

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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## How I Fell Among Thieves.

ANOTHER generation has arisen since my prosecution and imprisonment for "blasphemy" in 1883. Young people who were then twelve years old are now adults of thirty. Even very small children have grown up to be men and women. Some of them, of course, have become Freethinkers, and, on learning of my misadventure with the Christians, it is natural that they should ask for the details. Unfortunately, the book entitled *Prisoner for Blasphemy*, in which I related the whole story, has been for many years out of print. Only a small number of the copies printed ever got into circulation, the greater part of the edition having been destroyed by fire at the warehouse. One result is that the inquiries made have only been answered—for nothing else was possible—in the briefest and baldest manner. Another result is that the matter is often misrepresented by ignorant or malicious Christians. I have, therefore, decided to write an abridged account, omitting points of temporary interest, and to publish it at the lowest possible price. Meanwhile I print in this week's *Freethinker* a succinct statement, which will serve the turn of those who want information, at least until the promised volume makes its appearance.

This journal was started in May, 1881. It was then a monthly, but its success soon justified its publication weekly. According to the manifesto I wrote for the first number, its object was to wage "relentless war against Superstition in general and the Christian Superstition in particular." To this end it would "do its best to employ the resources of Science, Scholarship, Philosophy, and Ethics against the claims of the Bible as a Divine Revelation," and it "would not scruple to employ for the same purpose any weapons of ridicule or sarcasm that might be borrowed from the armory of Common Sense."

It was the last part of this program that brought me into trouble. I was disgusted at the infamous treatment of Mr. Bradlaugh by the bigots, and I felt the lash was wanted on the backs of the hypocrites. For there was really no sincerity in the crusade against the great Iconoclast. It was mean, cowardly, and contemptible. And as the Bible was dragged into the struggle I resolved to "go" for it without fear of consequences. The services of an artist were secured and Comic Bible Sketches were introduced. "We shall be greeted," I said, "with shrieks of pious wrath, but we are not easily frightened." I was not mistaken as to the shrieks. Evangelist Varley issued a circular to members of the House of Commons, calling on them to "devise means to stay this hideous prostitution of the liberty of the Press." Presently a question was asked in the House by Mr. Freshfield, the member for Dover. Sir William Harcourt, the then Home Secretary, deprecated the idea of a public prosecution. Subsequently another question was raised by Mr. Redmond. Early in July, 1882, I was summoned at the instance of Sir Henry Tyler. Mr. Ramsey was also summoned as publisher, and Mr. Bradlaugh was soon afterwards included in the prosecution. We had to appear at the Mansion House to answer a charge of Blasphemy, and we were duly committed for trial. No less than ten numbers of the *Freethinker* were brought into the indictment, the letter-press being proceeded against as well as the pictures. It was alleged that we had published certain

Blasphemous Libels "to the great displeasure of Almighty God, to the scandal of the Christian religion and the Holy Bible or Scriptures, and against the peace of our Lady the Queen, her crown and dignity." Ridiculous jargon! But quite worthy of the prosecution.

Mr. Bradlaugh succeeded in getting our indictment removed by writ of certiorari to the Court of Queen's Bench. The case went into the list and did not come on for trial until the following April. By that time I was in prison on another indictment.

I was urged to modify the policy of the *Freethinker*. I replied that the idea could not be entertained at that point. My blood was up, and I meant fighting to a finish. What I might yield to persuasion I would never yield to threats. Nor was it the tradition of Freethought to give way in face of the enemy. I kept the paper on the old lines. If there was any difference it was "for the worse." The Christmas Number, published on December 7, 1882, was full of "blasphemy" from title to imprint. For this I was summoned again. Mr. Ramsey was summoned too. They even included Mr. Kemp, the poor young shopman. This was on January 29, 1883.

Mr. Wheeler stood loyally by me in that extremity. For my own part, I said: "I never meant to give in, and I never will so long as my strength serves for the fight. Whoever else yields, I will submit to nothing but physical compulsion." "I pledge myself," I added, "to keep this Freethought flag flying at every hazard, and if I am temporarily disabled I pledge myself to unfurl it again, and, if need be, again and again."

I tried to get the second indictment removed from the Old Bailey to the Court of Queen's Bench, but the writ of certiorari was refused me in the most peremptory, and even insolent, manner by Baron Huddleston and Mr. Justice North. I had travelled up all night from Plymouth, after three lectures, to make the application. The rest of the day I spent in making such hurried preparations as were possible. I sat far into the night making notes for my defence. Finally I went to bed, slept like a top, got up early, ate a good breakfast, walked down to the Old Bailey, stepped into the dock, and bade farewell to my freedom.

Judge North would not postpone our trial until the next sessions. He had only refused the writ of certiorari the day before, but he said that was quite long enough for the preparation of our defence. What he meant was that the sooner we were in prison the better. Also that he had come down for the express purpose of sending us there. He played the part of prosecuting counsel throughout. His conduct was a disgrace to the Bench. Others felt this as well as I did, for he was shifted immediately into the Chancery Division, and was never permitted to try a prisoner again. He was a Roman Catholic, and he acted like an Inquisitor. But the jury would not yield to his blandishments, or to those of his friend, the nominal counsel for the prosecution, Sir Harding Giffard—now Lord Halsbury. They could not agree upon a verdict, and were discharged. Then the Roman Catholic Judge showed all his spite. "Blasphemy" is only a misdemeanor, but he refused to renew our bail. He kept us under lock and key. He even prolonged the sessions in order that he might have the pleasure of settling our case himself. On the following Monday morning we stood again in the Old Bailey dock, in face of a malignant judge and a packed jury. I knew my fate was sealed, so I defied Mr. Justice North, ignored the jury, and made a speech for my cause and my party. The day was drawing to a

close when the verdict of Guilty was returned. Judge North looked at me venomously, and I smiled back my scornful answer. He said he was sorry to see a man gifted by God with such great ability prostituting his talents to the service of the Devil. On that ground of religious bigotry he sentenced me to twelve months' imprisonment. Directly the words were out of his mouth the gallery was in an uproar, and the police had to clear it. Raising my hand, I gained a moment's silence; then, with a derisive smile and a mock bow, I said to the bigot on the bench: "*Thank you, my lord; the sentence is worthy of your creed.*"

People thought we were going to be treated as first-class misdemeanants, like other press offenders, but Judge North had ordered differently. Considering the circumstances, my sentence was the heaviest ever passed upon an "infidel" under the Blasphemy Laws. For twelve months I was locked up in a prison cell—really an ill-lighted brick vault, twelve feet by six—twenty-three hours out of every twenty-four. For the first three months the only book I had to read was a Bible—of which I was paying the penalty of knowing too much already. I wore prison clothes. I lived on prison food. It did not agree with me. My weight at first was a healthy one for my height and build—something over twelve stone. It was a little over ten stone at the finish. I was entitled to receive a visitor once in three months in the prison cage. I could also write a letter once in three months. It had to be written on a small piece of regulation paper, and to be read by the Governor before it was posted to its destination. I slept upon a plank-bed on the floor, covered with a thin fibre mattress. In these conditions I existed for a whole year. Day after day dragged along its weary length. I was dead to the world except in thought. Once a day, for an hour, I had an opportunity of seeing the sun, if it happened to be visible from the yard of a London prison. I never saw the stars. I never felt the soothing and consoling majesty of the heavens at night. When the gas was turned out at half-past eight I stretched myself out on my plank bed, and pictured imaginary scenes outside the prison walls, and thought of my friends, and of one still dearer; and wondered—for constant solitude brings that weakness—whether they were thinking of me. The darkness was intense, the silence was oppressive, and I sometimes fancied myself—like De Quincey in one of his opium dreams—buried alive in the centre of a mighty pyramid. My cell was my coffin, and above it towered the colossal tomb in which I was doomed to a death-in-life for ever. But the "miracle of dawn" always came round again, and the daylight brought sanity, and strength, and resolution.

In April my prison life was varied by a visit to the Law Courts in the Strand. The first indictment came up then for trial. Mr. Bradlaugh succeeded, as he was entitled to, in getting his own case taken separately; and I had the pleasure of going into the witness-box and testifying that he never had any connection with the *Freethinker*. His defence was, of course, a technical one, and the jury returned a verdict of Not Guilty. My own trial came on a few days later. Lord Coleridge gave me every opportunity he could for the preparation of my defence. He was shocked to learn what kind of sentence Judge North had inflicted upon me. Had the jury found me Guilty before him, he would have made my sentence concurrent with Judge North's, and shifted me to the civil side of the prison, where I could have passed a more human life. But for the sake of the future of our movement I did my best to bring the jury to a disagreement—which was all that could be hoped. In that I succeeded. Lord Coleridge was good enough to call my defence a "very striking and able one," and, with that compliment in my ears, I went back to Holloway Prison to serve the remainder of my sentence. Not a day was spared me. Sir William Harcourt was not to be moved by a memorial for my release, signed by a host of eminent men, including Mr. Herbert Spencer and Professor Huxley. It was understood that Mr. Gladstone was dead against any mercy to the "blasphemer." He forgot that Jesus Christ was accused of the same crime. But, on the whole, I am glad that I accepted no favor at such hands.

G. W. FOOTE.

## Dreams and a Future Life.

ALTHOUGH I have no sporting proclivities in my nature, the *Referee* has in me a regular and an attentive reader. "Our Handbook" is a feature in its pages which is well worth careful study. Its writer, "Merlin," is, as a rule, master of the subjects upon which he writes, and he treats them with an ability and a perspicuity rarely found among the contributors to our newspapers. It was, therefore, the more surprising to me to discover in his two recent articles, "About Dreams," a lack of his usual precision of thought and statement. For instance, the references to Materialism and Thomas Paine (not "Tom" Paine, if you please, "Merlin") are not, in my judgment, either accurate or fair, and neither are his comments on dreams clear, while the conclusions he draws from the partial exercise of the mind during sleep are not, in our opinion, legitimate. The present writer sent a letter last week to the *Referee* correcting some of the errors into which "Merlin" had fallen, but the editor refused to insert it.

It would be interesting to know what "Merlin" means by the "blind Materialism of the early days of the Victorian era." In what sense is Materialism more "blind" than its antithesis, immaterialism? A Materialist is one who regards the phenomena of life and mind as reducible to a physical basis—force and matter. He rejects all so-called spiritual or supernatural explanations of phenomena. The truth of this position "Merlin" admits, for he says:—

"We may take it for granted, as having been proved, that our only sources of information from the outer world are to be found in the five senses, and that they are influenced solely by the vibrations which it is their function to carry to the brain. This is as purely materialistic a conception as can possibly be imagined, and yet it may be found quite adequately to account for many happenings of an apparently occult description. *For we are learning more and more clearly that we have hitherto absurdly underrated the astounding delicacy of those physical organs on which the mind relies for its daily and hourly pabulum.*"

Is not this Materialism in its truest sense? Yet the writer says: "The world is awfully of those iron fetters of Materialism in which it has been confined for something like half a century, and is eager to break away from them. The fetters were forged by science, and science is now having a hand in their breaking." Perhaps in some future contribution to "Our Handbook" evidence will be forthcoming as to what those "iron fetters" are and wherein science is "having a hand in their breaking." The lament of the Churches is that the present is a materialistic age, and the science has yet to be named that has not Materialism for its basis.

According to "Merlin,"

"No popular doubt as to the eternal continuance of personal life was manifested in Europe until about a century and a-half ago, when Voltaire was beginning to be recognised as an enduring influence. Two hundred years back Master Arouet was seven years of age, but Voltaire was nearing three-score before his doctrines began to strike home to the terror of the faithful. His very name was already a fear in England when Tom Paine was a schoolboy, but the latter carried on the oriflamme of despair in *The Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason*. The two great controversial writers produced between them pretty much the effect the Lyddite shells of our modern artillery are said to have produced among the Boers at the beginning of the South African campaign—they terrified, that is to say, until such time as it was discovered that they did little actual mischief."

