Bill may interfere with the work of its colporteurs in France. The Anglican High Church papers are now chuckling over this eleventh-hour discovery. One of them says: "It would be a curious Nemesis if Protestants should themselves be badly hit by the very measure which, in no small degree, owes its origin to the hostility they have helped to arouse against the Catholic Church in France."

The *Rock* says: "One often wonders whether the innumerable books of sermons that are published are read much." It would certainly be very wonderful if they are.

The Rev. Principal Forsyth, D.D., writes in the *British Weekly* on Dr. G. A. Smith's Yale Lecture. Incidentally he observes: "We all know how the Secularist lecturer has been disarmed by the new reading of the Old Testament, and how his victims (largely among the kind of person that is drawn to a good Bible-class) are fortified against him by proper views of the books of Moses in particular." This is a very cool sort of an assertion. Of course, a combatant is practically disarmed if his opponent gives up the fight and bolts from the field. The only effective "new reading" of the Old Testament and "proper view" of the books of Moses must be their abandonment as reliable history, and the admission that they are in no sense a revelation from God. If Principal Forsyth, and those who think with him, are prepared to go to this length, then, of course, the Freethought lecturer may consider himself disarmed. There is nothing more to fight over.

The richest divine in the world, if the Pope be excepted, is Dean Eugene A. Hoffman, of New York. He is at the head of the General Episcopal Theological Seminary in New York. He is reported to be worth about £5,000,000. One would like to know how he reconciles the possession of all this wealth with the teachings of Christ, and what he thinks of his chances of eternal salvation.

There recently died at Richmond, Va., a colored preacher named Jasper, who made a great stir several years ago by a sermon entitled "The Sun Do Move." The preacher of his funeral sermon classed Mr. Jasper among the great patriarchs and prophets, and argued in favor of his astronomical theories.

The Abbé Paul Guérin, a French priest, has been arrested at Chateauroux on charges of embezzlement, obtaining money on false pretences, and fraudulent bankruptcy. He is a member of the Upper Clergy, being a Pope's prelate and Apostolic protonotary. His embezzlements are said to amount to £160,000 or £200,000 sterling. He has lived at Chateauroux for the last twenty years. Before this he was for thirteen years professor of theology at a college.

The depravity of mankind increases, says the *Sunday Chronicle*. The schoolmaster at Stoke, near Rochester, actually played cricket one Sunday afternoon with a five-year-old boy. For ten minutes he indulged in this unholy exercise, and the School Board had to discuss a resolution expressing regret at his conduct. Will it be believed that a clergyman called it a trivial thing, and that the Board declined to pass the resolution? This is positively putting a premium on Sabbath desecration! It brings the continental Sunday appreciably nearer. If public bodies take this attitude towards offences of this awful nature, whatever will become of us?

The Free Church Council at Grays begged the local authorities to stop the band in the Park on Sundays during the hours of school and service—that is, from 2.30 to 3.30, and from 6.30 to 7.45. The cream of the joke was, as is pointed out by a "Lover of Music" in the *Grays Gazette*, that the Free Church Council "advertised cornet solos and brass bands in their own places of worship during these very prohibited hours." Evidently it was a trade dodge on the part of these soul-savers, and we are glad to note that the Grays Councillors saw the matter in this light. Anyhow, they said "No" to the Free Church petition.

Pete Cassidy, an inoffensive half-daft man, has been sent to gaol at Cincinnati. He went about barefooted, wore his hair long, practised vegetarianism, and called himself Christ. That was the whole of his crime. We shudder to think of what would be the fate in Christian America of the vagrant prophet who first called himself Christ in Palestine some nineteen hundred years ago. Instead of being martyred, he would now be sent to a penitentiary or a lunatic asylum.

Professor Goldwin Smith wrote in the *New York Sun* a few days ago: "Herbert Spencer recognises the Unknown as an object of reverence." Dr. Moncure D. Conway took exception to the statement, saying: "The reference may be some recent utterance of Herbert Spencer which I have not seen, and, if so, it would appear to be a retraction of his theory of the Unknowable. If he recognises it as an object worthy of reverence, it is no longer unknowable, nor can it with exactness be declared unknown. It must be known to possess qualities worthy of reverence, for to reverence an object without moral or intellectual qualities, an unconscious cosmic force, would be bowing to a stock or stone, however enormous its dimensions. I have always understood that Herbert Spencer repudiated all attempts to attach any moral or religious significance to the Unknowable. But I have never found any reason to subscribe to his generalisation, regarding it, indeed, as self-contradictory. For an Unknowable 'from which all things proceed' is known as the source of a universe, therefore, not strictly unknowable." Professor Smith replies that, while he has not the means of reference at hand, he cannot think himself mistaken. Another correspondent supports Professor Smith, and quotes Spencer, but does not help matters any. When Mr. Spencer first asserted the existence of the Unknowable as the source of all things, Stephen Pearl Andrews made the point that the Unknowable could not be unknown if we knew it existed, since its existence was the most important item of knowledge about anything.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Preaching on the Incarnation at St. Matthew's, Southsea, the Rev. Bruce Cornford remarked that "the scientific world was at last beginning to realise that natural law was not invariable." As the reverend gentleman is not himself the scientific world, it is a pity that he did not give his authority for this statement. In the absence of it, we venture to say that he is—well, mistaken.

