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The Religious Crisis.

THERE is nothing remarkably striking or new in the phrase "religious crisis"—at least, so far as Christianity is concerned—for the history of that religion has been from its very inception a series of crises. From when it is said that Christ died on the Cross, to the present time, conflicts and alarms have marked its career. But the crisis through which the Christian religion is now passing transcends in significance and magnitude all the struggles of the past. If it be true that "coming events cast their shadows before," it requires no prophetic genius to foretell the ultimate fate of orthodox Christianity. It lacks the inherent vitality to withstand the demands of modern thought. Like other phases of superstition, it will continue to change its forms and lose its essential parts until it will "leave not a rack behind."

Freethinkers are not alone in forming this estimate of the present (for orthodox believers) serious position of Christianity, for no less an authority than Professor Pfeiderer, of Berlin, stated recently, in a paper read before the International Council of Unitarian and other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers, held at Essex Hall, London:—

"It is an acknowledged fact that the Christian religion is at present involved in a crisis which appears to be of a graver nature, both in scope and in character, than any previous conflict. In scope, because it is no longer confined to the upper classes, but has seized hold of the great masses; and in character, because doubt and contradiction have passed beyond the outworks of hierarchical abuses and patristic or scholastic dogmas, and have attacked the very foundations of religious belief..... The religious crisis of to-day rests on a combination of new scientific modes of thought with new social ideals, such as has never presented itself before."

The Professor admits that—

"When biology presents man as the final fruit of a long development from a primitive cell, it indisputably satisfies the understanding with its search for causes far better than the childish representation that God had moulded the human frame out of a clod, and blown into it the breath of life."

He adds what some would term a saving clause by asserting that, in addition to the material organisation, "a spiritual principle" is needed; but he does not attempt to explain what this alleged principle is. He grants that it does not "permit of experimental proof, and may be, consequently, rejected; but science has no right to deny it." Of course it has not. It is not the province of science either to affirm or deny that of which experience knows nothing. But the Professor exclaims:—

"What does it matter whether God created man out of an inorganic clod or out of a primitive cell destined to develop into a thousand forms of life—whether he produced him in a single day or in the millenniums before the human race first appeared on earth?"

It matters this much: that the Bible teaches that man was created out of "an inorganic clod in a single day" about six thousand years ago, while science furnishes no evidence of such creation, and supplies undoubted proof that man has existed upon the earth for millions of years prior to the time assigned for his origin by the writer of the book of Genesis. The Professor himself says:—

"The Biblical tradition presents man as created perfect, in the likeness of God, and fallen from this elevation by his own fault; while the theory of evolution

exhibits him as issuing from the lowest animal conditions, and only rising amid prolonged and severe struggle for existence to higher stages of human civilisation. The whole course of history is thus reversed."

The Professor next states a significant truism. He says:—

"Another important step has been taken by the religious consciousness with the aid of modern science. It is the axiom of physical science that every event in space and time stands under the absolute sovereignty of the law of causation. The chain of cause and effect, therefore, can never be interrupted by supernatural acts or 'miracles.'"

Just so; hence the fallacy of the Christian doctrines of the prayer of supplication and special providence. If, as Secularists believe, no "supernatural acts" can interfere with the law of causation, where is the utility of appealing to God in "the hour of need"? Some of the most cherished words in the New Testament are those which tell the sincere believer that he has a Father in heaven who will answer prayer and grant solicited requests. Christ said: "What things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye shall receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark xi. 24). When danger threatens, human skill is of more service than reliance on the Christian Providence; and, when disease approaches, medical aid is of greater value than all the priestly supplications. Those whom science cannot save will surely die, despite the promises of Christ and the faith of his followers. When we see and hear of such sad catastrophes as explosions in mines, which deprive wives and children of their husbands and fathers; of earthquakes engulfing dwellings with their inmates; of avalanches suddenly sweeping all before them; of floods devastating whole towns and sacrificing thousands of human lives; and of ships wrecked at sea where no aid can reach them—when these appalling horrors overwhelm us with grief, how can we believe in the efficacy of prayer or the reality of an over-ruling Providence who could, but would not, prevent such heartrending calamities? The following noble and sympathetic appeal of Mirando to Prospero, on witnessing a shipwreck, should put to shame the Christian Deity, if he exist:—

If by your art, my dearest Father, you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them:
The sky it seems would pour down stinking pitch
But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek,
Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffer'd
With those that I saw suffer! A brave vessel,
Who had no doubt some noble creatures in her,
Dashed all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perished;
Had I been any God of power I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth, or e'er
It should the good ship so have swallowed, and
The freighting souls within her.

What the Professor says of "the commanding influence of Christ," of "redemption" through him, and his social achievement, savors more of the emotional pleader than of the accurate reasoner. It has been urged again and again in the columns of this journal that the boasted beneficial influence of Christ at the present day is simply a theological fiction. If it is not so, let some of the clerical readers of the *Freethinker* try to prove the statement false. What they say upon this subject shall have my earnest attention. But it will be necessary for them to give facts, not merely to state opinions. Four questions are submitted to these rev. gentlemen. (1) From what evils has Christ redeemed us? (2) What social reforms did he initiate? (3) What physical science did he teach? (4) Where in this country to-day are his injunctions

in operation? It is quite time the masses had something more tangible presented to them than stereotyped phrases and old orthodox assertions. The over-credulous believers have been too long misled by theological pretensions and traditional repetitions. Fortunately, one of the marked features of the religious crisis through which Christianity is now passing is a desire upon the part of thoughtful men and women to have proof for allegations made by the expounders of that faith which is claimed to be based upon the New Testament. The truth of Volney's words is more than ever recognised, that "To believe without evidence and demonstration is an act of ignorance and folly."

Professor Pfeleiderer by no means stands alone in his detection of the inroads of scepticism within the religious fold. At the recent Wesleyan Methodist Conference at Newcastle a letter was read from the local bishop, in which he said: "More and more Christian men are recognising that the real conflict is between the forces of our Lord Jesus Christ on the one side, and indifference, unbelief, and open sin on the other." Dr. Davidson, the President of the Conference, also said:—

"Many changes in thought had occurred during the life of most present. The creation of the world, the history of the world, evolution in its bearing on organic and inorganic matter, the reign of law in its bearing on miracles; God, what he is; his relation to mankind; the Bible, sin—on many of these questions thought was very different now from that of old. Their literature was feeling the effects of this change, so was the teaching in their elementary schools. There was a growing restlessness of faith among women, and that was very serious, for it touched the very fountain-head of the life of the nation."

Yes, it is true that "many changes" have taken place in the realms of thought in reference to the very basic teachings of Christianity, and still further changes are going on. It is now exceedingly difficult to distinguish what the original faith really was, and ere long, as education in its truest sense increases, and independent thought still further advances, the primitive features of Christianity will have entirely disappeared, leaving only its name to indicate it from other decayed superstitions. We are glad to see it acknowledged that there is a "growing restlessness of faith among women." As this increases, the stronghold of orthodoxy will have to yield, for its great support hitherto has been feminine emotion. When woman shakes off the shackles of theology, the machinations of the priests will be doomed.

CHARLES WATTS.

Sunday-Schools.

THERE are Sunday-schools *and* Sunday-schools. One has nothing to say, for instance, against purely secular Sunday-schools, or such schools as the Sunday adult classes in Birmingham, where secular instruction is imparted. But the ordinary religious Sunday-schools—the church or chapel-schools, the creed-and-dogma teaching-traps for fledglings—what shall we say of them?

I know what I have said of them when the recollection has occurred to me of the Sunday-school I was sent to as a boy. I swear at that sort of school now, as I wished to swear at it then, being only prevented by the false notion that to use strong words of denunciation in regard to it would be a sin. At the present day I look back, and think the sin exists in the Sunday-school institution itself rather than in the young rebellious spirit, who resents the wearisome religious rubbish and close confinement imposed upon him, and longs only for the time when he can rush out by the open door into free and fresh air.

O, the sickening stuff I was expected to learn, as they said, "by heart." It meant a tax on the memory, but there was nothing that affected the heart or the understanding. There were some silly old collects for the day that I was expected to repeat. I have read them several times since, and I feel a righteous sort of indignation that, as a trusting juvenile, I should have been so much imposed upon by my elders, who ought to have known better.