This misrepresentation of Paine is not creditable to the intelligence of "Merlin." Paine was a firm believer in God and a future life. The effect which his two books produced is still visible both in the political and religious world. So far as the Government of this country is really national and progressive it is based upon the principles of *The Rights of Man*, which, ever since its first appearance, has been the text-book of all real political reformers. As to the *Age of Reason*, it is impossible to calculate the "mischief" it did to popular theology. It shook orthodoxy to its very foundation, and dealt a blow at the Church from which it has never recovered. The "Higher Criticism" of which so much has been heard of late is nothing more than a fashionable edition of the *Age of Reason*, a book which has

done more than all others to expose and destroy the absurdities of the Bible. The "mischief" this work of Paine's did is still continued, for the demand for the book is as great as ever. Thousands upon thousands of copies have been sold, and the cheap complete edition just issued at the price of sixpence by the Free-thought Publishing Company is now selling rapidly. So much for the allegation that materialistic tendencies are declining.

When "Merlin" writes of dreams and immortality he seems to be sorely perplexed, and his conclusions are very doubtful. If he would read Thomas Paine's *Essay on Dreams*, he would, perhaps, be convinced of the absurdity of placing any reliance upon them. Dreams are but thoughts or ideas caused by the exercise of great faculties of the mind are imagination, judgment, and memory. Were these at absolute rest, there would be no dreaming. Imagination seldom sleeps, but judgment and memory do, either partially or entirely. Hence dreams are clear or confused, according to the state of the faculties named. This fact possibly induced Byron to exclaim: "I had a dream, which was not all a dream." No doubt "Merlin" is right in saying: "We may safely assume, then, that dreams occur only under conditions of more or less partial consciousness, and we may agree that they are never presented to the mind whilst the body is in deep slumber." He also admits: "No belief in supernaturalism is necessary for the acceptance of the occasional truth of dreams." Yet, in speaking of the hope of immortality, he writes: "If we can once believe that we can hold communion with the dead, our fears of annihilation are over. If we can but believe that dreams are occasionally inspired by supernormal conditions, we have at least made a step towards a sense of security." A sense of security of what? Immortality? But where is the connection between dreaming and living for ever? Besides, what have dreams to do with holding communion with the dead? Moreover, it is admitted that dreams are natural. But, even if they were not, they do not support the hope of a future life, inasmuch as what occurs during sleep takes place in connection with the body during life. That affords no reason for supposing consciousness can obtain when there are no organs through which it can be manifested.

Upon the "value of evidence" "Merlin" has some extraordinary views. Referring to the non-fulfilment of some dreams, he says:—

"There is, of course, no doubt whatever that a great number of the stories told are in part pure invention, in part doctored after the event, and only in a very small proportion true. But this will not be found seriously to affect the position I am now striving to establish. If, out of the uncounted myriads of those instances of the coincidence of dream with fact, with which the world has, at one time or another, been made familiar, only one were found worthy of acceptance, the case for the defence would be triumphantly established."

Now, the difficulty here is, what is the position "Merlin" is "striving to establish"? That is by no means clear. Is it that dreams take place? No one will deny that. Is it the belief that they are the result of supernatural interposition? "Merlin" admits that such a belief is not necessary to account for them. Is it that, because a person dreams while he is alive, he will therefore be conscious when he is dead? That is purely an assumption without the shadow of evidence. No doubt some dreams "come true," but others do not; what, however, does that prove? Not that dreams can be relied upon as the recognition of facts, but only that during sleep the person has been partially thinking. It may happen to be accurate or inaccurate, just as it may be with thought during wakeful hours. If it be granted that the "coincidence of dreams with fact" can be established, what, in "Merlin's" opinion, does it prove? This he does not inform his readers.

His statement, that it is both the body and soul that dream, suggests a few pertinent questions. What does he mean by the term "soul"? Is it an entity capable of acting independently of the body? Does it control the physical organs? Is it subject to the same laws as govern the body? If yes, are we not justified in supposing that it will decay with the body? If no, what is the nature of the laws by which it is controlled?

Does the soul sleep with the body? If so, wherein does it differ from the material organisation? These questions should be answered before we consider the hope of a future life to be more than a dream. A Secularist may truly say: For my part,

I talk of dreams,  
Which are the children of an idle brain,  
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy.

CHARLES WATTS.

P.S.—Mr. Watts's promised article upon "Secularism and Social Remedies" will appear in our next issue.

### Atheism and its Critics.—I.

It may be well questioned if there is in the English language another word that conveys to the average individual so much that is objectionable as the word "Atheist." Unbeliever, Heretic, Infidel, all have certain saving shades of meaning about them that render them at least tolerable. Even "Agnostic"—thanks to the semi-religious meaning given to the term by many who describe themselves as such—may be used nowadays without any grave offence. For Atheism alone there is no quarter, no diminution of the dislike in which it is held. It is the one unpardonable sin, if not against the Holy Ghost, at least against the Mrs. Grundy of modern religious respectability, who exerts far more real influence than is wielded by the three members of the Trinity lumped together.

Why is this? Well, largely, I believe, because of the very feature that constitutes its chief recommendation to robust thinkers. The word has the advantage of being clean-cut, definite, and, if we exclude for the moment certain stereotyped misrepresentations to be dealt with presently, stands in no need of further elucidation. With the other words named there is always a certain haziness of meaning, which is as dear, apparently, to the average Englishman as are his native fogs. "We are all unbelievers, or sceptics, or Secularists, or Agnostics, to a certain extent," cries the "tricky" religionist, anxious to minimise the strength of an attack he is powerless to ward off by fair fighting, and on this ground some terms of peace are arranged. None of them ever say the same thing of Atheism. With that there is war to the knife; there is no compromise, no half-way house, no room for half-way measures; and for this reason, if for none other, it is denounced by religious leaders as the very quintessence of human iniquity.

Still rather more than this is necessary to explain the popular dislike to the word, and the popular impression—now, happily, somewhat less prevalent than of old—that there is a necessary connection between Atheism and mental and moral delinquency. Partly, as I have pointed out, the belief survives because it is industriously strengthened by a class whose interests lie in that direction. But the clergy need some starting-ground, and this is supplied by the primitive conception that the disbeliever in the gods is a direct enemy to the welfare of the tribe. In the tribal stage of morality individual responsibility has but a limited existence; the tribe, as a whole, is responsible for the actions of its members, and the same reasoning that leads to a general vendetta being declared against a whole tribe because of an injury inflicted by one individual gives rise also to the belief that the gods will pursue the same policy of vengeance for slights offered or service omitted. It is unquestionably upon this deeply-rooted instinct that the feeling we are dealing with rests, and its perpetuation has been secured by the constant endeavors of the clergy and others anxious to check the growth of unbelief by directing attention to its supposed unpleasant consequences.

Not the clergy only, but many other writers from whom different things might have been expected, have, from time to time, written as though Atheism and low or loose living were, at bottom, synonymous terms. Even Spinoza, whose system of philosophy might be made to constitute a scientific Atheism by a mere change of terms, repudiates Atheism because he has identified it with those ideals of life which are the satisfaction of the lower and more vulgar appetites. It is,

of course, impossible to conceive Spinoza knowingly libelling any class of people; but when one of his disposition and intellectual strength can give voice to a prejudice of this description there is small wonder to find the same belief flourishing with others.

It is more disheartening, perhaps, to find the religious conception of Atheists and Atheism bolstered up indirectly by a certain section of "advanced" thinkers, who go out of their way to dissociate themselves from those who bear this objectionable title. I have no objection whatever to the man who prefers the title, say, of Agnostic to that of Atheist, using it; each has the right to avow what opinions he chooses, and to give them the name that to him describes them best. But I must confess to feeling a trifle suspicious with that class of Freethinkers who go out of their way to indignantly repudiate the association of their own superior selves with "vulgar Atheism"—particularly as one often fails to find any vital difference between their own opinions and the opinions of those whom they repudiate. One begins to suspect that at bottom of this repudiation there lurks a fear of the "respectabilities," not at all creditable to the robustness of their thinking. And, after all, the Agnostic is only treated more leniently by the religious world because there is a more objectionable form of heresy to be dealt with. When Deism represented advanced heresy, all the charges now brought against Atheists were then brought against Deists; when heresy grew stronger, and Atheism became more prevalent, Christianity having meanwhile taken up the deserted Deistical position, the charges and villifications were simply transferred *en bloc*; and one can safely assume that were Atheism out of the way Agnosticism would hardly be as well received as it is at present, with Atheism to bear the brunt of the attack.

For the rest, it ought to be a matter of plain common sense that the open advocacy of an advanced opinion can hardly serve as a cloak or an excuse for moral turpitude. It must require an individual of more than average stupidity to argue that a person gives up the belief in a God because he wishes to do wrong with comfort. Anyone may pretend to another that he either does or does not believe, but how, in the name of all that is sensible, can he *pretend* to himself? A man does not *give up* a belief; it gives him up. He can no more say "I will give up believing in a God in order that I may pick my neighbor's pocket," than he can say "I will not believe that there is such a thing as a policeman in the town, because if I did it would stand in the way of my committing a burglary." Psychologically the statement is absurd; and historically it is more than absurd, since there is no plainer fact in life than that, given a man with marked criminal tendencies, and his religion will not only stand in the way, but will often furnish the occasion, of their expression.

And if it is absurd to imagine a man thus deceiving himself, the folly of supposing a profession of Atheism to be a cloak for deceiving others is still greater. Intellectual error there may be in any profession of opinion, but it may be laid down as a statement true of all cases that wherever an unpopular, and consequently unprofitable, opinion is avowed there is present in the very avowal a guarantee of honesty and sincerity that the world cannot well afford to lose. The mere throwing down the gauntlet to popular passion and prejudice, the defiance of the power of vested interests and of social ostracism, is a guarantee of honesty, if not of accuracy; and when, in addition, there can be seen the growing spectacle of men and women adopting Atheism as the result of careful study and reflection, there is strong evidence of the presence of a strength of mind and sincerity of character that ought not to be received with a sneer, and which cannot be crushed with a malediction.

I have spoken above of certain misrepresentations (conscious or unconscious) of Atheism, and it may be as well to deal with one or two of the commonest of these before going further into the subject. I do not intend to discuss all the clerical misrepresentations that are offered for public consumption; it will be enough to take a couple of typical cases—Mr. Herbert Spencer and the late Professor Huxley, both of whom have rendered incalculable services to the cause of progress; services which I hasten to emphasize, lest my criticism

should appear to belittle the obligations under which they have placed the present and succeeding generations. Apart from the service rendered by Mr. Spencer to the current theology by the introduction of his famous "Unknowable"—as strange a mental lapse as was ever made by a profound thinker—a further help was given by his destruction of an Atheism that was purely the creature of his own imagination. Respecting the origin of the universe, he tells us, we may frame three "intelligible suppositions"\* (neither of which, on his own showing, is intelligible). We may assert that it is self-existent; that it is self-created, or that it is created by an external agency. All three propositions are shown on analysis to be inconceivable; but what is remarkable about the performance is that Atheism is identified with the first. Mr. Spencer must have been strangely unacquainted with the general trend of Atheistic thought, ancient and modern, not to have known that the "origin of the universe" is precisely one of those questions on which Atheism has not alone been silent, but has also insisted that all attempts to answer such a question must result in a meaningless string of empty words. To the Atheist the universe (= the sum-total of phenomenal existence) is a fact, and one that no amount of reasoning can get behind or beyond. To even think of the universe as a whole is an impossibility, and to talk of its origin is to assume, first, that it did originate—which in itself is a pure assumption—and, secondly, that we have the means of transcending all the known limitations of the human mind. The Atheist can say, and has said, with Mr. Spencer himself, whose final statement of Agnosticism differs in no material aspect from Atheism, that, in discussing such a question as the origin of the universe, "we do but multiply impossibilities of thought by every attempt we make to explain its existence." No one has pointed out more clearly than Mr. Spencer that "Infinity" is not a conception, but the negation of a conception; the pity is that he did not recognise that, for the last century and a half at least, psychological Atheism has proceeded along exactly this line by way of demolishing the theistic theory. What does come within the possibilities of human intelligence is to mark and understand some of the ceaseless changes always going on around us; to observe their inter-relation, their bearing on human welfare, and our capacity for so modifying their action as to promote a fuller measure of human life. Further than that our knowledge does not, and cannot, go; and we may add that, if we could get beyond the world of phenomena, our doing so could not be of the slightest possible value.