This reverend gentleman also remarked that the only two persons who were witnesses of the great truth of the Incarnation were St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary. Had he said the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary, or Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, there would have been some plausibility in the observation. But Joseph! What on earth, or elsewhere, had Joseph to do with this matter? How was he a witness? What did he see? He only saw results. He knew nothing at first-hand of the cause. Certainly he might have been in a position to know that he was not himself the father of Jesus. But from the very nature of the case he could not possibly know who was. The only person who knew that was Mary. And the curious thing is that she held her tongue and said nothing. She let the mystery-mongers chatter; if, indeed, the miraculous birth of Jesus was ever talked of in her time—which seems very doubtful.

Mrs. Cackle: "The Rev. Mr. Longface said in his sermon that he was tempted to throw a few torpedoes among the sleeping members of his congregation." Mr. Cackle: "Why doesn't he throw a few into his sermon?"—*Ohio State Journal*.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, May 5, Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, London, W.; at 7.30, "Do Bishops Go to Heaven?"

May 12, Athenæum Hall, London.

To Correspondents.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS.—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.

LOUIS LEVINE.—Much obliged to you for the papers all the way from America.

G. THWAITES.—We handed your order to Miss Vance to be executed. Glad to see you are taking two dozen of the new *Age of Reason*. All the "saints" should do their utmost to disseminate this antidote to the Bible.

L. COLEMAN.—The whole outdoor list is now sent in to the *Freethinker* by the general secretary, Miss Vance. There is no need for the Branches to send in separate notices, unless it has been necessary to make a late alteration in the program.

ANACTHEUS (Glasgow).—Allowing for the story being a legend, why should not Eve have had daughters? It was not the Bible fashion to mention women without absolute necessity. They were an inferior sex, and the genealogies were always traced through men. Nor was anything gratuitous said about women. For instance, the Bible says how old Adam lived to be, but it does not state the age of Eve. She was only a woman.

D. FRANKEL.—The Camberwell assistant secretary had already sent us a paragraph on the subject. It is best to leave such notices to those who are directly responsible, though we appreciate your trouble and good intention.

S. B. JOHNSON.—You will see by the advertisement on page fifteen of this week's *Freethinker* that the Shares in the Free-thought Publishing Company are payable in easy instalments. It is impossible to make them easier.

C. DURRANT.—See paragraphs. Johnnie Kensit is to us one of the most comical figures of the present age. We agree with you that Freethinkers should try to destroy both parties, and that one means of doing this is the wide circulation of Paine's *Age of Reason*.

F. E. WILLIS.—Sorry to hear that Mr. Ward has had to encounter such saintly opposition at Birmingham. See "Sugar Plums."

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for your valued cuttings.

JAMES NEATE.—See "Sugar Plums." We hope Mr. Cohen will be well enough for his work in Victoria Park. He was anything but well when we saw him on Monday.

V. ROGER.—Thanks for the verses, but they are now eighteen months old, and they trench on ground which we think better avoided, at least in these columns.

JAMES GOULD.—We don't see anything in our line in the paper you send us.

JOHN SNEDDON.—It is not easy to advise you unless you are more definite. You do not say what special line of study you desire to follow. So many subjects are involved in the issues between Freethought and Christianity.

NORTHUMBRIAN.—The Glasgow friends will see to hotel or other accommodation for visitors to the N. S. S. Conference, if you give them fair notice of your coming. We shall print some particulars in our next issue.

W. D. NEVIN.—We did not think quite so highly of Grant Allen's powers as some of his friends and admirers did. But, of course, it is possible that we were mistaken. We never supposed that we were infallible, or anything like it. No doubt he did a certain service to Freethought in his way, but the appearance of his *Evolution of the Idea of God* was so late that it more or less echoed the voices of greater men, who had already attracted a considerable share of public attention.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Grays Gazette—Freidenker—Public Opinion (New York)—Blue Grass Blade—Truthseeker (New York)—Sydney Bulletin—People's Newspaper—Torch of Reason—Literary Guide—Portsmouth Evening News—Lucifer—Lancashire Daily Post—Crescent—Two Worlds—Secular Thought—Progressive Thinker—Sentinel—Free Society—La Raison—Boston Investigator—El Libre Pensamiento.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

MR. FOOTE had good audiences at Manchester on Sunday, in spite of the fine weather and some local attractions. As many persons were present who are rarely seen in the hall on other occasions, it was thought advisable to take a collection at each of the three meetings on behalf of the Branch funds, which need recruiting. The Manchester Branch keeps on steadily with its work in the face of many difficulties.

This evening (May 5) Mr. Foote lectures at the Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, London, W. His subject will be "Do Bishops Go to Heaven?"

Mr. Cohen's *Foreign Missions* is selling fairly well, but we should like to see it far more extensively circulated. It is an admirable statement of the case against the missionary societies, and contains a mass of valuable information that ought to be in the hands of all reformers. Unfortunately, the newspapers to which copies have been sent for review seem afraid to notice this trenchant impeachment. That is a reason why Freethinkers should try to promote its circulation.

Mr. Charles Watts will give three lectures in the Brunswick-street Hall, Glasgow, to-day, Sunday, May 5. No doubt he will have large audiences.