An old Church catechism book that I was drilled in to my intense disgust I remember still. I can smell

the horrid thing at the present moment. It had a peculiar odor that belonged to the binding, but seemed to be associated with the text. Both the binding and the text were intensely disagreeable and distasteful. There were long words in this book, such as "Baptismal Regeneration," "Justification by Faith," "Predestination," etc. I never understood them then. I am glad I did not worry myself much about them at the time. Now, I know that the people who are responsible for these terms do not know (according to their critics) what they mean, and there are endless squabbles as to their application. This is where the boy, grown old, laughs.

The verses of Scripture which were read out at the Sunday-school class were never really understood. The teacher did not understand them himself. How could he, poor man? I see his difficulties now, and can appreciate them. Later knowledge explains his often-puzzled looks and doubtful, hesitating interpretations.

According to the *Church Times*, "the average Sunday-school is the weakest feature in the modern parochial system." There are many weak features about the modern parochial system, the weakest often being the vicar or rector. But the fact that the Sunday-school system is on the decline need hardly be mentioned. Statistics showing the falling-off and the accompanying clerical complaints have been reproduced from time to time in these columns. They admit of no dispute. It is probably the recognition of this fact that causes the *Church Times* to publish a long editorial article on the subject. It says: "Too often the Sunday-school is left to take its chance, is conducted with an almost total lack of method, and is perhaps even less efficient now than it was half a century ago." The present writer is pleased to say that he does not remember what the Church Sunday-school was half a century ago, but accepts the assurance of the *Church Times* that it was better then than now. Similar complaints as to a falling-off in numbers, both of teachers and scholars, and a general decline in efficiency, are made by Dissenting Churches, too.

"As you pass the door of the school a noise is heard like that which proceeds from the Zoo at feeding time." These are the words of the *Church Times* in regard to a typical school. They do not suggest a too favorable opinion of Sunday-schools on the part of that High Church organ. But we must really give something that follows:—

"Here is a young lady, whose religious education has been that usually given in fashionable boarding-schools, endeavoring to teach the creed to a class of sharp-witted and irreverent children, who delight in asking inconvenient questions. Another 'teacher' has abandoned all pretence of instruction in despair, and is reading a book of fairy-tales to her class, in the desperate hope of bribing them into comparative quiet. The boys' room is simply a pandemonium; and the lady in charge of it is almost in tears. If only she could prevent Tommy from running pins into Jack, and Bill from using the inkpots as missiles, she would feel that she would have discharged to the full the duties of a Sunday-school teacher. As it is, she is conscious of failure, and looks imploringly at the clock, to see if the dreadful hour is not over for another week."

The *Church Times*' description of a country Sunday-school is hardly less favorable. Here, it says, there may be less insubordination. "The children seem to be learning fairly quietly, but what are they learning? Yes, what are they learning? Let the *Church Times* reply:—

"First, they have repeated the collect for the day, most likely without the least comprehension of or care for its meaning. Then some of the teachers 'tell them stories,' others do make an effort to give some spiritual tone to the lesson, but the simple truth too often is that they themselves know so little that they are quite incapable of teaching others. The vicar does not attend, but he has satisfied himself by holding a teachers' class from time to time, at which he more often delivers a short sermon than gives his teachers any real material for their lessons. As to the fitness of the teachers, he does not care to inquire too closely. Since the squire's daughter has volunteered to take a class, she must be allowed to do so. The important fact is, not that she has no real knowledge of Christian dogma, and is absolutely incompetent as a teacher, but that she is the squire's daughter. Even when the parish priest has found a teacher not quite unworthy of the name, that person will neglect her task

on the slightest of excuses. 'I shall be away next Sunday,' she remarks casually, 'but it will be all right; Miss So-and-So will be staying at our house, and she can take my class.' Whether her deputy has the slightest qualification for religious teaching is a point which she does not pause to consider. Sometimes there are petty disputes and jealousies between the teachers. At others, when a definite course of instruction has been mapped out by the parish priest, one of the teachers deliberately will ignore it. Many of them spend no time at all in preparing the lessons; they undertake the work in a spirit of light-hearted responsibility, and as a kind of personal favor to the incumbent."

Is it surprising that the official figures of the Church Year-book show that the Sunday attendance steadily decreases, in spite of the growth of the population? The Wesleyan Conference recently had to deplore a similar falling-off, not only in the number of scholars, but of the teaching-staff.

What is the object of Sunday-schools? Originally their main purpose seems to have been to afford elementary instruction which should at least enable the scholars, young or old, to read the Scriptures. Now, most of this rudimentary work is done by the Board-schools, and so we have, added to the course of teaching, the inculcation of dogma and a considerable amount of religious rubbish that the child has afterwards to unlearn.

Sunday-schools, as they are evidently on the decline, may well be left to drop out of existence. I do not say this as a Freethinker, but rather as a Humanitarian—a sympathiser with the rising generation, who have so many demands made upon them by the Board-schools and other educational institutions during the week that they ought really to be free to play and frolic about on Sundays. I do not say that we are suffering from over-education, but that there is a disposition to make it too rapid. As to the absurd theological nonsense which is mainly taught at Sunday-schools, the sooner that is dropped the better.

FRANCIS NEALE.

Thais.

It is a nice question whether the historian or the man of letters makes the better teacher, and it is one that is by no means easy to decide. The "gradgrinds" of the intellectual world will doubtless swear by the "facts" of the historian, forgetting that the materials with which the novelist works are as veritable facts as are the lists of names, dates, places, and events with which the historian fills his pages. Historic facts are, after all, born of human nature; they are the outcome of its varied strengths and weaknesses, and their right appreciation is consequently dependent upon a correct understanding of the life of which they are the expression.

It is at this point that the man of letters, the novelist—using that much-abused word in its higher sense—fits himself rationally into the order of things. He does not tie himself down to the literal facts of history, for the reason that he is not primarily concerned with them. His subject-matter consists rather in those passions or aspects of human nature which, whether taken in either their simple or their complex form, are yet true of all times and places. His concern with history is not with the record of events as such, but only as they illustrate the human feelings he is engaged in depicting. The primary concern of the historian is the exact recital of actual events; the primary concern of the novelist is to depict human nature, and to utilise actual occurrences only so far as they serve this purpose.

Both methods have their place and their value. We turn to the historian for a record of what actually happened on any given occasion, and expect him, provided he does his work faithfully, to neither add to nor take from these occurrences. But we are too apt to lose sight of the fact that the men and women whose names pass before us in the pages of an historian are veritably men and women like ourselves, and that the same feelings that move us moved them likewise. It is here that the man of letters lends a helping hand, and enables us to realise that, separated by the gulf of centuries though we may be, the societies of old Rome and Greece, of half-buried Egypt and of disintegrated Chaldea, were composed of our flesh and blood, and that, in spite of differences of knowledge and of social

habits, the same fundamental instincts operated then that operate now.

It is in this manner that literature acts as a vitalising force, and makes the dry bones of the past instinct with life and feeling. It is true that one would not go to Fielding, or Smollett, or Thackeray, or Eliot, or even to Scott, for a quite trustworthy record of names, dates, or events; but it is also true that, once we have settled these details, it is the magic of writers such as these that helps us to see the real materials by which history is made, just as, in other directions, one may acquire a better appreciation of human nature in its relation to actual life from the pages of writers like Meredith or Hardy than from a bulky philosophical treatise.

If it is difficult for the average reader to adequately picture the human aspect of what we may call the normal periods of history, the difficulty becomes greater still where we have to deal with those strange waves of delusion, almost of insanity, that have from time to time swept over the world. In the pages of Gibbon and later writers we read, for instance, of that epidemic of asceticism which forms such a curious and repulsive feature of early Christianity; but how many of those who read properly realise the *human* aspect of the story? Not many, I fear. The story is read, not as the record of men and women who were torn away from social and domestic obligations, and condemned to the observance of sterile virtues and revolting customs, whereas under other conditions they might have played a serviceable part in the evolution of their kind, but rather as an account that is both strange and curious, but which has to do with a somewhat different order of beings to ourselves. Were it properly realised what this chapter in Christian history really means from the standpoint of race-development, the steady weeding out of those who were best fitted to perpetuate the race, the hardening of character and brutalising of mind consequent upon monkish practices, the destruction of all manliness of character, and the holding up of the servile qualities as the ideal for men and women to aspire to—were all this properly seen, indignation against historic Christianity might soon take the place of the current half-maudlin expressions concerning the benefits Christianity has conferred upon the world.