And as it is not true that Atheism attempts to "explain" the origin of the universe, so, in the light of any rational understanding of Atheism, it is unjust to tie it down to any particular theory of cosmic evolution. All Atheists are, I take it, evolutionists; but if evolution were dismissed to-morrow as an exploded fallacy, Atheism, as a mental attitude or disposition, would remain where it was. Atheism exists, as we shall see later, both historically and individually, as the negation of Theism, and its justification has to be ultimately sought in the untenability of the latter form of thought.

Rightly enough it may be urged that the acceptance of the Atheistic position logically involves certain general attitudes towards cosmic and social questions; but the Atheist is no more tied to any special scientific theory than he is committed to the support of a particular form of government. It is, doubtless, convenient for the Theist to first identify his opponent with special social or scientific beliefs, and then demolish those beliefs, in full confidence that he is destroying Atheism; but it is none the less fighting on a false issue. All that Atheism necessarily involves is that all forms of Theism are logically untenable, and consequently the only genuine method of destroying it is to establish its opposite.

With Professor Huxley's deliverances on the subject I hope to deal in my next article. C. COHEN.

What is a philosopher? It is a man who opposes nature to the law, reason to custom, his conscience to opinion, and his judgment to error.—*Chamfort*.

\* *First Principles*, p. 30.

## Pulpit Performances.

It has recently been estimated that about a million and a half of sermons are preached during one year in the churches of the English Establishment. This calculation is based on the average of two sermons being delivered each Sunday in 15,000 parish churches. Much more than another million and a half must be added as the contribution of the Roman Catholic and Dissenting conventicles. Then we have still to estimate the number of sermons preached on the Continent, in America, in our colonies, and, in fact, in all parts of Christendom and the mission fields by Roman Catholics, Protestant and other preachers. The total output of sermons is, therefore, enormous. What are the results?

Either the inhabitants of Christendom must be—from a pious point of view—"desperately wicked" or stolidly indifferent; or, from a common-sense standpoint, the bulk of the vast host of Christian preachers must be culpably inefficient, or the doctrines they preach must be radically wrong and unacceptable, or devoid of vitalising power. Many of these millions of sermons are filled with supine lamentations over the indifference of the age. Many more are full of apprehensions of what may reasonably be expected from the inroads of advanced and rationalistic ideas. Sometimes the preachers seem to be in despair; at others they are inflated with a zealous hopefulness; which, again, is often succeeded by disappointment and chagrin.

Yet these preachers boast that their work has the "Divine blessing"; that the Lord is looking down upon them with an encouraging and all-seeing eye, and is anxiously watching and weighing the fruits of their labors. This ought to inspire them with matchless eloquence and power—at least, so a believer might think. But in the vast majority of instances it doesn't. In the Anglican Church sermons have long since ceased to hold their old-time place and influence. For one thing—if we except three or four, at the most half a dozen, popular clerics—there are now no preachers of really striking ability. The Church, and to some extent Dissent, has sadly degenerated in this respect from earlier and historic days. What are the sermons like in the majority of the present 15,000 parish churches? Well, we know what some of them are that we have heard, and many that we have seen in print; and we know what the opinion of the laity is generally—hinted or openly expressed. The popular feeling is shown by the numberless jokes on sermons—their preachers and hapless hearers—which help to fill up the columns of *facetiae* even in Christian prints.

No more tiresome infliction is imaginable than to have to sit, for what seems an unconscionable time, within hearing of one of the droning, dull, and apparently addepleted preachers the Establishment has imposed upon unoffending parishes. The rotten theology might be excused for the time being if the pulpiteer manifested the smallest ability or desire to present it in an interesting and attractive way. But any effort in that direction appears to be quite too much for the average parson to undertake. Vapid discourses, full of illogicalities, and vague, meaningless platitudes, seem to be regarded as quite sufficient if plentifully bestrewn with texts and the pious jargon which forms the stock-in-trade of the ordinary man of God. As for graces of elocution, balanced emphasis, and variety of tone, or even a suspicion of humor—that is rarely thought of, much less attempted. Is it any wonder that a perceptible sigh of relief arises from the congregation when the preacher is pleased to wind up with that ever-blessed formula which his hearers have impatiently awaited so long?

On the other hand, there is often a vast lot of raving and ranting about the preachers of Dissent which is, if anything, even more disagreeable than the ordinary clerical monotone. The subject-matter is equally rotten. If the parson wastes three-quarters of an hour on some alleged historical event in the Hebrew records—which nearly every intelligent hearer knows to be little else but fiction—the Dissenting preacher is strong on the "blood." He can't get away from that "blood" even for five minutes at a time. If you think he has got off on to a more agreeable topic and is going to give the "blood" a rest, he is back on it again before you hardly

know where you are. The way Dissenters roll that word on their tongues, and seem to lick their lips over it, may be religion, but I should call it ogreism.

Some Anglican preachers confine themselves to ethical discourses, and eschew as far as possible theology and the doctrinal element. These men are far too few, and are often looked at askance by others of their Church. A suspicion hangs about them that they are "not sound." Other preachers try to mix up the ethical and the theological, with, of course, the inevitable result of making a frightful hash of both. There is yet another phase of pulpitering. We learn from the *Church Times* of the other week that "in not a few churches preachers discourse on the so-called Higher Criticism, and unsettle the minds of the people as to the authority of certain books of the Bible, of the Bible itself, and even of the infallibility of our blessed Lord."

Why shouldn't they discourse on these subjects? Is it supposed that the questions alluded to can be kept from the laity? They crop up constantly in the leading reviews and magazines and much of the literature of the day. The pew knows a great deal about them; much more than it is credited with knowing. The only person who is apparently in ignorance is the parson in the pulpit. He, of course, knows or ought to know, and why should he burk them? Suppose that pulpit references to them "unsettle" the minds of the people. What is the faith worth which must be safeguarded in such a fashion? If the "authority of certain books of the Bible, of the Bible itself, and even of the infallibility of our blessed Lord," are matters that have been called in question in the Church itself—as we know they have—the laity should be fully informed by their "spiritual pastors and masters" from the pulpit. They should be told authoritatively what they have learned casually. The parsons may, at the same time, explain it away, if they can, leaving their people to judge. But it is essential—and here's the rub—that the parsons should say what *they* themselves think in their own studies and in their own secret hearts, and not what they deem it expedient to say from the pulpit. If there was any possibility of inducing them to do this—which they should do if they are honest men—we might at once look out for some interesting disclosures. But there is not enough stamina, courage, and sincerity in the Church to enable it, as a whole, to openly face difficulties or adopt any other policy than that of the silly ostrich.

We note, from time to time, the assumption by pulpiteers of the less thoughtful type of a vainglorious attitude, intended to betoken not merely an absence of fear, but a contemptuous disregard of the results of modern criticism. Sometimes they say: "There is nothing new about it; we knew it all before"; sometimes they say: "It is mostly conjecture; the conclusions have still to be established"; at other times they say: "If it were all proved beyond dispute, it doesn't affect our faith." These are the people who wouldn't believe that a ship would sink even though they saw that it was scuttled. Later on, as the conclusions of modern criticism begin to be fully and properly applied, it will be seen whether the Christian faith is not seriously affected. Meantime we can wait.

All the same, it seems a pity that preachers of all the various denominations, with their exceptional opportunities of reaching the multitude, should waste their time, and weary such hearers as they now have, by barren dissertations on the dry bones of theology, neglecting, for the most part, the purely ethical teaching which alone is productive of really beneficial results to the community. The new world which is springing up wants to hear less about God, of whom no one knows anything, and more about man in his relation to society and the universe.

FRANCIS NEALE.

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I propose to prove that philosophers without ethics are not sages, but simply reasoners; that religion is not the perfection of morality, for morality is always perfect and is not susceptible of more or less; but that religion is the supplement of the laws, since it adds to the fear of temporal penalties the fear of eternal punishment; that thus the laws are made to restrain the wicked, while religion is for the selfish souls, and morality for consciences.—*Rivarol*.

## Acid Drops.

A TELEGRAM to Dr. Browne, the Bishop of Bristol, who resides at the Episcopal Palace, was addressed, "Browne, The Palace, Bristol." Instead of being delivered to the Bishop, it was taken to a local music-hall called the People's Palace. But no performer could be found there called Browne, and finally it dawned upon somebody that the telegram was meant for the performer called Browne at the other Palace.

The Aston Guardians have had a grave religious problem to consider. The question was how three children, aged respectively five, nine, and eleven years, were to be trained in the fear of the Lord. The father was a Protestant, but the mother had entered herself as a Roman Catholic, in order to procure the privilege of going out on a Sunday. Primitive Methodism was also dragged in somehow or other, and the poor distracted Guardians referred the matter to the Local Government Board. Perhaps the problem is settled by this time, and perhaps it isn't. Even if it never got settled at all, and the trinity of children grew up without any knowledge of the Christian Trinity, they would probably be just as good citizens as others initiated into all the mysteries of orthodox theology.

Rev. W. Carlile, the boss of the Church Army, treats his congregation to iced coffee, and the innovation is said to be very successful. Possibly cigars will be added in time, or screws of tobacco and "fags."

Professor Heron, the new Presbyterian Moderator at Belfast, thinks it necessary to utter a note of warning against the Higher Criticism. Much of it, he says, is simply a denial of the supernatural. The article on the Gospels, for instance, in the new *Encyclopædia Biblica*, eliminates the supernatural altogether from Christianity, and practically denies the incarnation and resurrection of "our Lord." Professor Heron sees that this sort of thing must be resisted. At any rate, the clergy must not have more than they can help to do with it. A non-miraculous Jesus Christ would never keep the clerical business going, and that is the be-all and the end-all of churches, chapels, and preaching.

The Bishop of Peterborough says that one of his clergy has had to discontinue daily service in the parish church. Nobody attended but himself and his wife, and she got sick at last of being addressed as "dearly-beloved brethren."

The Abbey Church of St. Albans is in the centre of the straw-plaiting industry, and the congregation is therefore chiefly composed of women. Once upon a time they were aggrieved at the constant "Dearly-beloved brethren," and requested the Dean to alter it, as it was a slight upon their sex, who had souls as well as men. "I always thought," the Dean replied, "that brethren embraced the sisters, especially when they were dearly beloved." It was not a soft answer, but it turned away wrath.

Lord Dunmore is in America, hobnobbing with Mrs. Eddy, and puffing the "beauty of Christian Science and its power to elevate mankind, heal diseases, and reconcile man to the abandonment of sin." It would be more to his credit if he stayed at home in England and helped the poor Peculiar People, who are persecuted for really believing what Lord Dunmore professes.