What used to be the *Labour Annual* is now published under the wider title of the *Reformer's Year Book*. It is edited by Mr. Joseph Edwards, of Wallasey, Cheshire, and published at the *Clarion* office, London. Orders can be sent also to the Freethought Publishing Company. The new number for 1901, just issued, is really an astonishing shilling'sworth. We say without the slightest hesitation, or reservation, that it ought to be in the hands of every advanced politician and social or religious reformer. It contains a vast mass of detailed information about all "advanced" societies and organisations; portraits of "advanced" men and women, including one of the editor of the *Freethinker*; page on page of most useful statistics; and last, but not least in point of utility, a Directory of hundreds of "advanced" people. Mr. Edwards must take a lot of pains to make this publication so complete and serviceable. We know it is a labor of love with him, but at the same time his enterprise should not entail a loss; on the contrary, it should pay him at least a living wage for the time he devotes to it. We earnestly hope, therefore, that many of our readers will purchase this *Year Book*. They will get their money's worth for certain—and more; and they will also encourage one of the most loyal soldiers of progress in England.

We often quote a bit from our valued contemporary, the New York *Truthseeker*, and we are glad to see that the compliment can be returned. Our recent article on "The Crucifixion Fable" is reproduced in the *Truthseeker* of April 20.

Editor Moore, of the *Blue Grass Blade*, Lexington, Kentucky, quotes our last paragraph about him, though he prints it a little inaccurately, and adds that he doesn't know when anything has been said about him that did him more good. He regrets, however, that we had to use a "but." Well, we are sorry that the "but" must stay. Editor Moore is really not perfect. Nor do we quite understand why he sets so high a value on some of the things that appear in his paper. We have read enough of him to know that he is capable of writing the English language (he can call it American if he likes) with force and propriety. Why then does he stoop, and let so many of his contributors stoop, to unlimited slang? A spice of it occasionally is all very well, but resorting to it frequently is like "emphatic" writing, in which half the words get printed in italics or small capitals, and the reader gets wearied to death. Emphasis is not strength, slang is not necessarily powerful, and loose grammar is not elegant wit.

The East London Branch holds a members' meeting and conversazione at the Stanley Temperance Bar, High-street, Stepney, to-day (May 5) at 3.30 in the afternoon. It is hoped there will be a good attendance.

The open-air lecturing for this year in Victoria Park begins

this afternoon (May 5) at 3.15, when Mr. C. Cohen will occupy the platform. The local saints should make a big rally on this occasion.

We are pleased to see that Mr. Yves Guyot will still continue the *Siecle*. A group of Republicans have provided the necessary financial support for the present. Whether this journalist be right or wrong, he is at least an honest individual voice. His paper aims at the truth, whether hitting it or not, and is not "a wall on which to advertise anything that will be paid for," like too many Parisian "organs."

Anti-clerical agitations are breaking out in most Catholic countries. For some time they have been familiar in France and Austria, but we now read of them in Spain and Portugal. In every case the Jesuits are the principal objects of hatred and attack. The popular instinct recognises them as the arch enemies of mental liberty and secular progress. They have made a science of reaction, and they have to be dealt with in some way or other by every civilised government.

Mr. Percy Ward is doing good service by lecturing in the open air at Birmingham. It is not surprising, though, that the more bigoted Christians hate this form of propaganda. On Friday evening, April 26, at the meeting at Nechells-green, there was great disorder. Orthodox rowdies made rushes for the platform and yelled hymns; and Mr. Ward, accompanied by Messrs. Partridge, Andrews, Barras, Willis, and other friends, had to be escorted for about a mile homewards by three uniformed policemen and a detective. It is to be hoped that the local "saints" will rally around this platform and uphold it against all opposition.

Freethinkers all over the country are again requested to bear in mind that the National Secular Society's Annual Conference will be held at Glasgow on Whit-Sunday. We hope there will be a splendid and representative gathering. Branches should now be appointing their delegates.

The Twentieth Century Edition of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* is universally admitted to be a wonderful sixpenny-worth. A thousand copies went off the first week of its publication, and the demand is still brisk. A good many Freethinkers are purchasing dozens or half-dozens for distribution amongst their friends and acquaintances. These are supplied at the rate of 4s. 6d. per dozen, and those who invest a few shillings in this way are doing excellent propagandist work. The *Age of Reason* is a splendid antidote to the Bible. Millions of copies of that "holy" volume are circulated every year; some of them sold, and others given away. Surely, then, it behoves Freethinkers to circulate as many copies as they can afford of Paine's immortal masterpiece. It ought to be easy enough to clear out the first issue of this new edition in a few months. Ten thousand copies have been printed, and another ten thousand should be wanted before the end of the year.

We beg to press the claims of the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, upon our readers' attention. Some fresh Shares are being taken up, but we venture to say that this enterprise deserves a much larger measure of support. There must be scores, hundreds, who would like to see the *Freethinker*, for instance, not only sustained but advanced in circulation and increased in usefulness. This cannot be done, however, without resources, and adequate resources too; and as there is no big capitalist behind this journal, it becomes the duty—yes, the *duty*—of the general body of Freethinkers to provide the necessary means. If all did what they could, according to their means, there would be no burden upon anyone in particular. Moreover, the Company might be made to pay if it had a sufficiency of working capital. A much greater volume of business could be done, and done easily, on the present basis of labor and expense; and this would allow of a larger margin of profit on the general turnover.

Many a Freethinker, who could not take several Shares in this Company at once, could take one or two in 1901, and the same number in 1902. Even one Share is of importance when many are co-operating. We ask "the rank and file," then, to bestir themselves in this matter. It is a poor Freethinker who will not do *something* for the cause, while the Christians are straining every nerve to succeed and raising money like the sand in a desert whirlwind.