But what cannot always be achieved by the historian may more often be effected by the man of letters, and it is when one picks up a book like Flaubert's *Temptation of St. Antony*, or such as the one now before me,* that it is realised that these monks and nuns, half demented though they might be, and bestialised as they might become through the force of their religious mania, were yet of our flesh and blood, whose worst features were often the result of their being in the grasp of an over-mastering religious delusion.

Although published in France over four years ago, *Thais* has only just made its appearance in the form of an English translation, and the excellent get-up of the volume—special hand-made paper, good type, and dainty binding—serves as a fitting introduction to the story itself. According to the monkish legend, Paphnutius was one of the monks of the Thebald, who, fired by the stories he had heard of the beauty and life of Thais, a celebrated Alexandrian courtesan and actress, called upon her disguised as an admirer, succeeded in convincing her of the evil of the life she was leading, and enrolled her as one of the numberless horde of ascetics whose only method of demonstrating their love to God was by making plain their intense hatred of everything decently human.

Upon this legend M. France has built his story. He has also followed, so far as the purely dramatic portion of the book is concerned, the play of *Paphnuce*, first published at the beginning of the sixteenth century, but attributed to a nun said to have lived some six centuries earlier. I do not find any acknowledgment of this, but the indebtedness is obvious. In the old play the motive was simple. It was the good Christian *versus* the wicked Pagan, with the latter rescued from an evil life by the insuperable goodness of the former, the whole serving as a groundwork for a glorification of the ascetic virtues. In *Thais*, it is almost needless to say to

* *Thais*. By Anatole France. (Carrington & Co., London and Paris.)

those who know the writings of Anatole France, the simple machinery of *Paphnuce* is replaced by graceful wit and epigrammatic irony. Thais herself still remains a somewhat unconvincing character, but the monk has undergone a complete transformation; and beneath the surface of religious phrases we are shown, in a series of suggestive pictures, the real motives which lead to the resolve to "convert" Thais, and also the revolt of one side of human nature against the trammels of a stupid theology.

The central theme of *Thais*, as with *St. Antony*, is the rising of the "flesh" against the "spirit"—to drop into theological jargon for a moment. In one sense, the two works may be regarded as complementary. In *St. Antony* we have in the main the struggle of the intellect against asceticism. In *Thais* this element is almost absent; we see, instead, the struggle of a passion almost entirely, although largely unconsciously, sexual. This is portrayed without any of the fierce realism of Zola, but it is none the less clear on that account. A thousand little artistic touches—from the opening of the book, where it is the remembrance the monk carries of Thais as he knew her in his degenerate days, through the scene of his savage fury against those whom he discovers to have been her paramors, on to the last scene of all, where the news of her approaching decease gives rise to a burst of animal passions that breaks down the barriers of his ascetic training, and sends him hastening to the death-bed of his convert—make plain the nature of the conflict raging within him.

The three parts into which the work is divided, describing the absurd austerities of the monks and depicting the ingrained selfishness of the monastic life, give the occasion for a great many pieces of caustic satire at the expense, not merely of a particular theology, but of religious ideas generally. Notably is this the case in the description of the banquet scene, to which Paphnuce has gone in the hope of converting Thais. Paphnuce finds himself in the company of a number of Pagans, who satirise unmercifully his beliefs and his ideals. The following passage, in which Nicias, the philosopher, discusses the Christian Deity, will serve as a sample. Marcus, a follower of Arius, whom Paphnuce, as a disciple of Athanasius, dislikes even more than he does a downright unbeliever, is declaring that he believes "in an only God, not begotten—the only Eternal, the origin of all things," and Nicias breaks through the meaningless jargon by saying:—

"We know, Marcus, that your God created the world. That must certainly have been a great crisis in his existence. He had already existed an eternity before He had made up His mind to it. But I must in justice confess that His situation was a most difficult one. He must continue inactive if He would remain perfect, and must act if He would prove to Himself His own existence. You assure me that He decided to act. I am willing to believe you, although it was an unpardonable imprudence on the part of a perfect God."

The "plot" of M. France's book need not detain us. It is far more of an essay in the form of a novel than a novel proper. The object is obviously not so much to tell a story as to enforce a lesson, and even to-day it cannot be truthfully said that the teaching indicated is superfluous. We have not yet quite outgrown the Christian teaching that in some way we are pleasing God by treating innocent pleasures and natural functions as though they were sinful or degrading. In its worst form this teaching expressed itself in the practices that are portrayed in M. France's book; but the same influence is to be traced in the religious treatment of a day of rest, as in other matters of even greater moment. In the name of religion people were taught for centuries that everything natural was necessarily degrading; in the name of religion marriage was treated as a permissible evil, and the family as an encumbrance to a godly life; and in the name of religion man is still prevented from dealing with life in such a manner as would compel it to yield the greatest happiness and prosperity. If *Thais* does naught else, it at least enforces the lesson that it is the harmonious development of every aspect of human nature which constitutes perfect men and women; that whoso stunts one portion necessarily injures the whole; and that the evolution of a complete character can be achieved only by a proper recognition and appreciation of every function and faculty in the economy of human existence.

C. COHEN.

Christian Infamies.

AMONG the attractions of the annual Fair at Boulogne is an exhibition of unique interest, a terrible souvenir of the Spanish Inquisition. It comprises the actual appliances used by Holy Mother Church for the suppression of heretics. These instruments make a sickening collection, one that may possibly do harm; but in that most Catholic city of Boulogne, where the *photos d'après nature* in the shop windows repose on the same shelf with crucifixes, and where the Calvary surmounting the cliffs looks down upon the Casino gambling-hell, it will certainly do much good.

The following items are selected from the catalogue:—

The Mask of Ignomy.—An iron arrangement weighing some thirty pounds. After a few hours the pain caused to the wearer became intolerable.

The Boot.—The victim was placed upon a chair, and one of his feet encased in this horrible contrivance, into which was poured boiling oil or pitch.

The Thumbscrew.—Applied to those who were not sufficiently patient during their "trial."

The Nuremberg Hatchet.—Anyone menacing a priest with gesture of hand or foot had the offending member severed by this instrument.

L'Arrache-Langue.—A device for forcibly removing the tongues of those who spoke against the Inquisition.

The Spider.—Applied to women accused of suckling the children of heretics. Its object was to incapacitate them from further offence in this direction by violently tearing out their breasts. (*Avoir les seins violemment arrachés.*)

The Bastille Pillory.—For those condemned to starve in the damp dungeons. To increase their suffering the choicest viands were placed before them.

Branding Iron.—To mark the bodies of those who refused to give to the Holy Office. Afterwards they were placed upon the Index.

The Garrotte.—Used for strangling those who recanted before going to the stake. That was the only grace they could obtain.

The Pater Noster.—An arrangement for applying to the hands of those condemned to the *auto-da-fé*. It held them together in the attitude of prayer.

The Brodequin.—An instrument for placing upon the legs. When closed, the blunt points with which the interior was furnished entered the *tibia* and crippled the victim for life.

The Pear of Anguish.—This was inserted in the mouths of those who inconvenienced the Inquisitors by their cries. By turning a screw the mouth could be indefinitely distended, and articulation rendered impossible.

Serre-Tête.—A band of iron placed around the victim's head and then contracted. This was applied to those who wrote or spoke against the Inquisition.

These, and many other instruments of torture, are exhibited, and their application is, in some cases, illustrated with the aid of wax models. But this is not all. Separately enclosed in crystal caskets are four terrible figures, the actual remains of tortured heretics. The only specimens of their kind, they were discovered in 1861 in the Convent of San Domingo, at Mexico, embedded in a wall thirteen feet thick. The want of air and the dryness of the place are supposed to account for their wonderful preservation. They are, in fact, much better preserved than some of the mummies at the British Museum. The ample documentary evidence of genuineness with which these exhibits are accompanied is superfluous. To the observant eye no doubt is possible.