Rev. Marshall Hartley preached the anniversary sermons in connection with the Queen's-road Wesleyan Sunday-schools, Watford. He admitted that Sunday-schools were declining in quality as well as in quantity. There was a large proportion of girls over boys. And the teaching was not on a proper basis. "When they considered," he said, "how many children passed through Sunday-schools, and saw how few of them grew up in the way they had been taught, it was plain that something was wrong with the system. He had heard from a gentleman connected with His Majesty's prisons that out of every thousand criminals nine hundred had been in early days Sunday-school scholars." We have stated this ourselves, and we are glad to find the Rev. Marshall Hartley backing us up for once.

More home truths were told at another Watford meeting—that of the Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society. The Rev. Dr. Dunn, representing the parent Society, said that, in spite of the 300,000,000 Bibles now in circulation, there were more people in the world without Bibles now than there were a hundred years ago, owing to the vast increase in the population. Of the 1,500 million people in the world quite 1,100 million had never heard the name of Jesus Christ. Consequently there was plenty of work left for the Bible circulators. Of course there is. And there is likely to be. But what a commentary it is on the command of Christ to

his apostles, to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Nearly two thousand years have elapsed since he said it, and three-quarters of the world's inhabitants have never heard a word of that precious gospel yet. If they are going to hell in consequence, it is a terrible shame; and if they are not going to hell, it is a pity to disturb them.

Mr. Horatio Bottomley, of the *London Sun*, has been informed by a correspondent that the present slump in parliamentary government is due to the fact that "many of the present members fear neither God nor man; hence the blessing of God rests not upon their labors." The remedy is to elect men of religion, for "the nation which honors God he himself will honor in return." Mr. Bottomley doesn't seem to think much of this prescription. He points out that religion and politics have always made a bad mixture. "No," he says, "it is not Evangelists who are wanted in parliament, but men of brains and knowledge of the world." Which is rather rough on the Evangelists.

"True religion," says Canon Knox Little, "is not going back." We quite agree with him. There never was any to go back.

One of the latest misprints. A priest ran round to a dying man with the viaticum, and the wretches made him "run round with the Vatican."

"Providence" has been sorting the weather sadly. After a cold snap comes a hot one, and then after the hot snap a cold one. Sleet in June in Paris! And soon afterwards people were dropping down dead with heat syncope. In Austria the thermometer went down with a bang from ninety degrees, and snow fell in many neighborhoods. Enormous injury was wrought by floods, and huge tracts of corn and fruit were ruined. At Rome the temperature fell suddenly from tropical heat to eight degrees of frost. Great damage was done to the crops in many parts of Italy.

America is a "big country," and things seem to happen on a big scale over there—including disasters. There was a flood at Pocahontas, in West Virginia, a few days ago, causing the loss of five hundred lives. It was through the bursting of a dam, in consequence of the continuous rain during several days. "Providence" did not have a spare unemployed angel to give the locality warning, and a raging torrent swept along the valley carrying all before it—trees, houses, men, women, and children. Keystone, a town of three thousand inhabitants, was simply wiped out of existence; and the people who escaped are now camping out on the mountain sides. When the waters subsided it was seen that only one building in the town was still standing, and that was a liquor saloon.

Surely that liquor saloon ought to be the theme of many an edifying sermon. Christians call floods, and such things, the acts of God. It was the Lord, therefore, who rolled the flood along that doomed valley; the Lord who wiped Keystone off the map of Virginia; and the Lord who spared that drink-shop in his wrath. Such a bit of discrimination should be explained by the Gospel Temperance Societies.

Two jurors at an inquest in Dublin refused to be sworn on the ordinary Testaments, and demanded Roman Catholic Testaments. The King's Declaration against Romanism seems to have been rankling in their breasts, for one of them said that Roman Catholics were called idolaters, and if they were idolaters they would act as such. The logic seems a little defective, but, anyhow, they were dismissed from the jury. Yet why should they not insist upon being sworn on the particular version they believe in? Jews are accommodated with the Old Testament bound up by itself. Roman Catholics might be encouraged to make the same claim in England as that of the two Dublin jurors. It might help towards the attainment of that very desirable end—the total abolition of legal swearing.

According to Archdeacon Sinclair, there are fifty-two churches in the City of London, and only 22,000 persons are residents on Sundays. Therefore, he says, the Sunday work can only be conducted on a small scale. But then, within a mile of the City, there are tens of thousands of people who might flock to these churches if the churches had anything to offer which was acceptable. It is absurd for Archdeacon Sinclair to attempt to excuse the emptiness of the City churches by talking about the paucity of residents in their immediate neighborhood. What about the City Temple? That is filled nearly every Sunday. The fact is, the City clergy are dull and lazy, and are indifferent to everything but drawing their unearned stipends. The yearly income of the clergy attached to these churches is estimated at from £20,000 to £25,000. The results achieved in the way of attendance and confirmations are ludicrously small.

This is, of course, a question which mainly concerns the

Established Church itself. Still, it is a fine commentary on the complaints about the "hard-worked and underpaid" clergy.

At the recent meeting to promote kindness to animals, presided over by Lord Llangattock, it was announced that twenty-five bishops had written twenty-five sympathetic letters excusing their absence. A cheap and easy way of pretending to assist the object of the meeting. Why weren't these bishops, or at any rate some of them, present? It is more than doubtful that they were better employed.

The *Churchman*, which recently contained an article, "Is Our Church a Failing Cause?" now observes that some leaders of Church opinion frankly confess that they had not realised the extent and variety of the ominous signs found in the statistics of the "Year Book of the Church." It adds that there is too much disposition to think that Churchmen should say as little as possible about ugly facts of this character. We can quite believe in the prevalence of that fatuous disposition in the Church. It will probably prevail until disestablishment and disendowment provide a rude awakening.

The Established Church is not alone in having to lament a falling-off in the number of its adherents. The Baptist East Midland Association, which comprises Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, and Notts, recently held its annual Conference. It was reported that the total number of baptisms had been 100 fewer than last year, and, in regard to the Sunday-schools, there had been a net decrease of 512 scholars and 130 teachers. The Church membership showed an increase of only 127, or less than one per church. The Committee reported a declining income.

It is estimated by Eugene Stock that, after nearly nineteen centuries of the Christian era, one-half the present population of the globe has never heard of Christ at all. And it is a fact, also, that at least 30,000 human beings in China, 30,000 in India, and probably 15,000 in Africa, die every day without any knowledge of Christianity. The One Above does not seem to disturb himself very much in regard to the revelation of his Will. According to the Christian Evidence people, he made a spurt with the spread of his Gospel in the earlier centuries. Since then he appears to have been resting. The poor human creatures to whom he has left the work are quite unequal to coping with it. Anyhow, according to the above figures, there are 75,000 heathens dying in ignorance every day. And God knows how long it will take to reach the generations that are yet to be born.

Rev. Dr. G. S. Barrett, who spoke at the recent annual meeting of the Christian Evidence Society, said there had been a complete shifting of the quarter from which the anti-Christian assault came. The Atheistic lecturer found a diminishing audience. The peril lay rather within the Church than without. Dr. Barrett is quite right in apprehending the perils to faith which have now arisen within the Church. As to "diminishing" audiences at Atheistic lectures, the wish must certainly be father to the thought, for no such diminution is perceptible. Quite the contrary, or why the pathetic appeals of the Christian Evidence Society for funds to resist the advance of Freethought outside the churches?

A description of a service held by the Peculiar People in Southend Market Hall appears in the *Examiner*. It is not unkindly written, which is somewhat to the credit of the writer, seeing that the humblest of these poor people is a more consistent Christian than he. When he entered, he found them devoutly kneeling on their spread-out handkerchiefs. On the platform was a "bishop" with seven or eight elders. "A very homely platform it was, and, in proof, one of the elders, in the interval of waiting, quite calmly took out a comb and tidied his rather lank locks." The presiding elder argued, in his sermon, that if the Bible says "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved," it also says, "They shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover," and one is as true as the other. The visitor is compelled to admit: "There appears to be logic in this."

There has been some bad language used in connection with a jumble sale held in a chapel school-room close to a well-known laundry. A messenger, who was not very safe in his topography, had been despatched to the latter establishment with the weekly washing of a prominent citizen. Unhappily, the washing was left at the jumble sale, whereupon the holders, thankful to the Lord for the anonymous gift, proceeded to offer the collars, shirts, and various other articles to the highest bidder.

A Sunday-school class of girls were taken on a pic-nic from Accrington in a coach. The horses bolted, and the occupants

of the coach were flung in all directions, several being badly injured. Where was Providence on this occasion?

A telephone girl, it is related, recently broke down in health. She was visited by the vicar of the parish, who asked: "Are you sure that it is the worry of the telephone work that has laid you up?" "Oh yes," she replied, "I find myself saying 'Are you there?' when I kneel down at night to say my prayers." There is more in this little story than appears at the first glance.

One was always surprised that Harold Frederic, the gifted author of *Illumination*, should have surrendered himself to such an absurd craze as Christian Science. Now it seems that the perilous fad has found, even amongst our own countrymen, influential, if not very intellectual, supporters. We learn that Lord Dunmore and his two daughters, with Lady Ramsay, are at Boston familiarising themselves with the work of the American Church organisation, so that they may be better equipped for work at home. It is reported that the Earl and Countess of Dunmore, and their eldest daughter, desire to become regularly-ordained instructors. Any sort of religious imbecility seems to succeed—Dowieism, Boothism, Eddyism, and a host of other irrationalities quite too numerous to specify. Meanwhile Wisdom is crying aloud in the streets for even meagre support.

A very good defence of that scathing work, *The Fatal Opulence of Bishops*, is presented in the *Record* by its author, the Rev. Hubert Handley, vicar of St. Thomas's, Camden Town. He points out that, amongst forty reputable journals which have noticed the work, only four or five fail to see that some measure of reform is needful. In subsequent observations he makes a quotation from one of the lectures which Professor Harnack lately delivered to the students of Berlin University, and has since published. Harnack says: "The Lord's injunction that a minister of his Word is to divest himself of worldly possessions will still come to be honored in the history of His Communion."

Harnack is more sanguine on that point than we are. Judging, however, by other passages in his lectures, the probability is that he meant this to be taken as "sarkastic," as Artemus Ward would have written it. Harnack continues: "At the very least, it ought to be a strict principle that ministers should concern themselves with property and worldly goods, only so far as will prevent them being a burden to others." Christ made no such proviso as appears in the latter part of this sentence. "Gold and silver have I none," said Peter when, according to the Acts of the Apostles, he commenced his ministrations for the "risen Lord." The Bishops cannot, and do not, desire to say this. They would sooner stand self-condemned than part with their accumulations.

How these Christians love one another! The Abbé Touchard, chaplain to a Society of nuns, was kneeling at the altar in the Chapel of the Sacred Heart at Nantes, celebrating Mass, when a woman, dressed entirely in black, approached from behind, and felled him to the ground by striking him on the head with a mallet. The Abbé fell insensible, but the woman made no attempt to escape, and waited until the police were fetched. She was formerly a religious Sister, but had been discharged from her Order, she alleges, through Abbé Touchard.

The Bishop of London, preaching at Oxford, said we were living in alarming days. The confirmation candidates were going down in number, less young men of the upper class came forward for Holy Orders, and thousands in London went neither to church nor chapel.

The storm in the teacup about the divorcee who, after being married at a registry office, went to a church and received the "nuptial blessing" is still raging in the columns of the *Church Times*. What a mighty fine value that journal sets upon a few mumbled platitudes of its priests! It couldn't make much more fuss if the erring curate-in-charge had written out a cheque on the Church funds to provide the divorcee with a household of furniture, which might, indeed, have been a "blessing."