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.

Shakespeare's Day.

BORN APRIL 23, 1564. DIED APRIL 23, 1616.

O lived the Master now to paint us Man,
That little twist of brain would ring a chime
Of whence it came and what it caused, to start
Thunders of laughter, clearing air and heart.

—GEORGE MEREDITH.

QUITE recently anyone who took a walk down the Strand might have seen in two shop windows two editions of Shakespeare's works. One was a copy of the rare first folio, and was priced at three hundred and twenty-five guineas. The other was a popular paper edition, which could be purchased for ninepence. Between the two there are, of course, all kinds of editions at all kinds of prices. The fact, however, that the work of one writer is simultaneously offered for sale at such diverse prices is a striking proof, if any were needed, of the predominant position which the poet occupies. The past few years especially have been rich in testimony to the hold which Shakespeare maintains over the hearts and minds of his countless readers.

But it is on the stage as well as off that the present generation must look in order properly to measure the extent of his sway. It used to be a reproach that in the theatrical world "Shakespeare spelt bankruptcy." The reproach has been removed. *Twelfth Night* has been attracting large audiences at Her Majesty's Theatre for some time past. Sir Henry Irving's production of *Coriolanus* is filling the Lyceum with delighted playgoers. Mr. Lewis Waller is touring with *Henry V.* For the thirteenth year in succession, Mr. Benson has opened his series of memorial performances in the theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, the so-called "Shakespeare Week" being one of the fixed festivals in the literary and dramatic calendar.

Stratford-on-Avon! Is there another town in the world to equal it for the attraction of one human memory? London is the birth-place of a large number of eminent men and women. But the memory of Shakespeare is the beginning and the end of the reputation of Stratford-on-Avon. There is nothing else seen or felt before or behind it.

In no quarter of the globe, since he was laid to his last sleep by the side of the peaceful river, has the name of the little town been mentioned without suggesting and meaning him. Many a populous city is proud of the smallest segment of a great man's glory. He was born there. That is a great thing to say. But quiet little Stratford-on-Avon can say far more than this. Shakespeare was not only born there. He returned to it at the zenith of his intellectual manhood. He spent his last days and died there. To Shakespeare Stratford owes its renown; from Shakespeare it derives the bulk of its prosperity. To visit the place is to tread with affectionate veneration in the footsteps of the poet. To write about Stratford is to write about Shakespeare. There are the paths that the "greatest Englishman" often trod. There stands the house in which he was born. There is the school in which he was taught. There is the cottage in which he wooed his sweetheart. There are the traces and relics of the mansion in which he died. There is the church that keeps his dust, so consecrated by the reverence of mankind—

That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

There he lies—who was once so great! No power of human thought ever rose higher or went further than the thought of Shakespeare. In his personality, no less than in the fathomless resources of his genius, he baffles all scrutiny, and stands for ever alone:—

Others abide our question; thou art free:
We ask, and ask; thou smilest and art still—
Out-topping knowledge.

Yet there he lies—the king who has reigned three hundred years. "The rest is silence." The thought of it makes the heart thrill with a strange and incommunicable awe. You cannot wish to speak when you are standing there.

The dim light, broken by the richly-stained windows, streams across the dusky chancel, filling the still, calm air with opal haze, and flooding the grey gravestones

with its mellow radiance. At intervals the rustle of the leaves is audible, in a sighing wind. What visions are these that suddenly fill the building? What royal faces of monarchs, proud with power or pallid with anguish! What sweet, imperial women, flushed with happy youth and love, or wide-eyed in tearless woe! What warriors, defiant of death! The mournful eyes of Hamlet; the wild countenance of Lear; sweet Cordelia, and bright-eyed Rosalind; the laughter-brimming eyes of Mercutio, and the mocking countenance of Iago. We watch fierce-eyed Hotspur and rash-brained Romeo, while Touchstone's bells come tinkling on the ear. We see the Roman dying in the arms of Egypt's beauteous queen. We perceive the murderous face of Macbeth, the swarthy features of Othello, Ariel with his harp, and Prospero with his wand. Here, there, everywhere—before, behind, around us, about us. The melancholy Jaques and the hoary Cardinal. Gentle Desdemona and light-hearted Miranda. Our eyes are dazzled. Here is no death, though the brain that conceived these immortals lies in eternal stillness. Though the Master Magician be but a handful of dust, he yet lives in the memory and affection of men—

Not of an age, but for all time.

MIMNERMUS.

The Billville Debate.

BRETHRIN' had a meetin'—jest as lively as could be;
Subject fer discussion: "Is Salvation Really Free?"
Fer the rival meetin' houses talked it out from dark to dawn,
That they'd save the Presbyterians, but—the Methodists wuz gone!

The Baptists said 'twuz sartin as the mornin' follered night
That they had the road ter glory an' wuz runnin' of it right;
An' the proud Episcopalians said the thing wuz plain as day
That they'd have ter take the gospel the Episcopalian way!

The Methodists wuz 'mong 'em an' holdin' ter their place,
An' stickin' ter their privilege of fallin' way from grace.
An' so they met together, jest as earnest as could be,
Ter settle that big question, "Is Salvation Really Free?"

They talked from dark ter day-time—they shouted out their views;

They made the pulpit trimble—ripped the railin' off the pews;
But they come ter no decision till a preacher says, says he:
"It's sartin in this neighborhood salvation's really free."