Assuredly here is one of the most terrible sights possible to witness. The contortion caused by the desperate struggles of these four victims, the significant marks of the binding cords, the expression of the fleshless faces, all make an *ensemble* at which the most intrepid imagination might recoil. In each case the physique and cranial development are good. These men were not degenerates; they were thinkers and fighters in their time.

I can imagine the Protestant reading this, and saying: "What has all this to do with me? The Inquisitors were Catholics."

Such an objection could be made only by one who

knew less of his Bible than of pulpit platitudes. For it cannot be too often insisted that such villainies as these are the logical outcome of Christ's reputed teaching; nay, more, they receive his absolute sanction.

Torture was commonly applied in Jesus's time for the most trivial offences, and he gave it the sanction of his silence. If he failed to rebuke its application in such cases, is it likely that he would condemn its use against those whom he deemed the worst of malefactors?

The Inquisitor might well reason in this wise: You ask me why I kill this man. In return, I might ask you why you kill a murderer. But Christ declared the apostle of infidelity to be far worse than a murderer. "Fear not them which kill the body," said he, "but rather fear them which are able to destroy both body and soul in hell." And again: "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee; for it is profitable to thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." Would you have the Inquisition flout the express wishes of Christ? You ask me why I put heretics to the question. It is because I believe there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than in ninety-and-nine just persons who need no repentance. What is the welfare of that poor body of his to the salvation of his immortal soul? If we put a hundred heretics to the torture, and one retracts his heresy, we are well repaid. Place a single soul in the balance, and how many bodies, think you, can equal it?

The Inquisitor might well reason in that wise, and a whole school of modern pulpiteers could not gainsay him. He could quote Scripture at every sentence of his argument; and, if they quoted Scripture against him, as they doubtless would, his authority would still be as good as theirs.

The Christian, before he boasts of the power of Christianity, might remember the means of its propagation. It might then occur to him that its power argues not so much the goodness of God as the savagery of man. And he might even come to learn, if he were honest and intelligent enough, that it is no more the prerogative of his paltry creed to help the march of progress than of the fetishism of the South Sea Islands; that the march of progress will continue, steady, strong, and ultimately triumphant; and then, and not till then, the varying dogmas which have always been reflections, and never luminaries, will fade away before the brighter orb of knowledge, like the waning of the distant worlds before the monarch of them all.

E. R. WOODWARD.

Just what Jesus Did.

ONLY a very few people seem to realise how little Jesus did during his career on earth. Of course we speak on the authority of his four biographers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. No one can read buried history. We cannot dig through twenty centuries of human existence and change of oblivion to reality. If Jesus did more than is told in the New Testament, there is no way now of restoring the broken statue of his life. Only a few incidents of his career are preserved, and these are more or less under the suspicion of being fabrications. The truth is, there was no real Jesus, and the manufactured performances of the Gospel hero are not those that come from human brain or human hand.

To do as Jesus is said to have done is to do the impossible. The only explanation of a miracle is that it is a falsehood. Truth did not write the four gospels.

We have examined the so-called footprints of Jesus, and we find that they were made by another person. Who made them nobody knows. There is a distinct ecclesiastical atmosphere that surrounds the New Testament narrative. It looks as though some interested liar wrote the four gospels.

Mark has a somewhat different story to tell from Matthew, and yet, upon examination, we find it to be simply the old tune with variations.

According to Mark, Jesus began his career by preaching. We next find him calling certain fishermen to follow him (i. 20).

Next he cast an unclean spirit out of a man (i. 25).

He cured Simon's wife's mother of a fever (i. 31).

He healed divers diseases (i. 34).

He went into a solitary place to pray (i. 35).

He preached in all Galilee and cast out devils (i. 39).

He healed a leper; probably the same fellow that Matthew reported (i. 41).

He forgave the sins of a palsied man and cured him of the palsy (ii. 5).

He went through the cornfields on the Sabbath (ii. 23).

He restored the withered hand of a man on the Sabbath day (iii. 5).

He ordained twelve men to go out as his disciples and heal as he healed (iii. 13-15).

He refused to see his mother and his brothers (ii. 34).

He taught parables, as in Matthew (iv.).

He rebuked the winds and calmed the sea with a word (iv. 39).

He repeated the miracle of sending devils into a herd of swine (v. 13).

He cured a sick girl by laying his hands upon her (v. 23).

He restored the woman with an issue of blood for twelve years by allowing her to touch his clothes (v. 34).

He raised up the sleeping daughter of the ruler of the synagogue's house (v. 42).

He wrought the miracle of feeding five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes (vi. 41-44).

He walked upon the sea (vi. 48).

He cast the devil out of the daughter of a Greek woman (vii. 29).

He returned sound and speech to a deaf and dumb man (vii. 35).

He again repeated the miracle of feeding the multitude, this time with seven loaves and a few small fishes (viii. 1-9).

He gave sight to a blind man (viii. 25).

He rode into Jerusalem on an ass (xi. 11).

He drove out the money-changers from the temple (xi. 15).

He cursed the fig tree (xi. 21).

He taught the people in parables (xii.).

He died on a cross (xv. 25).

He rose from the grave (xvi. 6).

He went up into heaven (xvi. 19).

There is little difference in the gospel-stories of Matthew and Mark. They agree in most essential points as to what Jesus did—that is, they repeat the current falsehoods in nearly the same language.

The same criticism which we made upon the incidents in the career of Jesus as reported by Matthew are equally applicable to the narrative of Mark.

1. Almost any man can preach, but most preaching does not amount to much.

2. Who can cast out an unclean spirit? What is an unclean spirit? A spirit of any kind is a mystery.

3. Any doctor can cure fever.

4. Praying is such a common practice that there is nothing astonishing about it.

5. Anybody can pray, if they do not know any better; but to imitate Jesus in this act would only be waste of time.

6. Healing lepers is "easier said than done."

7. Casting out devils to-day would tax the ingenuity of a Talmage.

8. Palsy may be cured, but not by saying: "Thy sins be forgiven."

9. It is easy to go through a field on Saturday, or on Sunday. Contempt for Sunday laws is almost a duty, and it is necessary at times even now to violate the statutes in order to assert human rights.

10. In refusing to see his mother and his brothers Jesus showed the kind of religion he taught.

11. Fishermen, and captains of ocean steamers, would be glad to possess the power to still the tempest and calm the sea with a word, or even with an oath.

12. The miracles of healing reported in the gospels do not help doctors to-day, and there is no chair of "laying-on of hands" at any of our universities.

13. Feeding crowds on nothing, or next to nothing, is a trick that would pay a good dividend at a Christian camp-meeting.

14. Where is the man who can follow the steps of Jesus on the water? Can Sheldon?

15. Cursing trees does not kill them in this age.

16. No human body imitates Jesus to-day by coming out of the grave.

17. Who follows, not the steps of Jesus, but his flight through the air, as he went up into heaven?

We submit that in the acts of Jesus, as reported by Mark, there is little that man can follow, and little that would benefit him to follow.

—*Boston Investigator.*

A Freethought Christening.

"MILDRED shall be thy name. May the blessings of liberty, of freedom in all thought and action, of purity of life, ever be thine. May no sorrow ever cross thy life, and may no man ever place before thy path an obstruction to the noble and natural cravings of your soul." These were the words of baptism of little Mildred Vlcheck, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Vlcheck, of No. 26 Humboldt-street, yesterday afternoon. The words were not those of priest or preacher or orthodox creed, but of Mrs. Marie Rokusek, the president of the Vlastimila, a society of Bohemian women devoted to Freethought. The society is of national scope, and has both literary, social, and beneficial functions. In this city its membership is about 1,000, mostly of women who are compelled to work for a living, or whose husbands belong to the lower walks of life. In the Vlastimila is found nearly the whole of their mental and social lives, and as one of the members expresses it: "Here we remember that we are women, and cherish the ideals of free womanhood." No bar to Christians is placed in the constitution, but the rolls are composed almost entirely of those who have no Church affiliations.