The *C. T.* says, with stern decision: "Through somebody's carelessness or concealment of facts, the Church's law was broken and the prayers of the Church offered for a marriage that was no marriage." No marriage, indeed! The parties were legally united before they entered the church. Nothing could end the contract except death or a successful appeal to the Divorce Court. One of the pair had been to that Court already, and is hardly likely to go again. Yet, silly-like, they must needs march into the church to receive a "spiritual blessing." We can safely bet a million to one that it was the woman who wanted it. They have had it, and much good it will probably do them. They have gained for

themselves an unenviable notoriety, and, further, they have got the poor curate-in-charge and his absent vicar into no end of trouble with the absurd bigots of their Church. This comes from superfluous piety.

Mr. A. W. Macgregor, stationed at Kikuyu, on the Uganda Railway, mentions a curious imposture practised by a native medicine man. He writes: "I find that the Wa-Kikuyu are greatly under the influence of a medicine man, who is called 'the man of God.' This man is reported at certain times to go up to heaven to converse with God. He is said always to go at night, when his friends are sleeping beside him, passing through the roof. His ascent is always during a shower of rain, and is accompanied by thunder. He returns the third day looking very thin. On one occasion, he says, he was beaten for not telling the people 'God's words.' He sometimes describes God as being an old man, sometimes as a little child. The country above is very beautiful, with, of course, plenty of cattle, nearly all white. He is held in great repute, and receives enormous presents of cattle, goats, and other property."

Mr. Macgregor is probably right in suggesting that this imposture may be an echo of teaching given by passing missionaries.

Here is sad news, indeed. A considerable diminution has taken place in the reserve fund of Peter's Pence. The Pope has been led on from dabbling in politics, which helped to alienate contributions, to dabbling in stocks, and he now finds himself face to face with a deficit which not even the income from the Jubilee Year will cover. Still, this representative of the homeless, penniless, wandering Nazarene has always a few millions to fall back upon in case of need. But such is the avarice of holy men that even that reserve may not assuage his grief.

Superintendent Thomas, of Glamorgan, seems to have a proper reverence for the clergy. A parson in the Resolven (Wales) district sold some milk containing ten per cent. of added water, according to the analyst's certificate. If it had been some poor old woman who had sold the adulterated milk, of course Superintendent Thomas would have seen his duty clear, and discharged it. But, as the vendor was a clergyman, he reported the matter to the Glamorgan Local Government Committee. He said he desired to take the instructions of the Committee as to whether he should proceed with the case or not. The Chairman (sharply): "Why do you ask? Is ten per cent. too small a quantity to act upon, or what?" The Superintendent: "No, sir; but as the man is a clergyman of the Church of England, and he will be charged with adulterating his milk, I thought it would be better to allow this meeting to consider the matter before proceeding further. The machinery is all in order to proceed." The Chairman: "Do you want instructions from this Committee to prosecute?" The Superintendent: "No, sir; I only just put it before you." The Chairman: "Then don't put any more before us."

Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you is an excellent sentiment, but it doesn't always work out well as a rule of practice. A child was treated to a view of a picture in which early Christian martyrs were being devoured by lions. It was a girl, and she lifted up her voice and wept. Inquiries, however, elicited the fact that she was really weeping for a poor old lion who had got no martyr. There were not enough to go round, and she sympathised with the noble beast who was done out of his dinner.

The "Mad Mullah" preached to his followers that the British bullets were made of water. Many of them who believed it are now in kingdom-come.

An enthusiastic motorman, living in a small borough in the neighborhood of Paris, lately conceived the idea of having a new automobile blessed or baptised. He argued that there was nothing incongruous in such a ceremony, any more than in the benedictions called down by priests on the boats of Norman and Breton fisher-folk. Accordingly, the motor-car, finely decorated with flowers of the season, was wheeled out into a yard, where it was sprinkled with holy water by the parish priest, who delivered an appropriate address to the fifty or sixty persons ranged around. The automobile had sponsors, and was called Jeannette. When the ceremony was over the car was propelled through the borough for the admiration of the inhabitants. There was subsequently a banquet for the invited guests, and then a concert, followed by a distribution of buns and bon-bons to the children of the locality.—*Daily Telegraph*.

A swarm of bees took up quarters in the roof of the chancel of the parish church at Bicker, in Lincolnshire. Some of them came down during divine service. They must have reported adversely to the rest, for the whole swarm

disappeared immediately afterwards. Perhaps the industrious creatures couldn't stand such a frightful waste of time.

Chubb Jackson and Alice Latter are being prosecuted by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and the Southend magistrates have committed them for trial. Jackson has been carrying on institutions at Southend, Ryde, and Parkstone, for "brightening the lives of children." "An opportunity," he said, in one of his circulars, "offers to transplant children from cold, hunger, and misery to God's wonderful garden, where they will be taught by every tree and blade of grass, the chirping birds, and rippling stream." That, however, does not seem to have been the sum-total of their education. It is alleged that hymn-singing was varied with starvation and indecent whipping. Whether the allegation will be supported at the trial remains to be seen. It is only fair to say that Jackson indignantly denies the charge before his "Maker" as "a lie forged in the caverns below."

The Archbishop of Canterbury confesses that the Church ought no longer to look upon science "with doubtful eyes." The Lord is using it as an instrument to open the path to his Word, that it might penetrate to the remotest parts of the earth. In other words, the Lord started modern science for the sake of the missionary business, and the clergy opposed it because they didn't know what he was up to.

Five hundred native Christians have been murdered at Mok-pho, in Korea. Happy people! The missionaries made them fit for heaven, and now they are there.

There were more anti-clerical "disturbances" in Madrid on Sunday. A large meeting of Freethinkers was held, and a procession was formed, which marched through the streets, crying "Down with the Jesuits!" and "Long live the Republic!" Spain is a long way off a Republic, but the Freethinkers do right in keeping an eye on the Jesuits, who are the sworn enemies of all liberty and progress—indeed, of all that is usually denoted by the word civilisation. Even in France they have played their game so well that, according to the Prime Minister, in another six or seven years no Government would have been powerful enough to deal with them. Happily they are being dealt with now.

"The great Philanthropist of Scotland"—Mr. Andrew Carnegie, to wit—has his attention called in a *Times* advertisement to a certain June publication, where he may read an appeal for help to release a certain Society from a debt of £11,883, and thus to enable them to spread "knowledge" all round the world. But it appears that the "knowledge" meant is of the Gospel order, in which Mr. Carnegie is reputed to take no stock. The pious advertiser—perhaps the enterprising secretary of the concern—broadly hints that a good cheque from the Philanthropist of Scotland would secure him a "blessing." Whether in this world or the next is not stated.

Mr. Carnegie has lots of money, but he hasn't enough to go round amongst all the begging Societies that would like to have some. Gospel beggars were always the lustiest beggars. Some of them could almost cadge hairs off a bald head. But we guess they won't get much out of Andrew. He is a Scotchman, at least by blood and birth, and he expects some return for his money—and preferably in this world rather than in the world to come.

### The Converts.\*

THE poets now are pious: one and all  
Before the throne of mighty Yahveh fall.  
"The author, then, of *Gunga Din* and *Bells*,  
Into ecstatic praise of Jesus melts!"  
It must be so. Has not the "News" asserted  
Each poet is "converted"?

Does William Watson songs of battle sing?  
Does Swinburne chant "the beauty of the King"?  
What though some groundlings raise a pean to him,  
The god of battles, blood-besmirched and grim?  
We beg to ask: *Where will they be inserted,*  
These songs of the "converted"?

Better to be "converted" to belief  
In giving broken brethren's hearts relief;  
Better, believing this, to rise and do  
Than to pen idle odes and dream—like you,  
Who, by the patrons of your muse deserted,  
Seek fame by being "converted"!

J. YOUNG.

\* See "Pious Poets" in the *Freethinker*, June 23.



## Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, June 30, Freethought Demonstration, Hyde Park, at 7 p.m.

## To Correspondents.

- ALL communications for Mr. Charles Watts in reference to lecturing engagements, etc., 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.
- F. E. WILLIS.—Pleased to hear from you again. Thanks for cuttings.
- MISS VANCE, N. S. S. secretary, acknowledges the following towards the expenses of the Regent's Park Demonstration:—J. J., 5s.; A Friend, 1s.; L. H., 6d.
- W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always welcome.
- D. S. KERR.—Thanks for cutting. See paragraph. Sorry you are unable to take Shares in the Freethought Publishing Company at present, but pleased to hear that you hope to take some before the end of the year.
- W. R. MILLWARD.—Thanks for cuttings.
- W. T. PITT (Birmingham) writes:—"Please find cheque herewith for first instalment on five Shares in the Freethought Publishing Company. I have from the first intended to take these Shares up, and am almost ashamed of being so late, but trust there are hundreds like myself ready to do something at last for so promising an enterprise. I feel you have made one great step with the *Age of Reason*, and I hope you will be able to make another with *Force and Matter*. No doubt you will do so if you get the encouragement you deserve." Mr. Pitt has long been a most active worker for the Freethought cause in Birmingham, and we trust his example will be extensively followed. Many friends have waited to support this Company. Don't let them wait too long, but find salvation now.
- A. B. MOSS.—Hope to see you at the Excursion. Thanks for your kind inquiry. Mr. Foote is better, but not quite free from the enemy.
- J. G. BARTRAM.—See paragraph. We are always happy to help Branches along with their work as far as possible. Write whenever you want to. Don't fear "troubling" us.
- G. E. C. NAEWIGER.—See paragraph. Is any good hall available for Sunday lectures at Hull now? Mr. Foote would be pleased to visit the town in the autumn or early winter.
- J. PARTRIDGE.—We hope the Birmingham friends will have a good time next Sunday. Mr. Foote is improving. What he really wants is a good long holiday, such as Mr. Price Hughes, Dr. Parker, Dr. Watson, Mr. Dawson, and other men of God, are able to get annually. A few days' rest and change do very little good. It is like a plate of soup to a dinner—a good introduction, but a bad substitute. Brain work is very exhausting, and, as one gets older, one feels the need of more frequent intervals. The pace of the past ten years will not be easy during the next ten years.
- A. E. E. writes: "Accept my congratulations on your magnificent Demonstration in Regent's Park. The gigantic crowd was exceedingly attentive, and took up the various points with great relish and appreciation. The speeches were excellent, all of them. Mr. Cohen did not look as well as he ought to. He should husband his strength. [We have told him so.] Your own magnificent voice [ahem!] gave way a bit at the end. Take it easier. Your voice is so clear that it will carry well, without the straining you gave it last night. Dr. Barrett, at the Christian Evidence Society's meeting, said that the Atheist lecturer finds a diminishing audience. He ought to have been in the Park last night! How is it you had no collection? [Collections are not allowed in the Royal Parks.] I handed my contribution to Miss Vance in the brake, or I should not have gone home with an easy conscience."
- G. WOODWARD.—Thanks for your note on the poem. Perhaps allowance should be made for the poor poet. His tribe were always more or less impecunious.
- W. HEAFORD.—See paragraph. Hope to see you at the Excursion. The Regent's Park Demonstration was more than a mere success—it was a transcendent success.
- J. A. BELLCHAMBERS.—Your verses shall appear. Why did not you and your brother come up to the brake and shake hands? We should have been very much pleased to meet you both. It was, as you say, a grand meeting in Regent's Park. No collections can be made, nor can literature be sold, under the new regulations in the Royal Parks. Of course it was a great pity that the *Freethinker* could not be introduced to that vast audience, especially as we have to suffer so much in other ways from the bigotry of newspapers, etc.
- JOHN PAYNE sends us £1 for the N. S. S. General Fund. It arrived just too late for acknowledgment in last week's *Freethinker*. This will explain the delay.
- MAJOR G. O. WARREN.—We are much pleased to learn from the secretary that you have applied for five further Shares in the Freethought Publishing Company. Your sympathy and good opinion are valued.
- DR. R. T. NICHOLS.—Glad to see you are taking up more Shares in the Freethought Publishing Company. We saw you at the West Ham Demonstration, but had no opportunity of exchanging greetings.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Weekly News (Summer Number)—Tribune—Northern Weekly Leader—Truthseeker (New York)—Freethought Magazine—Boston Investigator—Freidenker—Progressive Thinker—Yarmouth Mercury—Sydney Bulletin—Essex Weekly News—La Raison—New Century—Morning Leader—Two Worlds—Crescent—Torch of Reason—Lucifer—National Religion, by Samuel Smith, M.P.—A Tale of Shame, by Joseph Oldfield—Secular Thought—Herald of the Golden Age—Blue Grass Blade—Star—Sun.