"I'll prove it! Come up, brethren, till you're all in hearin' reach;

Jest tell me whar's that salary you promised me to preach?
You've been feedin' on the Gospel till the souls of you are fat,
An' the preacher's coat is threadbare an' the wind howls through his hat.

"You listen to the sarmont, but the whole contented crowd,
When we take up a collection, are a-snorin' long and loud!
Can't hear the hymn we're singin'—the basket never see,
An' it's my onbiased jedgment that you've got salvation free!"

The Presbyterian preacher said he'd sign his name ter that;
The Baptists said 'twuz sartin that the brother had it pat!

The Episcopalians j'ined him thar: 'Twuz plain as plain could be

The people in that neighborhood had got salvation free!

—Atlanta Constitution.

Self-esteem.

"The universality of belief is efficient evidence of the truth of it."
—Christian assumption.

"I'm beautiful," each vain one lisps,
And gazes in her mirror gay.

"I grow more lovely every day.
Ah! How my photos praise me."
And her lovers also praise her.

"I have a God," each Christian sings,
"To glorify; to whom I pray
To grow more like him every day.
Thus I, his image, praise him."
And the godly priests too praise him.

"Women are angels come to earth";
"Fools will be angels in the skies."
Henceforward deem no statements lies
Where all agree. Doubt not their sanity;
Truth's now a multiple of vanity.

G. GUARDIABOSCO.

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

A Lecture by DR. ROBERT PARK.

V.—(Conclusion.)

WE are not Agnostic, however, that philosophers in all ages have busied their brains, and especially during the century just closed, to find an affirmative solution to the question; and that all their efforts have ended in failure—undisguised failure. For one of the first things which such a philosopher has to do is to reconcile the philosophical with the dogmatic concepts, and that, in our opinion, is not possible. For it would evidently be of no use to religion, as we know it, even if philosophy came to discern a God, be it personal or impersonal, if it could not be shown that it was the very God of the Hebrews—in other words, the orthodox dogmatic conception. The nearest approach which has been made to do this was made by that great man, philosopher, preacher, and theologian, Principal Caird, now dead. In his Gifford lectures (as I have pointed out in my lecture upon "Mind and Form," given before the Ruskin Society) he defines God "as a principle of all intelligence, an essential characteristic of a spiritual (that is, of course, a thinking feeling) nature, not a mere abstract self-identical unity, but a unity which realised itself, and could only realise itself, by going forth from itself and returning upon itself." Then, again, amplifying this, and referring to the inwardness and necessary immanence of God in nature, he said: "It was an idea which carried us wholly beyond the Deistic God; forced us to bring in an element altogether foreign to it—that, namely, of a God who was not an outside creator or designer, but an immanent spiritual presence, the inner life and thought of the world. Even in the inorganic world there was something which baffled us to conceive of as produced merely by an external creator; and, when we rose from nature to man, we were confronted with conditions which the deistic conception of God was wholly inadequate to meet." As I said in my lecture I say again: "An authoritative announcement like this marks an epoch and a revolution." We must all admire the great scope of such a philosophical conception; but, at the same time, we must realise the completeness with which it negatives the dogmatic conceptions, and so entirely shifts the centre of gravity, so to speak, in the moral world. It appears to us that this conception places the undivided responsibility for all the good and ill in the universe upon the "immanent presence"; and, although we fully realise the limitations of free will, we believe and teach that the "immanent presence" is impersonal and unmoral, and that man must be held responsible for his acts as a social unit, only taking heed to guides of experience and knowledge, and relying upon them rather than upon emotional impulses such as those that moved Saul when he went down to Askalon, and in cold blood slew thirty men.

Upon a review, then, of these three notions or conceptions of God, presented to you, for the most part, in the words of the Bible, or professed believers themselves, we judge them to be mutually exclusive and antagonistic; and, where not grounded upon a bogus authority, purely speculative in character. We are compelled to reject them all; and, when we are asked to believe in "God," we conceive we are entitled to ask what conception of "God" the speaker refers to; and when we have obtained this, we are in a position to give satisfactory reasons for unbelief or suspense of judgment. In especial regarding the conventional, the commonly inchoate idea of God, we can always say respectfully, but firmly, as Huxley wrote to Kingsley—viz.: "I cannot see one shadow or tittle of evidence that the great unknown underlying the phenomena of the universe stands to us in the relation of a father, loves and cares for us as Christians assert. On the contrary, the whole teaching of experience seems to me to show that, while the governance (if I may use the term) of the universe is rigorously just and substantially kind and beneficent, there is no more relation of affection between governor and governed than between me and the twelve judges."