After the regular meeting the society celebrated its first christening, if it could be so called. The child's mother was a member of the order, and wished the society to give her first daughter a name. The ceremonies were simple, and at the same time most impressive, made so by the earnestness and pathos of the appeal to the parents by Mrs. Rokusek, who stands to the ideal society in the place of Moses to the children of Israel.

The parents of the child were seated before the president, while the babe was held before her by a sister of the mother, who promised to stand in the mother's place, and rear the child in accordance with the teachings of the Vlastimila, should the mother die.

There were no symbols of faith in a hereafter, no prayers to a divinity. The child was given a kiss of love instead of a sprinkling of water; a hope for a good life instead of a prayer for a future heaven. After the formal words quoted above, Mrs. Rokusek turned to the parents, and gave them words of advice as to the future training of the child. "Never forget that you are Bohemians, and nourish within that child a reverence and a love for the native land of your ancestors. Teach it to speak the language, implant in it the love of liberty which led you and your parents to come to America. Keep ever before it as the guiding star of its life the ideal of purity of thought and the divinity of a moral life. Never, however, try to tie it to creeds which its soul cannot accept as the truth. Truth is something which everyone must determine for himself, and this is the reason why the child is baptised in Vlastimila rather than in some church. When the age of mature thought arrives, Mildred will not be hampered by vows made to-day that she shall be trained in some special creed. We leave her free to choose for herself her beliefs and the path which she shall follow in seeking the maturity of her soul. See to it that no act of yours ever interferes with the freedom in which she is to-day christened."

The ceremony was concluded by placing a little golden chain, to which was attached a locket engraved with the word "Vlastimila," around the child's neck. And a shower of kisses started the little maid on its career of Freethought.

—*Cleveland Plain Dealer, June 24*

Religious evolution follows the course of social development. The first deity is a mother, as the first object of adoration was and is the mother's breast. The recognition of elders and rulers on earth led to the homage paid to their spirits. From human rule was built up the hierarchy of heaven. When chieftains were established, chieftain gods were created, and these gods were at first only tribal. With the federation of tribes under one ruler came subordinate gods under a chief deity. Not till large monarchies were established, the rulers of which claimed to be king of kings and lord of lords, was any claim made for the sole rule of the sovereign of the skies. It was the large empires which paved the way for the so-called universal religions. Everywhere we see that the progress of religion followed that of society.—*J. M. Wheeler.*

Acid Drops.

THAT dear good man, the Bishop of London, we see by the newspapers, has left England for a two months' holiday. This is not bad for an apostle of the gospel of "blessed be ye poor." In the hot, dusty streets of London the poor inhabitants are all sweating and many cursing. They must live where they work, however uncomfortable it is. The only two months' holiday they are ever likely to get is in the work-house, or, if the worst comes to the worst, even in gaol. Of course they are only the *flock*, and they must be thankful (if they can) for the smallest mercies. But it is very different with the *shepherd*. He leaves them nibbling at parched tufts, while he is off to fresh woods and pastures new. Perhaps he will spend a week or two in the cool, bracing air of Norway; then descend for ten days or so in Rhineland, and afterwards sun himself in sight of the blue waters of the Mediterranean. His magnificent salary will go on all the while; and for these two months, at any rate, the pilgrim Bishop of London will be one of the luckiest mortals on earth.

During this splendid holiday Bishop Ingram will meet all sorts and conditions of men—and of women too, for all we know. But it would be extremely awkward for him if he happened to meet with Jesus Christ. The "Master" told his disciples to carry neither scrip nor purse. Bishop Ingram, however, takes something more than a scrip along with him. We guess he has a portmanteau and perhaps a travelling trunk. He has also a purse. You may be sure of that. Yea, and a well-filled one—and a cheque-book behind it. But if Jesus Christ turned up to meet Bishop Ingram it would probably be as a tramp, with bare feet, ragged raiment, and a generally unkempt appearance. And we dare say a miracle or two would be necessary to persuade the rich Bishop that this tramp was indeed his "Master." We dare say, too, that it would take something still stronger to persuade the tramp "Master" that the rich Bishop was one of his disciples.

While the Bishop of London is on his holiday—that is to say, for a sixth part of one whole blessed year—the people of London will have to do without his soul-saving ministrations. As far as he is concerned, they are all left free to dance along the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire. Some hundreds of them may go to hell in his absence. In these circumstances, such a long holiday bespeaks a very callous heart. But the circumstances are, of course, only imaginary. The Bishop doesn't believe that nonsense, and his flock don't believe it. They only make-believe it. So he goes away with an easy conscience, and they bear his absence with tolerable equanimity. Indeed, if he never returned at all, they would probably not be inconsolable.

Here is another holiday clerical. "The Dean of Bristol and Mrs. Pigou," we read, "who spent June at Spa, have taken a house at Morthoe, near Ilfracombe, for a few weeks." Happy couple! They find the truth of the inspired text that godliness is great gain. For our part, we don't blame Dean Pigou. Lots of men would take his job for the same consideration. Many of them, in fact, would preach sideways or upside down for his salary. We blame the fools who find the money for these priestly parasites.

Dean Gregory, of St. Paul's, has also left London for several weeks. The Cathedral remains behind. And of the two it is the more handsome and valuable.

Clericals are to be found in abundance at the principal English watering-places. Bath, for instance, swarms with parsons and rich widows—who often meet.

The *Daily Mail*, through the pen of W. Holt White, gave what we suppose was meant to be a thrilling account of the obsequies of the late Empress Frederick. To our taste it was simply "high falutin'." One might almost imagine that the Holy Ghost was being churched before burial, and that God Almighty himself was the chief mourner; so thickly does Mr. White lay the "royal" and "imperial" flattery on the Kaiser and his dead mother.

Canon Shore's funeral sermon on the Empress Frederick, at Homburg, is described by this same reporter as quite "a revelation"; but, if it was so, the report does it a sad injustice. The following bit may be a revelation—a revelation of human folly: "Before the close the preacher told a remarkable incident which happened during the last moments of the Kaiserin. As he sat by the bedside with the window open, in flew a white butterfly. It lighted lightly on the bed, and then flew out of the window heavenwards. It might, said the Canon, have been the Empress's soul."

Now, what in the name of wonder is there remarkable in a

white butterfly? Are they not as common as blackberries? A butterfly in summer is a perfectly natural phenomenon, and it often flies in by mistake through an open window. Had it been a butterfly in December it would have been worth writing about. But a butterfly in August! Why, it takes a Christian bump of wonder to find a special significance in such an ordinary incident.

What nonsense to suggest that this white butterfly might have been the Empress's soul! It might have been excusable as a piece of poetical fiction. But fancy a preacher seriously working off such stuff from the pulpit in the twentieth century! On the whole, it does not seem that Canon Shore is very highly gifted himself in the matter of "soul." Indeed, if this is a fair sample of his preaching powers, we should say that he ought to be accommodated with the chaplaincy of a lunatic asylum.

Signor Crispi died at last in peace without a word spoken. His daughter and his wife were induced to leave the room, and he expired in the presence of two of his old comrades in arms of 1860, the Duke of Verdura and Senator Damiani. He was never a coward, anyhow; and, if there is any settlement with God to go through, he will probably stand up like a man and plead his own case for what it is worth.

Signor Crispi's wife plagued him to have a priest brought in to his death-chamber, but he refused, and said he would "settle with God himself."

It is reported that Crispi died comparatively poor, in spite of the scandalous stories of the wealth he had amassed by plundering the Italian nation. His library was his principal property. He had been collecting it for over sixty years, and he leaves it to the town of Palermo. It is said to be worth £40,000.

It has now been authoritatively decided by the Home Secretary that it is illegal to charge ecclesiastical monumental fees in the unconsecrated parts of cemeteries. Recently a Suffolk Free Church minister complained of such an exaction to the Home Secretary, who replied that in unconsecrated ground no minister is entitled to any fees in respect of interments, except such as are duly fixed for services rendered, and the vicar is entitled to a fee only when he conducts the funeral service himself or by his deputy.

We extract the above from the *Christian World*. Why people should patiently and uncomplainingly submit to these clerical exactions has always been a puzzle. It is especially astonishing that Dissenters do not make a more determined resistance to the demands which seem to be dictated solely by clerical greed.