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.

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

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

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

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 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.

THE third of this season's Freethought Demonstrations was held on Sunday evening in Regent's Park. Mr. Wilson's brake, which served as usual for a platform, was driven up to a splendid position under the shade of a noble tree, fronting a grand stretch of sward that would have accommodated a hundred thousand people. The wind, which had been boisterous all day, had died down into a refreshing breeze; the clouds had almost entirely disappeared from the sky, leaving it pure and serene; and the slanting rays of the sinking sun shed a soft golden glory over the landscape, which might easily have been imagined to lie a hundred miles away from the crowded and dusty metropolis. It was an idyllic scene, and the *beau ideal* of an open-air meeting. Crowds of well-dressed people gradually gathered round the brake, and in less than ten minutes Mr. Cohen was able to begin business before a grand assembly. His capital address was listened to with profound attention and evident appreciation. Mr. Watts followed with a vigorous and spirited speech that was warmly applauded. All the time the audience was increasing, and it continued to do so throughout Mr. Foote's address. The crowd was then so vast that he had to exert himself to the utmost to send his voice to the outskirts. One silly Christian woman insisted on interrupting, but with that exception the best order prevailed from beginning to end. Every point of the speakers was caught up, laughter followed the lighter remarks, and applause greeted every serious appeal. Altogether, it was a most magnificent success. We can hardly hazard a guess as to how many people were present. The crowd was really out of all ordinary calculation.

When Blücher—the famous Prussian general, who came up in the nick of time at Waterloo—visited London, he went up the Monument and surveyed the British metropolis from that favorable altitude. The scene below him prompted the exclamation: "What a splendid city to sack!" Some such idea passed through Miss Vance's mind in Regent's Park on Sunday evening. "What a splendid crowd for a collection!" she thought. But it was impossible to make one. The new rules of the Royal Parks are dead against it. It is only in the parks under the County Council that collections can be made—though not by or for individuals—within the limit of the meetings.

The fourth of these Freethought Demonstrations will be held this evening (June 30) in Hyde Park—another place where collections cannot be made. The pitch selected is the regular meeting place of the West London Branch near the Marble Arch, and the speakers (Messrs. Foote, Watts, and Cohen) will use the Branch platform. If the brake were used it would have to be taken down to the old Reformers' Tree, which is a long way from where the people are in the habit of assembling; and, of course, it is no use demonstrating to the trees and the sheep.

Next Sunday (July 7) is the day of the London Freethinkers' Annual Excursion, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive. A special train has been chartered to run to Box Hill and Dorking. It leaves London Bridge at the convenient hour of 10 in the morning, and Victoria at 10.5, calling also at New Cross and Clapham Junction. The tickets for the return journey are only 2s. for adults, and 1s. for children under twelve. There ought, therefore, to be quite a crush on this occasion.

There is plenty of accommodation for hungry and thirsty

souls in Dorking and the neighborhood, but the largest hall available for a general tea will only hold 150. This function will be 1s. per head, and will take place at 5 o'clock. Mr. Foote will preside. Those who want to be present should make sure of their tickets.

London Freethinkers of the male persuasion should bring their wives, daughters, sisters, or other female relatives, along to this Excursion, so that they may see that "infidels" are not such a dreadful set of folk after all, however they may be "God forsaken." The low price of the ticket is also a good chance for the children. Mr. Foote means to bring all his family, and other Freethinkers should try to do ditto. Let us, if possible, have a real happy "family party" next Sunday.

As far as the N. S. S. is concerned, the open-air propaganda in London will be suspended on this excursion Sunday, as per arrangement, in order to give lecturers, chairmen, committee men, and other workers an opportunity of joining in the trip without any sort of neglect of duty.

Mr. H. Percy Ward had two fine meetings at Newcastle on Sunday. The morning meeting on the Quayside was somewhat interfered with by a howling band of evangelists, who pitched on one side of the Secular platform, and by a howling tipster on the other side. All copies of the sixpenny *Age of Reason* were cleared out in a few minutes, and the crowd clamored for more. In the evening the Town Moor audience was a large one, in spite of the cold wind. Mr. Ward was listened to attentively, and warmly applauded. To-day (June 30) he lectures again both morning and evening. During the week he has been lecturing at Shields and Stanley.

The Glasgow Branch goes on excursion to Loch Thom (Greenock) to-day (June 30), and, if the weather is reasonably fair, there ought to be a strong rally of the local "saints." The party will travel by the train leaving St. Enoch's Station at 7.50 a.m. All who join it are requested to bring their own provisions. Tea will be provided for them, but that is all. It's Scotland ye ken, and the blessed Sawboth tae! But then the Scotsmen are used to it, and won't be frightened from attending by commissariat difficulties.

Mr. Arthur B. Moss had two fine meetings on Sunday. In the morning he lectured at Battersea on "The Riddle of the Universe," and after the lecture had a friendly discussion with Mr. Symons, a veteran controversialist of a very liberal kind. In the evening Mr. Moss addressed a very large gathering at Mile-end on "Life Hereafter." There was a good sale of literature on each occasion.

Hull "saints" are requested to note that, if they mean to join the annual excursion, they *must* obtain their tickets not later than next Thursday (July 4). Seats cannot be guaranteed otherwise. The secretary's address is—G. E. C. Naewiger, 12 Sydney-terrace, Londesboro'-street.

The Birmingham Branch has its Annual Picnic next Sunday (July 7). The party will go by brake to Clent Hills. July 3 is the latest date on which application for tickets can be entertained. The tickets are 4s. 3d. each, covering the drive and a meat tea. The time of starting, etc., will be printed on them. It would much assist the committee if those who intend to join the picnic would apply for tickets early. The secretary's address is—J. Partridge, 65 Cato-street.

The Manchester Branch picnic takes place on Sunday, July 14. The party will go to Hebden Bridge for Hardcastle Craggs. Further particulars will appear in our next issue, or may be obtained in the meantime from the secretary, Mrs. Pegg, 15 Mytton-street, Hulme.

Mr. W. Heaford had two capital meetings in Victoria Park on Sunday. His third lecture was at Ridley-road, where he was beset by an organised band of Christian Hooligans, who did their utmost to prevent him (or anybody else) from being heard. These brutal tactics were disavowed by the C. E. S. representatives, and the audience resented them, but could not stop them. If they are repeated the police should be brought upon the scene. Their protection has been promised, and should be sought when necessary.

"Dives and Lazarus" is the heading of a warm letter by J. W. de Caux in the *Yarmouth Mercury*. We don't envy the feelings of the Bishop of Norwich, at whom it is aimed.

Count Leo Tolstoi's *Reply to the Synod's Edict of Excommunication*, translated into English, and published in the form of a penny pamphlet, reaches us from the Free Age Press, Christchurch, Hants. It is really well worth reading. Tolstoi goes on in his calm, merciless way pouring scorn upon the priests who have pointed him out for the hatred of all the bigots in Russia, some of whom have threatened him

with violence, and even with assassination. He tells the Church that "almost all educated people" believe its dogmas just as much as he does. He also tells the Church that its various rites are nothing but methods of sorcery "for a certain consideration," that its remission of sins encourages immorality, and that it is constantly flying in the face of Christ and his teaching. Finally, he gives a calm statement of the belief in which he approaches death. It is not our belief, but it is that of a great and good man, and is therefore worthy of respect and attention.

Applications for Shares in the Freethought Publishing Company are coming in steadily, if slowly. We should like to see them flow in more rapidly, but it seems very difficult to quicken the pace, so we suppose we must be patient. If we were appealing to Christians we might hurry them up with a dash of brimstone. But we cannot appeal to the fears of Freethinkers. They must move disinterestedly or not at all. We can only appeal to their love of "the good old cause."

## We Take off our Hats to Old Harry.

(An "Infidel" Song.)

THEY talk of the sorrows of Satan,  
But the one who has cause to be sad  
Is his "opposite," Jahveh the great 'un,  
The personification of "bad."  
We glean from the Scriptures so scrappy—  
Everybody that runneth may read—  
That none but the "good" can be happy;  
Then Old Nick must be happy, indeed.

Chorus:—

We take off our hats to Old Harry,  
With a jeer at Jehovah, the Jew;  
Three cheers for Old Nick,  
He's a regular brick,  
And the very first pick of the two!  
We read in the unholy "shocker"  
That he opened the eyes of a pair;  
Educated them up to the knocker,  
Showed them both what to eat, what to wear.  
He's the founder of school and of college  
Is Old Harry, the good and the wise;  
He's the father of wisdom and knowledge,  
Not the father of evil and lies.

Chorus:—

So we take off our hats to Old Harry,  
With a jeer at Jehovah, the Jew;  
Three cheers for Old Nick,  
He's a regular brick,  
And the very first pick of the two!  
Old Harry once walked on his belly  
(See Jehovah, the "Author" of all);  
But now (*vide* Marie Corelli)  
He's a gentleman, upright and tall.  
We all know a "gent" when we spot one,  
And we've spotted Old Harry, in print;  
He's a regular "toff" is the "hot" one,  
He could give to some tailors a hint.

Chorus:—

And we take off our hats to Old Harry,  
With a jeer at old Jah the undressed.  
Three cheers for Old Hal,  
He could mash any gal  
In the "Row" or the "Mall" in the West!  
This world is a bit overcrowded;  
What a fearful condition, good God,  
'Twould be in if none had been shrouded,  
Had a sepulchre under the sod!  
When a man is decrepit and toothless,  
Death comes as a happy release;  
But, according to Jahveh the ruthless,  
No life, but for Satan, would cease.

Chorus:—

So we take off our hats to Old Harry,  
In our gratitude bare ev'ry head.  
Three cheers for Old Nick,  
He's a regular brick,  
He's a friend of the quick and the dead!

ESS JAY BEE.

The mid-world is best. Nature, as we know her, is no saint. The lights of the Church, the ascetics, Gentoos, and corn-eaters, she does not distinguish by any favor. She comes eating and drinking and sinning. Her darlings, the great, the strong, the beautiful, are not children of our law, do not come out of the Sunday-school, nor weigh their food, nor punctually keep the Commandments.—Emerson.

## The Wesleyans—Balaam's Ass—Jonah's Whale.

Of late years we have not heard very much about those interesting and laughable saints, Messrs. Balaam and Ass, Messrs. Jonah and Whale. As Christians ignore them, Freethinkers have no occasion to refer to them, except now and then in a casual way. Recently, however, they have been resuscitated in a rather unexpected manner. The *Age* (March 6) contains the following note:—

"Faith in the Biblical story of Jonah and the whale was a subject which aroused the Rev. Dr. Watkin to a personal explanation at yesterday's meeting of the Wesleyan Conference. Dr. Watkin said it had been inadvertently represented in the press that he regarded this Biblical incident as mere fable, and some pious Methodists had been greatly stirred over it, and had written to certain persons asking what was to become of Methodism when such men as he held that view. (Laughter.) He would say that he did not regard the story as fable. He had not lost his belief in the miraculous; and he believed that, to serve some moral end, God could make an ass speak, or could make a prophet, who was a fugitive from duty, comfortable inside a whale. (Loud laughter.) The president of the Conference, the Rev. A. R. Edgar, said he had received a letter on the subject, asking that the Rev. Dr. Watkin be brought to his bearings, and requesting that the Conference be asked to declare its belief in Jonah and the whale. It was understood that the matter would again be referred to at a later stage of the Conference."