I pass now to deal with the remaining subjects I have named in the title. And first as to life. The life of the individual consists in the healthful and harmonious reactions, of chemico-physical character, which proceed within the developing, or developed, body. Vegetative life is the outcome of these, and relational or social life is the outcome of reactions as betwixt the individual and the outer environment. Life is not anything separate or apart from a material substratum, and its duration, intensity, quantity, quality, are all dependent upon, and the outcome of, certain potentialities indwelling in the constituents of the germ and the sperm; and the manner in which these potentialities have been favored or disfavored in the struggle for existence, and the acquirements which the individual self adds to these potentialities. To begin with, life is vegetative, and it is only in the course of growth and evolution that it becomes animate, individual, and social. Moreover, whilst it endures it oscillates periodically round a polar centre termed the "healthy normal," frequently making eccentric divagations into the unhealthy abnormal, attracted thereto by innumerable conditions of the outer environment; and, finally, after a culmination at some uncertain age, a gradual devolution—the exact reverse, functionally, of its initial process—sets in; the material substratum becomes worn out and *unrenewable*, and so the life associated with it wanes gradually, and finally ceases. As I have told you from this platform before, and have written elsewhere, I regard life and death as comparative, and not absolute, terms. Death is simply cessation of life *in one form*. Life is simply emergence of energy from one form into another. No matter, therefore, is properly conceivable as being entirely or completely dead, and the proof of this is that matter is eternal. How this matter with allied energy, the potential of life, first came to pass from one form into another we simply cannot tell, *and no amount of belief in any conception of God can illumine our minds by a single ray*. All we know is, that in some way the light and warmth of the sun is a necessary condition thereof. What other conditions are requisite the mind of man has hitherto failed to conceive. Haeckel, however, in his recent work, entitled *The Riddle of the Universe* (p. 257), says: "We can affirm, with legitimate pride, that they have been substantially solved by modern biology and its theory of transformism; indeed, many of the phenomena of the organic world are now interpreted, on physical principles, as completely as the familiar physical phenomena of inorganic nature." We may therefore hope that the present century may yet see revealed the very heart of the mystery.

Now, with respect to *substance*; I feel that I had best quote, from the book just referred to, the pronouncement of the great biologist Haeckel, representing, as it does, the matured opinion of a great scientist's well-informed mind, and also, happily, the conclusions I have arrived at myself quite independently. He writes: "The two fundamental forms of substance are not dead, and only moved by extrinsic force. They are ponderable matter and ether, and are endowed with sensation and will (though, naturally, of the lowest grade); they experience an inclination for condensation, a dislike of strain; they strive after the one and struggle against the other."

Experience has never yet discovered for us a single immaterial substance, a single force which is not dependent upon matter, or a single form of energy which is not exerted by material movement, whether it be of mass, or of ether, or both. Even the most elaborate and perfect forms of energy that we know—the psychic life of the higher animals, the thought and reason of man—depend on material processes, or changes in the neuroplasm of the ganglionic cells; they are inconceivable apart from such modifications. The physiological hypothesis of a special, immaterial "soul-substance" is untenable.

Every shade of inclination, from complete indifference to the fiercest passion, is exemplified in the chemical relation of the various elements towards each other, just as we find in the psychology of man, and especially in the life of the sexes. This fundamental unity of affinity in the whole of nature, from the simplest chemical process to the most complicated love story, was recognised by the great Greek scientist Empedocles, in the fifth century before Christ, in his theory of the "love

and hatred of the elements." It receives empirical confirmation from the interesting progress of cellular psychology, the great significance of which we have only learned to appreciate within the last thirty years. On these phenomena we base our conviction that even the atom is not without a rudimentary form of sensation and will.

He goes on to say that our astonishing empirical discoveries in the province of electricity have enlarged our notions of ether, the existence of which, as a real element, has been known as such for the past twelve years. The path was opened for these discoveries by the researches of Heinrich Hertz, in 1888, and, alluding to his premature death, he writes: "Like the premature death of Spinoza, Raphael, Schubert, and many other great men, it is one of those brutal facts of human history which are *enough of themselves** to destroy the untenable myth of a 'wise providence' and an all-loving father in heaven."

Hertz and those who have followed conclude that the imponderable ether and ponderable forms of matter are, and have been, in eternal reciprocal dynamic reaction, and "that this interaction was, and is, the source of all the varied forms of energy. The sum-total of this energy in the universe remains constant, no matter what changes take place around us; it is eternal and infinite, like the matter on which it is inseparably dependent. The whole drama of nature consists in an alternation of movement and repose; yet the bodies at rest have an inalienable quantity of force just as truly as those that are in motion. It is in this movement that the potential energy of the one is converted into the kinetic (or actual) energy of the other.....The diminution of one involves the increase of the other; the total value remains unchanged in the universe."

Finally, not only the growth and nutrition of plants and animals, but even their functions of sensation and movement, their sense, action, and psychic life, depend upon the conversion of potential into kinetic energy, and *vice versa*. This supreme law dominates also those elaborate performances of the nervous system which we call, in the higher animals and man, "the action of the mind."

Goodness.

O THOU that cravest after good,
Why chain thy mind with priest-taught creed?
Were Nature wooed enough, she would
Yield balm for man's sublimest need.

Somewhere Perfection burns. Perchance
Remote from Fancy's boldest flight!
But better ride the distant stars
Than sleep content in priestcraft's night.

The speaking beauty of the flower,
The splendor of a sunset sky,
Can breathe more peace to human hearts
Than endless pulpit sophistry.

The wild wind whispers in our ears,
Great ocean sobs on countless shores,
Each cottage has its babbling child,
On every hand some voice implores

Man to lie still on Nature's breast,
And drink the milk of goodness in;
But Priestcraft tears him from her arms
And prates of foolery and sin,

Till, motherless, his orphaned heart
Hungers in hope round every lie,
And the slow poison crawls within
That dooms his better self to die,

And Nature shudders at the scene
Of sunshine swamped by awful night,
Though still her soft arms beckon those
Who fearlessly demand the light.

WALTER K. LEWIS, B.A.