There is, we learn, says the *Daily News*, quite a scare among the worshippers at St. Paul's by reason of the dangerous tunnelling contemplated near the foundations. One old City caretaker, who has attended on Sunday for more than forty years, refuses now to cross the threshold. Another elderly lady was heard to say to a friend on Ludgate Hill: "Do, my dear, let us go to some really safe church!"

Mr. J. Herbert Williams, in a letter to the *Times*, points out the utter unreliability of pretended relics in the shape of human bones. "For example," he says, "this week brings the feast-day of the finding of the body of St. Stephen, the proto-martyr, for which there is not a whit more proof than for Cardinal Vaughan's find. I recollect a story somewhere of two towns miles apart claiming each to be possessor of the head of (suppose) St. John the Baptist, as if he were another Janus. But, on one reliquary being opened, it was found to hold half a skull. To the historical student relics have no meaning or interest."

Dr. Horton, after reviewing his ministry for the last twenty years, paints a depressing picture of the present times. He admits that there is a comparatively small number of churchgoers in London. He attributes the falling off to the advent of the bicycle. "For the bicycle," he says, "has become the religion of many a young man and young woman." And perhaps the young men and women are quite as well employed in taking a healthful and exhilarating spin into the country as in listening to a discourse by Dr. Horton. There are hygienic reasons why cycling should not be decried, and rational people nowadays don't care a cent about any suggested sin of cycling on Sunday. It is sufficient that that day usually happens to be most convenient.

The *Sunday Companion* is a silly paper. It presents in its latest issue a forked-lightning kind of illustration of Sunday trains and trams and steamboats, with some letter-press rubbish about the number of employees who are engaged in "Sabbath desecration." But it makes the trains and trams and boats crammed with people, and the obvious question is:

Are all these folks to be debarred from pleasant outings for the sake of the comparatively small number of employees who are necessarily engaged, but who may take their holiday on another day? If they are not allowed a compensatory "day off," then the *Sunday Companion* should go for the railway or tram or steamboat companies who refuse it. That is the obvious solution of the whole matter.

As a matter of fact, Monday is a far better day for real rest and recreation than Sunday. Therefore, we see no hardship, but an advantage, to these traffic employees in working on the blessed so-called Sabbath.

The *New York Nation*, reviewing the *Encyclopædia Biblica* (vol. ii.), says: "It remains to note some of the articles of most outstanding importance. High among these must come that on the gospels by E. A. Abbot and P. W. Schmiedel. It is by far the longest, running to 134 columns, and could not easily be overpraised as an elaborate development of a certain position. Of course that position is most extreme, even from the standpoint of an anti-supernaturalist.....The drift of the whole is unmistakable, and it helps us far into the light as to the ultimate outcome of the extreme critical school. How such scholars as Professors Davidson, Driver, and G. A. Smith feel themselves in their present company must remain dubious. But the path before Dr. Cheyne and his *confères* is clear. The Protestant doctrine of Scripture is for them utterly shattered; no fine fence over the word 'inspiration' can help them. For a positive religious attitude they have no basis left, except authority."

Continuing, the *New York Nation* says: "The figure of Jesus fades into a misty uncertainty like that of Apollonius of Tyana, and we shall soon be back at a point where Blount's seventeenth-century comparison between the Gospels and Philostratus's life of the same Apollonius will again have weight. Under these conditions the Church of Rome will undoubtedly draw many into its shelter, and others will soothe themselves with vague phrases and mystical aspirations. For those who hold, however broadly, to an historical revelation it is now time to face a crisis."

Yes, there is indeed a crisis. The criticism has been transferred from the Old Testament to the New, and, from the orthodox point of view, terrible havoc has been worked. Meanwhile the Lord is engaged in counting the hairs on our heads and watching the sparrows as they fall.

A minister, who has just returned from the East, says that the women of Nicæa, the place from which the Nicene Creed is said to have proceeded, have a curious method of knowing when an egg is boiled to their liking. When they put it on to boil they immediately begin to recite the Nicene Creed, and when they have gone through this the egg is considered to be cooked. The notion is quaint, if not unique. But an old sand-glass would serve very much better.

One of the severest things ever said touching the tendency to preach courses of sermons on strange themes is credited to the late Dr. Storrs. He is said to have most heartily despised a series of sermons based on verbal catchwords, and had no patience with a series on the animals of the Bible or the flowers of the Bible. On one occasion he humorously expressed his wonder that the asses of the Bible had not been chosen as a series. "There was Balaam's ass, which was a better orator than his master. There was Job's wild ass, that was sent out free, and the ass on which our Lord rode." He added that, if the number were not sufficient for a long series, the preacher might add an autobiographical sketch!

Dr. John Watson (Ian Maclaren) made a witty remark against prosy sermons the other day at a ministers' meeting. A ministerial friend was talking to a member of his congregation about the state of his health. "I am terribly troubled with insomnia," he said. "I lie awake at night, hour after hour, thinking about my sermons." "Indeed!" replied the listener. "Why don't you get up and read portions of them?"

The *Jewish Year-Book* for 1900 states that there were in the world at that time 11,210,415 Jews; that of these 9,000,000 and a few more are to be found in Europe, about 6,000,000 of them being found in the Kingdom of Russia, 2,100,000 under the Austro-Hungarian Kingdom, and 600,000 in the German Empire. All these are descendants of the people amongst whom Christ is said to have appeared, and who were best able to judge of his pretensions. These descendants exhibit their traditional and absolute unbelief by rejecting the New Testament.

A Highland clergyman, whose sympathies were not, as a rule, on the side of the poor and needy, one day met his match in the person of a poor farmer lad, to whom he had

conceived an ill-disguised dislike. The lad was the only son and chief support of his mother, a poor widow, and was in the habit of receiving a strong suit of fustian clothes annually from the parish by way of relief. One day, when the minister was out enjoying a drive in his handsome carriage, he observed the young husbandman, who was engaged in driving a herd of sheep along the high-road, and was wearing his latest brand new suit of clothes, of which the cleric well knew the source. Anxious to humble and mortify the youthful shepherd, he caused his coachman to stop, when he addressed the lad, saying: "Well, my boy, who gave you that splendid new suit of clothes?" "Oh," was the quick and cutting retort—"oh, just those who gave you yours—the parish!"

A well-known clergyman in Yorkshire recently had a very elaborate and highly-colored stained-glass window put into his church, representing incidents that are supposed to have transpired at the birth of Jesus, the subject being taken from the hymn beginning, "While shepherds watched their flocks by night." Some parishioners, passing by, walked in to see the new window, when one of them suddenly exclaimed: "Why, noo, I's sure it's a real bonnie window, an' us cheps is aalwis larnin' something new, for, bless me, I didn't know that thor was magenta cows i' the time of oor Savior!"

We shouldn't really have credited Belfast with so much bigoted stupidity if it hadn't appeared in plain black and white in some of the Irish papers. It seems that a Mr. Craig left £5,000 to the Belfast Council to provide Sunday music in the parks. A public meeting was held last week to protest against the Belfast Council committing the city to any such scheme; and a deputation from the meeting appeared before the Council. Rev. Charles Davey, minister of Fisherwick, put the objections of those who are "most concerned for the religion and morals of the city." The Parks Committee, before which the matter had first come, had been equally divided on the question. After a long discussion the matter was referred back to the Parks Committee, Alderman Pirrie stating that "there was no doubt public opinion in Belfast at present was against music in the parks on Sundays."

An American woman who is a Christian scientist maintains that mosquitoes have brains and reasoning powers, that it is "outrageous" to kill the "little harmless insects," and that all that is necessary is to reason with them. She says: "If a mosquito is troubling you, just speak to him kindly, and say: 'Look here, my friend, you leave me alone and I'll leave you alone.' Then believe that he won't bite you! Even if he does, his sting won't hurt. I have done this for years, and now enjoy having the pretty little things around and listening to their musical buzz." This sort of sentimental feeling might apply to verminous inflictions. And where would Christian Science come in against Keating?