This is clearly but a very partial report of what was said, but it is enough to show that the subject is now treated as a joke even in religious circles. All theological beliefs go through one and the same course. At first they are held spontaneously, then they are dogmatically propounded as things which *ought* to be believed, and sacerdotally enforced by fraud, bribery, and terror; later they become relaxed; last of all they are joked with and laughed at by even those who profess belief in them. The Devil "finished his course" years ago, and now raises a smile whenever he is named. Adam and Eve; Noah and his flood; Jacob's wrestling bout with God; Moses' vision of God, front and rear; Balaam's talking ass; Joshua's standing sun and moon; Elijah's mount to heaven in a whirlwind, and Christ's virgin birth and Satanic temptations, are all now sources of amusement, more or less, amongst professed believers.

Another fact is made clear by the *Age* note—namely, that Dr. Watkin and his comrades would not have mentioned the affair again but for the fact that "they feared the people." Devoutly silly people, or people who wish to be considered devout, wrote letters about what appeared to be Dr. Watkin's heresy; and he found it necessary to pretend still to believe in miracle, and did *not* regard Jonah and Co. as a fable. Nobody is likely to attach much importance to a heartless protest of that sort.

But fancy "pious Methodists," or any other persons outside lunatic asylums, being "greatly stirred" over the truth or the absurdity of those veritable nursery tales. To what a condition of imbecility will priestly and parsonic teaching and influence reduce people otherwise sane. Left to themselves, people would no more believe the literal truth of the fables in the Bible than they do those of Æsop; but, as no set of sharpers lives upon the pretence that Æsop is inspired, people are left to take their own natural course with his immortal parables. But the Bible tales are different. How? Why, several sets of unmitigated sharpers live by representing the Bible to be all true and all divinely inspired, and they make people believe they will be damned if they do not believe all the book contains. The clergy find this fraud pays them splendidly, and, for fear of losing their hoodwinked customers, they pretend to solemnly believe what brings them power and cash—even such yarns as those of Balaam's Ass and Jonah and the Whale.

I do not care to enter into any formal argument to show these yarns are not credible—that would be to show them infinitely more respect than they deserve.

According to the Bible (Numbers xxii.—xxiv.), Balaam was a necromancer, enchanter, or prophet,

whom Balak, king of Moab, hired to curse Israel. The Lord became nervous over this act of Balak's, and quite lost his head, poor God. He told Balaam not to go to Balak, and then changed his infallible and unalterable and unchangeable mind, and told him to go. Then God got into an almighty rage, and sent one of his cut-throats with a drawn sword to slay the enchanter if he tried to pass a certain place.

Balaam, suspecting nothing, and considering that he was doing as God bade him, was quite unconscious of danger, and failed to see the murderous angel that blocked his way. But the ass, divinely inspired as the beast was, saw the angel and his drawn sword, and budged. The rider said: "Gee up, Athono." But the ass saw what his rider did not, and, not being able to turn round for the narrowness of the lane, he went to the wall, and squeezed Balaam's foot between it and his side. This enraged the holy prophet, and he laid on upon his beast so wrathfully with his stick that the poor donkey could keep silence no longer, but vigorously reproved his rider for his unreasoning cruelty, and gave him a good piece of his mind. Balaam appears to have felt no surprise at the "dumb ass," as Peter says, "speaking with man's voice" to him. Our nursery tales never show any surprise at the speech of animals and birds. In actual life they don't talk, but they do it regularly in fable. We are told the Lord opened the ass's mouth! A most unnecessary act, surely, considering how extremely large an ass's mouth is naturally—and this one was not suffering from lockjaw. Besides, whenever did you meet an ass that could not chatter without help from the Lord, or from any other quarter?

There is one note I must repeat here (for I have often noted the fact before), and that is, that it was the ass that first saw the angel, not Balaam. This, I believe, is ever the case—none but asses ever see angels, devils, ghosts, etc. I know of no exception to that rule. True, some of those who get such visions, who see the invisible and the non-existent, are rational enough in other respects, but are quite gone on angels, etc.

As a proof that Balaam's ass did speak as the blessed Bible describeth, I may direct attention to the fact that in all parts of the world animals, beasts, birds, insects, fishes, etc., *do* speak—in romance, in fables and nursery tales. All the most delightful books upon those subjects would lose all their charm if the animals, etc., did not reason and speak like human beings. And who could speak better than they? Read "Reynard the Fox," for example, and say whether the cleverest barrister that ever lived could beat the fox in argument.

I am not prepared, however, to say that God ever opened an animal's mouth and made or enabled him to speak, as the Bible says was the case with this ass. Those who wrote the Bible gave God all the speech *he* ever had. It is man who opens both the mouths of animals and of God too, and makes them speak his own thoughts and sentiments. No animal ever spoke without man's aid, and no God ever spoke, except as some man inspired and made him speak. The ass we know, and most other talking animals we know; ay, and we know this God too that speaks to man—he is man's self, man's creation, man's own image; nothing more.

When Achilles was going into battle his horse Xanthos held quite a long conversation with him, and even foretold his death. If you are tempted to doubt this gospel truth, read again the case of Balaam's ass. Should the Devil tempt you to doubt the Bible yarn, then strengthen your faith by another dose of Achilles's horse. Or you may pray the Lord to give you grace sufficient to believe both stories; and if you pray sufficiently you are sure to believe. And, remember, you can never save your immortal souls except by believing impossible nonsense.

Let us now turn in a devout and prayerful spirit to the inspired story of Jonah. I wish to say that I have no particular prejudice against any big fish or sea-mammal of any description; and if they wish to swallow a prophet or two now and then, or a few bishops or other clergy, why, let them; for we can well spare them. But, for mercy sake, let them never disgorge them. No doubt they *are* tough and hard, and require a great deal of digestion—cucumbers can be nothing to them in that respect. Still, we do hope that the next whale that swallows a sky-pilot will thoroughly turn him into whalebone and blubber.

A gentleman, or otherwise called "The-word-of-the-Lord," visited Jonah, and gave him orders to go at once to Nineveh. Not fancying the task, Mr. Jonas Jonah packed a few necessaries in his gladstone bag and departed for Joppa, there to book for Tarshish, "to flee from the presence of the Lord."

In those days, I must explain, the Lord and his presence were very limited, for his worshippers had not travelled much, and so had had no chance to "magnify" or expand him. It was comparatively easy then to flee from the presence of the Lord and to visit regions he never knew of. When his worshippers travelled more, their God became more expansive, and also much thinner. Expansion first spoilt him, and then annihilated him.

In this case Jonah reckoned without his host, as we shall see. He went aboard the *Swiftsure*, or some other ship, and was off. So comfortable did he feel that he went to his bunk, turned in, and had a jolly good nap.

In those days Clement Wragge and Co. had not blasphemously taken the weather out of the Lord's hands; and he had all sorts of weather in stock ready to dispense here and there as he saw fit. The Lord was a live God in those days, and could soon let people know what he was about. So he launched one of the biggest storms he had by him after Jonah. The fugitive somehow recognised the breath of God in that storm; some peculiarity about it, not described, must have revealed the fact that, not the Devil, but the Lord, was in that cyclone. Eventually Jonah was flung into the sea. There seems to have been no Board of Trade or other body then in existence to demand an account of every passenger taken aboard, and probably the runaway prophet was never inquired after.

In those days the Lord was up to business. He had visited a large dag, a fish, or sea monster of some unknown sort—species and genus—and fitted him up internally as "lodgings for a single gentleman," who was not expected to have company or visitors. As the Lord prepared the fish himself, you may be sure he made all necessary alterations for the new use it was to be put to. How many rooms he fitted up for the prophet I am unable to say. Let us hope he made a very nice suite for him. How he arranged for light and fire, cooking, washing, etc., is not recorded, nor are we told whether Jonah had a steward or cook aboard with him.

If the prophet's own report of his voyage can be accepted as true, the Lord must have proved an awful bungler in the affair. He had evidently never been in lodgings himself, and knew nothing of lodgers' requirements. Why, Jonah tells him to his face that his lodgings were just as wet as the sea outside, and that even the sea weeds came in and wrapped themselves about his head! So villainously was the place ventilated that the poor fellow says he fainted. The Lord may have "prepared" the fish for Jonah's accommodation, but he must have done it in an awful hurry, or else scamped his work most shamefully. I don't believe he could have recovered his rent in any court in the world.

Well, Jonah soon got sick of the scurvy treatment he was receiving, and the fish, being terribly sick with such an indigestible praying morsel in his stomach, took a strong emetic, and Jonah very soon found himself kicked out of doors, and on dry land again. The fish made off without even asking for his fare.

Such is the yarn that Dr. Watkin has found it necessary to declare that he does not believe to be a fable. Well, why should he? Why should he believe that anything in *Æsop* or in *The Arabian Nights*, or in any of our fairy tales, is a fable? The *Gesta Romanorum*, a book much used in the pulpits in Popish times, tells how a princess was swallowed by a whale, and the whale had to be cut open before he would part with her. She came out quite well.

Arion, a musician, had made himself very rich by his profession, and was on board ship homeward bound, when the seamen determined to murder him for the sake of his money. They flung him into the sea, but the Lord or some other body had prepared "a great fish" for him—a dolphin; and that dolphin swallowed him, took him ashore, and landed him like a gentleman.

Hercules, to destroy a huge monster, jumped down his throat and killed him by "inward applications only."

When he came out his head "was as bald as the palm of your hand." In other respects the hero was no worse.

Fables! gentlemen! Why should we regard these as fables? The Lord, or any other almighty fool or almighty joker, could perpetrate tricks of this kind by the thousand. Why not believe them? You'd better, if you don't want to be damned.

The best confirmation we have of the truth of the Jonah yarn is one told by Lucian, about 1,800 years ago, in his *True History*. He and his companions were at sea, and were chased by a monster just 180 miles and four furlongs in length. This "great fish" swallowed them all up, ship and all, and they went down into what one may call his saloon, where they found a forest growing, and well-tilled fields, for there were plenty of people there.

In this monster they lived, cultivating the ground, and faring remarkably well for about a year and nine months; then they launched their ship and made off in proof that the Jonah yarn is true as gospel, as I believe it to be.

Fables, indeed! If you consider how many precious souls these yarns have saved, and the crowds who have been cheated out of their all by them to enrich the clergy, how can you think them fables? Why, gentlemen, they are amongst the very best paying lies that have ever been told and circulated.

—*Liberator* (Melbourne).

JOS. SYMES.

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### Brain and Soul.

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It should be clearly understood that thought is nothing but the organic function of the brain; and it has to obey the same laws in regard to exertion and repose as any other organic function. The brain can be ruined by overstrain, just like the eyes. As the function of the stomach is to digest, so it is that of the brain to think. The notion of a *soul*—as something elementary and immaterial, merely lodging in the brain and needing nothing at all for the performance of its essential function, which consists in always and unweariably *thinking*—has undoubtedly driven many people to foolish practices, leading to a deadening of the intellectual powers; Frederick the Great, even, once tried to form the habit of doing without sleep altogether. It would be well if professors of philosophy refrained from giving currency to a notion which is attended by practical results of a pernicious character; but then this is just what professional philosophy does, in its old-womanish endeavor to keep on good terms with the catechism. A man should accustom himself to view his intellectual faculties in no other light than that of physiological functions, and to manage them accordingly—nursing or exercising them as the case may be; remembering that every kind of physical suffering, malady, or disorder, in whatever part of the body it occurs, has its effect upon the mind.—*Schopenhauer*.