"Your neighbor has just given me an old coat," said the tramp. "Can you give something?" "Yes," replied the clergyman. "I will go through the collection-box and find some buttons to match the coat."—*Philadelphia Record*.

* The italics are mine throughout.

Correspondence.

"GRAINS OF SALT."

THE BIBLE GOD.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Your correspondent, Mr. Drewell, refers to some of the objections to incidents in the old Testament which have often been urged both before and since the time of Francis William Newman and his *Phases of Faith* (1853).

1. Take the giving of the Law and its object. Israel, when set free from slavery and from the iron furnace of Egypt, was placed in relationship with God (Jehovah) as a nation, and national laws were given to them.

This code of laws was not a code of everlasting righteousness with a fully-revealed God. Christ declares the contrary. It was but a *partial* revelation to a people as yet unprepared for full light and truth. God was hidden behind the veil. It was not until the death of Christ that this veil was rent, and all God's attributes fully declared, and his ways justified.

The law of the Ten Commandments was a righteous law, but it did not produce righteousness, for Israel broke the law, and so man's innate sinfulness was brought out—a sinfulness which was not the work of his Creator, but the result of his own disobedience.

By the law was the *knowledge* (*epignosis*) of sin—a righteous command not to do acts which man well knew to be sinful, resulted in his adding *transgressions* to his past sins.

It was necessary for man to "know himself" if he would aspire to better things. And, without a full knowledge of self, there can be no enjoyment of that which alone can satisfy the heart of man with its sublime aspirations.

2. The destruction of the Canaanites. These seven nations had defiled themselves with nameless abominations, so that the land vomited out its inhabitants on account of their filth and their gross inhuman cruelties to their children. For four generations they gave way to degrading, bestial sins. Long-suffering patience and judgment, mingled with mercy, were of no avail. Had those seven nations been left to pollute God's earth in the same manner as Sodom and Gomorrah had previously done, how could humanity have progressed by "sociological evolution"? A monstrous breed would have spread far and wide, as in the days before the Flood.

The Dead Sea and its gloomy surroundings, the ruins of "the Giant Cities of Bashan," and the recently-explored sites in the land of Gath, bear unerring, though silent, testimony to the righteousness and wisdom of Jehovah's ways in judgment. Had God not interfered, the earth would once again have been filled with soul-destroying and spirit-degrading immorality, accompanied by open and unrestrained violence, as was the case in the days of Noah.

3. Moral evil. God was not the author of *moral* evil. The passage in Isaiah (xlv. 7) conveys no such imputation. To affirm that God created man as he *now* is, or the Canaanites, as they were in their day, is to libel one who is holy, righteous, and good. Libels and curses, like chickens, "come home to roost."

The Bible distinctly lays the charge of introducing *moral* evil to the creature, and not to the creator. God's ways of earthly government in the Old Testament were necessarily not a full and complete revelation of his nature and attributes. But now, since the Cross of Christ, righteousness and truth have been declared as well as grace and mercy, and these divine attributes will characterise God's ways when his present silence is broken and he once again intervenes in the affairs of men.

The Judge of all the earth will do right, and then none but those who misunderstand him, or who deliberately choose the evil and refuse the good, will ever call in question his righteous decrees.

J. J. B. COLES.

CHRIST AND THE SWORD.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR.—You publish a letter this week in your "Acid Drops," copied from the *Brighton Herald*, whose author ("a helpless worldling") wishes "to know how the fighting parsons and jingo Nonconformist ministers manage to explain away these words—viz., 'put up again thy sword into its place, for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword.'"

With your very kind permission, I will give him and others the information he seeks. He is much mistaken in thinking any well-informed Christian has any wish to explain these words away. By most teachers, instruction is given by proverbial sayings, which flatly contradict one another—thus: A young man is taught that "penny wise makes pounds foolish," and also that, "if he takes care of the pence, the pounds will take care of themselves." On the critical plan of "a helpless worldling," one or other of these proverbs must lead us wrong, while the fact is they both lead us right. Our common sense teaches us we are at one time to be guided by the first of these proverbs, and at another time by the second.

Christ sometimes taught by this well-known method of contradictory proverbs, leaving it to our own discretion to show when is the proper time for their use. Thus at one time he taught "They who take the sword shall perish by the sword," and at another "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." By contrasting both proverbs we learn that we should sometimes suffer evil rather than assert our just rights, and sometimes we are to try to vindicate our rights. As in worldly matters, so in religious, our discretion is to be employed if we are to come to right conclusions.

Permit me to add that all objections brought against Christ's recorded sayings might be as easily met as this. In fact, I only trouble you with this letter as the objection seemed to deserve an explanation; most objections I have heard seemed positively to be their own condemnation.

HENRY J. ALCOCK.

The Celibacy of Roman Catholic Priests.

ABSTRACT OF THE BIRTH OF TWENTY-SIX POPES.