The pilot, Charles Richard Thomas Watkins, who was recently executed at Maidstone for the murder of his brother-in-law ended his life in the approved fashion. He was, we are told, very attentive to the ministrations of the chaplain. The culprit, as a pilot, paid due deference to the official and salaried sky-pilot, and sailed into unknown waters with a penitent air, after partaking of the Sacrament of the Church of England. Of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Another of the fast-disappearing proprietary Anglican chapels in London has finally closed its doors. Eaton Chapel, in Eaton-place, long an Evangelical stronghold largely attended by Irish Churchmen, has finished its career as a place of worship. The Rev. F. Leopold Meares officiated, and before preaching the last sermon read a letter from a number of well-known clergymen, expressing sympathy with the congregation in their being obliged to leave. The ground landlord is the Duke of Westminster, and he gave permission to remain; but Canon Fleming declined to allow the chapel to be used any longer as a place of worship. The churchwardens brought the matter before the Bishop of London, who asked Canon Fleming to reconsider his determination, but in vain, and the congregation, largely consisting of elderly people, are now turned adrift.

How sad! But perhaps they will be able to find a gospel-shop elsewhere. There are plenty about, even in the neighborhood of Eaton-place. Canon Fleming will not improve his reputation with Church-people by his obduracy. He is a stiff-necked cleric of a school that even Churchmen would be glad to see dying out.

The old Lord's Day Act passed in the reign of Charles II., of pious memory, has been enforced at Accrington. A hawker of fish on Sunday has been fined 2s. 6d. and costs. The Town Clerk, who prosecuted, seems to be a specially sanctimonious person. He said he failed to see why the Lord's Day Act should be snuffed out. Then he said it had

come down from a higher authority than that of Parliament—namely, as one of the Ten Commandments.

This unctuous sentiment might appeal to the Bench; but, really, are we to be governed nowadays by primitive Mosaic laws? Besides, the Fourth Commandment does not apply to the so-called Lord's Day, but to the Sabbath, as any Jew will tell us who refrains from work, not on Sunday, but Saturday. And then, on common-sense grounds, what harm is there in selling fish on any day, providing the fish is fresh and folks want it?

The wine at Cana is once more disturbing the religious and teetotal mind. Abstinence is well, but it isn't a Christian virtue. It prevails in its strictest form amongst Mohammedans. Rev. C. A. Davis, of Stroud, writing in the *Crusade*, urges that the wine at the marriage feast at Cana "must have been at least nearly non-intoxicating." To which the obvious answer is: How, then, could the company have been "well drunk" before Jesus created the additional supply? Of course, men of the world know perfectly well that the demand for more mainly arises when people are, as the Gospel account says, "well drunk." And that was where Jesus came in, after behaving somewhat rudely to his mother (John ii. 1-11).

"The conclusion, therefore, remains that the wine in use at the feast was non-intoxicating, and that the wine miraculously produced by our Lord was of a similar character, though of better quality." No such conclusion "therefore remains." Quite the contrary. Why not admit at once that, according to the account, Christ "stood treat"? The thaumaturgic feat was by no means difficult.

The *Two Worlds* is a journal of free and liberal tendency, though associated with Spiritualism, which, in its modern phases, is undoubtedly an advance on the common Christianity. But we have been much puzzled by the following account which it publishes: "I was present at a seance in Liverpool when Dr. Sexton was there. Dr. Sexton was the companion of Charles Bradlaugh in his advocacy of those ideas and trains of thought common to the Secularist school of England. A number of others were present. The medium never sat for money. When Richard Carlyle died—not Thomas Carlyle, but Richard Carlyle, the political economist—he left this provision in his will: that his brain should be dissected for the benefit of science, and it was ordered that Dr. Richard Hitchman, of Liverpool, should do the work. Dr. Hitchman was present on this evening. They had no such thing as a cabinet there, and there came rolling on the floor a head and nothing more, and it rolled up on to the lap of Dr. Hitchman, a tall man of magnificent physique; but he shivered. Though he had cut to pieces hundreds of heads in his time, he shivered. 'Richard Carlyle,' said he, and the lips moved. A ghastlier scene I never saw in all my days. I have seen the dissecting table, I have seen ghastly pictures of dead men and dead women, but never saw anything so horrifying in all my days as the rolling of that head on to his lap and then passing away. The lips seemed to move, and the eyes turned in their sockets. It was a perfect representation of the head of Richard Carlyle."

We doubt the decisive opinion of the narrator as to the "perfect representation of the head," seeing that all the way through he does not appear to know the name of the subject, which was not "Richard Carlyle," but "Richard Carlile."

Some worthy Sabbatarian, anxious for the souls and stomachs of his neighbors, dug up an ancient statute of George IV., which prohibits the exposure of bread for sale within the ten-mile limit between nine a.m. and one p.m. on Sundays, and applied for a summons under it at the Thames Police-court. The magistrate, however, refused, and the philanthropist laid representations on the subject before the King's Bench. Mr. Justice Darling made merry over the legislators who wished to compel people to eat stale bread at least one day a week, but there was, apparently, no getting over the Act, and the response of the Bench was, with a suspicion of reluctance, "Oh, take your order."

About 2,000,000 dollars a year is spent for Bibles by the American people, while 500,000 dollars a year goes for hymn books and 60,000 dollars a year for prayer books. The cost of religious periodicals and other literature amounts to 11,750,000 dollars a year. Last year the amount of money spent by all countries in the interest of Christianity amounted to much more than 1,000,000,000 dollars. We can see by the above, from the *Chicago Journal*, that Christianity is well advertised; but for some reason it is losing customers by the thousands every day, and the world is getting better to.—*Freethought Magazine*.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

September 1, 8, 15, Athenæum Hall, London.

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.

R. S. BROWN, in view of our recent and present struggle, quotes the following lines from Oliver Wendell Holmes:—
Thus drifting afar to the dim-vaulted caves
Where life and its ventures are laid,
The dreamers who gaze while we battle the waves
May see us in sunshine or shade;
Yet true to our course, though our shadow grow dark,
We'll trim our broad sail as before,
And stand by the rudder that governs the bark,
Nor ask how we look from the shore.

W. ROWLAND.—Your further subscription may be an encouragement to others—as Voltaire put it. Thanks.

JOHN GRANGE, the well-known and highly-respected leader of Freethought in Bradford, writes: "I am sorry to see you in the trouble in which Mr. Anderson has cruelly landed you. False friends are worse than the most ferocious foe. But I trust that neither you nor your family will suffer any serious embarrassment. I need not say 'Take courage,' as it is a quality that is always with you. I think a little good will come from this malicious treatment. The sympathies of the Freethought party will be awakened to an appreciation of your work and merit. At any rate, you have mine in fulness."

G. L. ALWARD.—Thanks for your kind letter and donation to the Fund for Mrs. Foote. There is no hope of getting "matters settled up with Mr. Anderson." His action has placed the whole affair out of his own hands as well as out of ours. He rejected every proposal we made him, and we shall not make him another. He has made us bankrupt, and it will have to go at that now. Some day or other we hope to see you all again at Grimsby.

JOHN HUGHES.—Yes, it was a small "two or three" meeting indeed. The romantic crowd of our creditors could not assume prosaic reality. And thus goes one of the gigantic lies, while others are under the same doom. We have acknowledged your friend's donation in this week's list. Kindly thank him on our behalf.

J. OSCAR.—The heart behind the gift is the thing. If it is as large as you can make it, it is large enough for us.

F. J. AUST.—We are glad, in one way, to know that you regard Mrs. Foote's husband as "a hero." But we shall be pleased when we are under no further obligation to publish our friends' compliments. We hate having to do it, but the necessity was forced upon us. Letters accompany donations, and we are bound to give our sympathisers a hearing.

G. DICKINSON (Mrs.).—We value your kind expressions. If the women of the Freethought party could lecture Mr. Anderson, and make him hear, they would undecieve him as to the fancied justice of his action. He seems to confuse justice and law, which are sometimes the antipodes of each other.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

H. SILVERSTEIN writes: "On behalf of my wife and self I beg to forward a second donation to the Fund for Mrs. Foote. I more than regret you should have to make repeated appeals to your friends for what ought to have been subscribed at first call. I should like to see a number of those who have already subscribed double their subscriptions, in order that the laggards be made up for. 'Better late than never' is all very well, but there are occasions when it is possible to be too late. I say nothing with reference to your pursuer, as words fail me to express my opinion of him."