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### The Humor of Phillips Brooks.

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It does not lessen the dignity of Phillips Brooks's memory to learn from his biographer, Alexander V. G. Allen, of Cambridge, that he had an abounding sense of humor—humor that crops out in a fund of anecdote.

To the person who wondered at the possibility of the whale's swallowing Jonah he said:—

"There was no difficulty. Jonah was one of the minor prophets."

Contrasting the ancient church with the modern, he remarked that the early devout tried to save their young men from being thrown to the lions.

"Now," he added, "we are glad if we can save them from going to the dogs."

A clergyman going abroad talked, in jest, of bringing back a new religion with him.

"You might have some trouble in getting it through the Custom House," someone remarked.

"No," observed Bishop Brooks; "we may take it for granted that a new religion would have no duties attached."

A person, for the sake no doubt of argument, once drew attention to the fact that some men, calling themselves Atheists, seemed to lead moral lives, and Brooks promptly disposed of it.

"They have to," said he. "They have no God to forgive them if they don't."

## The Rev. Z. B. Woffendale at Bay.

TUESDAY evening, June 18, will long be remembered by the persons who witnessed a scene in Hyde Park as unexpected as it was successful from a Freethought standpoint. The Rev. Z. B. Woffendale was announced to lecture from the Christian Evidence Society platform on "The Anti-Slavery Movement: Its Christian Advocates and Atheistic Opponents." This sounded interesting, and I resolved to attend the meeting. Just upon my leaving the office Mr. Charles Watts called, and, hearing of my intention, decided to accompany me—the more readily as he had an account to settle with this reverend gentleman, who never tires of boasting that he is ready to meet the leaders of Freethought in public debate, but when opportunity presents itself gives a now threadbare excuse for crying off. We reached Hyde Park to find Mr. Woffendale already denouncing "those unfeeling Atheists who upheld slavery in America in 1829"; and around that date and the name of Robert Dale Owen did Mr. Woffendale hover for upwards of an hour. So pathetically and persuasively did he sermonise that the sixty or seventy persons then around him (chiefly, as I gathered from their remarks, members of his Somers Town Chapel) must have been quite convinced that slavery was instituted in 1829 by Robert Dale Owen; that the only slaveowners were Atheists and their descendants. As once during his address, when I moved a few steps away, out of sheer weariness at the constant repetition of the aforementioned date and name, Mr. Woffendale, in manner truly clerical, pointedly requested me "not to go away—to stay and take the bitter pills he was preparing for me." I thought it not out of place, when discussion was invited, to put two important questions to him. These, however, he skilfully avoided answering, but preached at me for five minutes. I was about to oppose, but the crowd having recognised Mr. Watts, and Mr. Woffendale having invited him, he mounted the platform. Mr. Watts spoke for twenty minutes at least, showing the fallacies and misrepresentations of Mr. Woffendale, and inquired where in the New Testament had Christ said one word against the organised slavery which then existed. To this Mr. Woffendale was silent, contenting himself, in his reply, by giving an exhortation upon "the love of Christ." Mr. Watts publicly challenged him to debate for two or three nights, and then did this champion of Presbyterianism resort to his time-honored subterfuge to avoid an encounter which Secularists have for the last seven or eight years endeavored to bring about.

Mr. Woffendale declined to debate with Mr. Watts until he had discussed with the President of the N. S. S. Now, it would be absurd to suppose that the President would object to debate with any competent opponent; he has had too many debates to be open to the suspicion of wishing to avoid any representative Christian gentleman, provided the subject and conditions were reasonable, but they never were reasonable, Mr. Woffendale reserving to himself the right to settle the terms and to choose the subject, which was a positive and negative expression of the same thing. See an article in the *Freethinker* (August 5, 1894), which contains a letter from Mr. Foote asking for a joint committee to be formed, whose minute-book and correspondence would show where the fault lay if the proposed debate did not come off. This, of course, did not suit the would-be-thought Christian gladiator, who prefers talk to action, and bombast to argument; who yearns for debate with the leader of the Freethought movement, but proposes conditions that effectually prevent it; who thinks Mr. Watts the most courteous and able of opponents, but really could not meet him.

In point of numbers, seldom has there been seen such a gathering in Hyde Park at 10 o'clock at night, for at least a thousand persons had joined the original audience, and the Secularists present, prior to wishing each other adieu, expressed their gratification at seeing Mr. Woffendale again brought to bay, this time by Mr. Watts, and heartily agreed with that Shakespearean character whom Mr. Woffendale so nearly resembles, that "discretion is the better part of valor."

EDITH M. VANCE.

## What Everybody Says.

WHEN we come to look into the matter, so-called universal opinion is the opinion of two or three persons; and we should be persuaded of this if we could see the way in which it really arises. We should find that it is two or three persons who, in the first instance, accepted it, or advanced and maintained it, and of whom people were so good as to believe that they had thoroughly tested it. Then a few other persons, persuaded beforehand that the first men were of the requisite capacity, also accepted the opinion. These, again, were trusted by many others, whose laziness suggested to them that it was better to believe at once than to go through the troublesome task of testing the matter for themselves. Thus the number of these lazy and credulous adherents grew from day to day; for the opinion had no sooner obtained a fair measure of support than its further supporters attributed this

to the fact that the opinion could only have obtained it by the cogency of its arguments. The remainder were then compelled to grant what was universally granted, so as not to pass for unruly persons who resisted opinions which everyone accepted, or pert fellows who thought themselves cleverer than anyone else. When opinion reaches this stage, adhesion becomes a duty; and henceforward the few who are capable of forming a judgment hold their peace. Those who venture to speak are such as are entirely incapable of forming any opinions or any judgment of their own, being merely the echo of others' opinions; and, nevertheless, they defend them with all the greater zeal and intolerance. For what they hate in people who think differently is not so much the different opinions which they profess as the presumption of wanting to form their own judgment; a presumption of which they themselves are never guilty, as they are very well aware. In short, there are very few who can think, but every man wants to have an opinion; and what remains but to take it ready-made from others, instead of forming opinions for himself. Since this is what happens, where is the value of the opinion even of a hundred millions?—*Schopenhauer*.

## Correspondence.

MR. WATTS AND THE REV. H. J. ALCOCK.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I ask as a subscriber, and in the cause of truth and fair play, permission to correct a misrepresentation of Scripture. Mr. Watts, in his article of last week, writes: "Although Christ is said to have proclaimed 'Blessed be ye poor,' it is only a very few of His professed followers who show the slightest desire to share in the promised 'blessing.'" He puts "blessing" in inverted commas, as though he was quoting the New Testament; so I will ask him kindly to tell us where it teaches poverty is a "blessing."

Mr. Watts (as usual) does not say where he is quoting from; but the only verse which has any appearance of supporting his statement will, on examination (as often before), prove, when read at length, the very reverse. Here it is: "He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said: Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke vi. 20, N. V.). The meaning clearly is that true disciples are blessed, not because of their poverty (when they happen to be poor), but in spite of it, or notwithstanding it; for after a little the kingdom of God will be theirs.

In the immediate subsequent context are three other Beatitudes of exactly the same nature. Thus we are told that true believers are blest, though hungry and sorrowful and excommunicated, because of the glorious hereafter which lies before them. The same interpretation applies to the whole four. Christ distinctly implies that poverty, hunger, sorrow, and excommunication are positive evils, which will be more than compensated for in the future. In other places it is taught, and is verified in Christian experience, that these positive evils may be so overruled for good, even on earth, as to become "blessings in disguise."

As the long article of Mr. Watts draws all its apparent force from the misrepresentation of Scripture which I have discussed, its reasoning does no injury to Christian doctrine.

(REV.) HENRY J. ALCOCK.

## FLOGGING IN THE ARMY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—With reference to the recently reported case of flogging on board a transport vessel carrying mules from Naples to Port Elizabeth, may I say that I have obtained wide publicity for the facts relating thereto? The sentence, as I have already pointed out, is absolutely illegal, and the matter will, I understand, receive the attention of Parliament at the earliest possible moment.

Twenty years ago, when, to quote the words of a famous Irishman, the cat-o'-nine-tails was snatched out of the aristocratic hands which had lashed the backs and bleeding sides of the English "common soldier" for horrible generations, it was established up to the hilt that it was impossible to make good soldiers by punishments which only harden and degrade. Mr. Bradlaugh, who had seen some service, said that "men who once felt the lash were not loyal to any command, and they felt a bitterness and an abhorrence of everyone connected with the ordering of the punishment."

It is said that recruits for the services are hard to get; this, surely, is not to be wondered at, with the "cat" and the birch still in use in military and naval prisons for offences which, in Irish and Scotch civil prisons, are not legally floggable.

JOSEPH COLLINSON,

Hon. Secretary, Prison Reform Committee,  
Humanitarian League.

Providence is the Christian name of Chance.—*Chamfort*.

## 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.): Closed for the summer.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell-road): 7, Congress meeting—Speakers, Stanton Coit and Joseph McCabe.

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, High-street): 11, Stanton Coit, "General Aims of the Union of Ethical Societies."

WEST LONDON BRANCH ("The Victory," Newnham-street, Edgware-road): July 4, at 8.30, Monthly meeting.

### OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, W. J. Ramsey, "The Bible as a Book of Humor."

BROCKWELL PARK (S. L. E. S.): 11.30, Mr. Swann.

BROCKWELL PARK: 3.15, J. W. Cox; 6.30, R. P. Edwards, "Blasphemy."

STATION-ROAD (Camberwell): 11.30, J. W. Cox, "Who's Who? What's What?"

CLERKENWELL GREEN: 11.30, E. White, "From John the Baptist to Judas Iscariot."

EDMONTON (corner of Angel-road): 7, C. Cohen, "Christianity."

FINSBURY PARK (near Band Stand): 3.30, C. Cohen, "Benefits of Belief."

HAMMERSMITH BROADWAY: 7.30, E. White, "Did Christ Rise from the Dead?"

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, C. Cohen, "Atheism and its Writers"; 3.30, W. J. Ramsey, "The Resurrection"; 7, Freethought Demonstration—Addresses by Messrs. G. W. Foote, C. Watts, and C. Cohen.

MILE END WASTE: 11.30, F. Davies, "Thomas Paine"; 7.15, S. E. Easton, "Where will you Spend Eternity?" July 3, at 8.15, W. J. Ramsey.

PECKHAM RYE: 3.15, R. P. Edwards, "Mark Twain's Greeting."

STRATFORD (The Grove): 7, W. J. Ramsey, "I was in Prison."

VICTORIA PARK: 3.15, F. Davies, "Creed and Conduct"; 6.15, E. B. Rose, "Blasphemy: Real and Fictitious."

KINGSLAND (corner of Ridley-road): 11.30, R. P. Edwards.

### COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH: 11, in the Bull Ring, F. Hanks, "The Bishop of Worcester's Dilemma."

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

GLASGOW: Annual excursion of the Secular Society to Loch Thom. Train leaves St. Enoch at 7.50 a.m. Friends are requested to bring their own provisions. Tea only provided.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, F. J. Gould, "A Greek Story from Browning."

NEWCASTLE: H. P. Ward—11 (Quayside, east of Boat Landing), "Why I Dare not be a Christian"; 7 (Town Moor, near Military Sports Stand), "The Gospel of Secularism."

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Members and friends will go by 1.55 Midland train to Rotherham, for Clifton Park and Museum.

### Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 241 High-road, Leyton.—June 30, m., Hyde Park; a., Finsbury Park; e., Edmonton.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham.—June 30, Newcastle-on-Tyne. July 7, 14, 21, 28, Birmingham.

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