Pope Hosius was the son of a sub-deacon named Stephen.
 Pope Boniface was the son of a priest named Jucundus.
 Pope Felix was the son of a priest named Felix.
 Pope Agapit was the son of a priest named Gordianus.
 Pope Deusdedit was the son of a priest named Jeconde.
 Pope Stephen I. (253) was the son of a priest named Jules.
 Pope Zozimus (417) was the son of a priest named Abraham.
 Pope Felix III. (483) was the son of a priest named Felix.
 Pope Domnus I. (676) was the son of a priest named Maurice.
 Pope Sisinnius (708) was the son of a priest named Jean.
 Pope Adrian III. (884) was the son of a priest named Benoit.
 Pope Formosus (891) was the son of a priest named Leon.
 Pope Stephen VI. (897) was the son of a priest named Jean and of a prostitute.
 Pope Landon (912) was the son of a priest named Anastasius.
 Pope Boniface VII. (973) was the son of a priest named Ferrutius and of a prostitute.
 Pope John XV. (986) was the son of a priest named Leon.
 Pope Sergius IV. (1009) was the son of a priest named Martin.
 Pope Theodore was the son of Theodore, Bishop of Jerusalem.
 Pope Sylvester was the son of Sylvester, Bishop of Rome. (Gratien, in his *Décret*, says, in parentheses, that it had been alleged that Sylvester was the son of Pope Hormisdas.)
 Pope Gelasius was the son of Bishop Valerius.
 Pope John X. (912) was the son of John, Bishop of Bologna.
 Pope Gregory XIV. (1590) was the son of Sfondrato, Archbishop of Amalfi.
 Pope John IX. (931) was the son of Sergius III. and the notorious Marozie, mistress of Duke Albert of Tuscany.
 Pope Benedict XII. (1334) was the incestuous son of John XXII. and his sister.
 Pope Eugenius IV. (1431) was the bastard of Gregory XII. and a Benedictine nun.
 Pope Alexander VI. (1491) was the incestuous son of Calixtus III. and his sister Joanna.

Priests tell us that there is a God somewhere who takes care of the people of this world, a God somewhere who watches over the widow and the orphan, a God somewhere who releases the slave, a God somewhere who visits the innocent man in prison, the same God that has allowed men during thousands of years to burn to ashes their fellow-men simply for loving that God. We have been taught that it is dangerous to reason upon these subjects, and that, of all crimes in the world, the greatest is to deny the existence of that God. Redden your hands in the blood of the young and innocent, steal the bread of the orphan, deceive, ruin, and desert the beautiful girl who has loved and trusted you; for all this you may be forgiven, for all this you can have the clear writ of that bankruptcy court of the gospel; but deny the existence of that God, and the tearful face of mercy becomes lurid with eternal hate; the gates of heaven are shut against you, and you, with an infinite curse ringing in your ears, commence your wanderings as an immortal vagrant, as a deathless convict, as an eternal outcast.—*Ingersoll*.

I say that the religion and the culture which demand riches and blazonry while vice and misery are at their side are, like painted harlots, hiding their debaucheries with rouge, and their shame with satin and spice. I say that the cant and affectation of piety and culture which lisp sentiment and chant hymns in drawing-rooms and chapels while flesh and blood are perishing in the streets, and while the souls of our sisters creep shuddering to hell—I say that this religion and this culture, these maudlin, sickening things, with their poems and sonatas, their chants and benedictions, are things false and vain, and nothing else but lies.—*Robert Blatchford*.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC

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

LONDON.

THE ATHENÆUM HALL (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Do Bishops Go to Heaven?"

CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7, Conversazione.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell-road): 7, Professor Earl Barnes, "The Control of Education by Women."

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, High-street): 11, Rev. Roberts, "Moral Functions of the State."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, W. J. Ramsey.

STATION-ROAD (Camberwell): 11.30, E. Pack.

PECKHAM RYE: 3.15, F. A. Davies.

BROCKWELL PARK: 3.15, E. Pack.

CLERKENWELL GREEN: 11.30, C. Cohen, "Christianity."

EDMONTON (corner of Angel-road): 7, W. Heaford, "The Difficulties of Faith."

FINSBURY PARK (near Band Stand): 3.30, W. Heaford, "Religion and Common Sense."

HAMMERSMITH BROADWAY: 7.30, R. P. Edwards, "Mark Twain's Greeting to the New Century."

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, R. P. Edwards, "The Natural History Museum and its Bearing on Christianity"; 3.30, R. P. Edwards, "Mark Twain's Greeting to the New Century"; 7, F. Davies, "Christianity and Common Sense."

MILE END WASTE: 11.30, W. Heaford, "Belief and Unbelief"; 7.15, "C. Cohen, "The Message of Secularism."

STRATFORD (The Grove): 7, A. B. Moss, "The Clergy and Christianity."

VICTORIA PARK: 3.15, C. Cohen, "Christianity."

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH: 11, the Bull Ring; 3, Camp Hill; 7, Assembly Rooms, Broad-street. Wednesday, Bull Ring at 8. Friday, Nechall's Green at 8. For particulars see Birmingham Daily Mail, May 4.

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school.

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): C. Watts—11.30, "Secular Value of Philosophy"; 2.30, "The Science of Life"; 6.30, "Will Christianity Survive the Twentieth Century?" Committee meeting at 1.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, F. J. Gould, "Mother-Earth: A Greek Myth."

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, Lecture or Impromptu Friendly Discussion.

PONTYPRIDD (City Restaurant): 6, A Meeting of the Pontypridd and District Secular Organising Committee.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, G. Berrisford, "Is a Knowledge of God Possible?"

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

STANLEY (Co-operative Hall): May 4, at 7.30, H. P. Ward, "Christian Ministers: What they Preach and What they Practise." May 5, at 3, H. P. Ward, "What is Secularism?"; at 7.30, "Is there a God?"

Lecturer's Engagements.

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

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