HAROLD ELLIOTT sends heartfelt sympathy with subscription, and hopes every Freethinker will do what he can at this time of need.

R. S. S. CHILDREN'S PARTY.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—
C. Shepherd, 2s. 6d.; C. Deane, 5s.; per J. Haines, 2s. 3d.

ELECTRAIRE.—Accept our thanks for the copy you have sent us of Hugh Price Hughes's masterpiece of religious fiction, *The Atheist Shoemaker*. You read the case rightly. We did want another copy.

J. G. BARTRAM.—See acknowledgment in list. We thank the Newcastle friends. You have read a severity we did not intend in the final lines of our last week's article. What we meant was to put pointedly the truth that those can hardly reckon themselves a man's true friends who stand aloof in the hour of his supreme necessity. It was far from our intention to be bitter towards those who are, for the time at least, unable to give anything. We have said again and again, and said it sincerely, that in such cases, where the sympathy is real though financially impotent, we can cheerfully take the will for the deed. The man who despises a kind face because its owner can only come empty-handed, is a brute far below anything (we hope) we are capable of sinking to.

JAMES KNOWLES.—Our thanks to the Blackburn members who heartily sympathise with Mr. Foote in his trouble, and hope he will soon be again free to devote his great energy and abilities to the cause of Freethought." Miss Vance executes your order for a dozen copies of the *Age of Reason*.

W. B. THOMPSON, a veteran of the Chatham Branch, who has done such long and good work in connection with the Secular Hall at New Brompton, says that his sympathies are entirely with us in the present affair. "I have read," he writes, "very carefully everything which has appeared in the *Freethinker* on the question, and, as matters stand, in my opinion you have come out on the top. So completely have you cleared yourself, that it leaves one without a vestige of a clue as to the motive of Mr. Anderson in forcing you into bankruptcy. The most rabid and narrow-minded Christian, under similar circumstances, could not have served you *any worse*. I cannot understand how a Secularist can act in such an unworthy manner towards the President of the Society, of which Mr. Anderson has been hitherto an honored member. To my mind it seems a paltry and contemptible attempt to injure you in the public estimation, and to besmirch the cause of Secularism through its President. I hope the N. S. S. Executive will consider such conduct on the part of one of its vice-presidents, and take some action expressive of its disgust. With regard to your defence, I am more than pleased at it, because we, too, have heard strange, disquieting rumors for some time past concerning the President and other prominent members of the N. S. S., wafted to us from the mighty metropolis."

T. P. STEWART.—Acknowledged as desired. Please convey our thanks to your friends. We note that you would like to see a fund opened in November as a Christmas Box for Mrs. Foote; also that you would like to hear of our taking a sea voyage for not less than a month. But the present holiday will have to serve for a good while, although that "sea voyage" sounds very tempting to one who has a passion for the sea.

R. JOHNSON.—Our compliments to your niece, who feels so much for Mrs. Foote. We note your hope that when we have settled with the Court, and ascertained our exact financial position, our "losses will be made up by the party without any further appeal."

S. A. W.—Thanks for your good wishes.

J. A. HOLT.—No need to complain. The gentleman who "counter-acts" (bless him!) Paine's *Age of Reason* advertises the book. We hope all Christian champions will go on "counteracting" it.

JAMES RALSTON (Motherwell) says that if his purse were as full as his heart he would be more than pleased to wipe out all our debts. Many of the "saints" have left Motherwell, but those who remain express their "great admiration" for what they are good enough to call "the masterful way" in which we have fought superstition, and they hope we shall "long be spared to pilot the ship of Freethought." They regard Mr. Anderson's conduct as "most contemptible," and say that Freethinkers will only be doing their duty in rallying around us on this occasion.

A. CORLEY.—Yes, it is an awkward time of the year for such calls, but we could not choose the date.

S. J. ROSE tells us that his wife, with a true woman's feeling, has prompted him to send a cheque to the Fund for Mrs. Foote. This correspondent adds: "I do not see that there is any stigma in your being made a bankrupt in such a way, and I assure you it does not lessen you in my humble esteem. I hope I may live to enjoy the work of your pen for as long as I have enjoyed it in the past. And when you are about to take that real holiday I will try to do something towards it."

W. BAILEY, sending cheque to Mrs. Foote, not only trusts that she will be able to keep her home together, but hopes her husband "will have the good sense to leave off working so hard and so long for nothing, and to spend his time in future in placing his wife and children, who ought to be a long way before party, in a more secure position." Good advice in a way. But Mrs. Foote's husband means to go on fighting for Freethought, and he is not built to be a hireling journalist. He must write what is in him, or not at all. Still, he must look to the wife and children. He recognises that.

J. FOV.—A working-man's opinion ought to weigh with our pursuer, but we fear that nobody's opinion weighs except his own—though that is not the *entire* explanation of his conduct.

J. P. SMITH hopes every Freethinker will support one who has given his life to Freethought.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Sydney Bulletin—Blue Grass Blade—Two Worlds—Boston Investigator—Truthseeker (New York)—Northern Daily Telegraph—Stratford Express—La Raison—Liberator (Melbourne)—Lucifer—Secular Thought (Toronto)—Freidenker—Freethought Magazine—Sunday League Record—Dundee Telegraph—Progressive Thinker—Open Court—Public Opinion (New York)—Crescent—Humanity—Discontent (Washington).

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.

Up to Date.

Soon after last week's *Freethinker* was published—that is to say, on Thursday, August 8, at 12 o'clock—I attended the first meeting of my creditors, under the bankruptcy proceedings so maliciously forced upon me by Mr. George Anderson—the gentleman who has just escaped giving away £15,000. This was the second inroad made by these proceedings upon my much-needed holiday, and there will be no other unless I am fetched. Being in lodgings, I had to start for London without my breakfast, as it was necessary to travel by a very early train, in consequence of the notorious unpunctuality of the Railway Company I had to patronise. I breakfasted in London, and then proceeded to the Bankruptcy Buildings, in Carey-street, behind the Law Courts. I had arranged to swear to, or rather to *declare*, my Statement of Affairs before the meeting aforesaid. This took some time, for you have to go to one room for one thing, and to another room for a second thing, and so on to the end of the chapter. Punctually at 12 o'clock one of the Official Receivers took the chair at my first meeting of creditors. Whether by accident or selection, I was favored with the largest room of the kind in the building. I should say it was capable of seating a hundred people in ease and comfort. My little band of creditors were quite lost in it. There were two present, the Christian creditor who was *not* trying to make me bankrupt, and the Freethinking creditor who *was*. The Christian creditor, who has had £360 off his account during the past year or so, was represented by his cashier, who was supported by the firm's solicitor. Mr. Anderson was there in person, supported also by *his* solicitor. I wondered whether he would be there or not. He did not put in an appearance on the rehearing of the Petition in Bankruptcy, after I had discovered those damning documents (at least, from a moral point of view) in his own handwriting. Perhaps he hardly felt that he could face it out on that occasion; anyhow, he left the matter entirely in the hands of his solicitor and counsel—who could not be examined.

This meeting of my creditors was as brief as it was small. It occupied about ten minutes. I had no proposal to make, for I have not the slightest intention of paying Mr. Anderson a single halfpenny more if I can help it. He has chosen to play his game, and he must abide by the result. I admit that the Christian creditor's case is a different one, and I shall not cease to recollect the fact; although, in this case too, I must protest, as I have all along protested, against the possibly legal, but otherwise monstrous, claim of nearly £200 for interest. As far as the principal of the debt is concerned, however, I know that I had and used this firm's printing-paper; and some day or other, in spite of these bankruptcy proceedings, I hope to discharge my legitimate obligation.

No offer being made, then, I had to accept bankruptcy. I had fought Mr. Anderson step by step to prevent this. I had offered him (as perhaps my readers will recollect) *all* the money he had ever advanced me, on condition that he took the Shares he had publicly, as well as privately, promised to take in the Freethought Publishing Company. I had further offered to have the whole dispute submitted to a Committee of Honor. I had opposed the application for a receiving order against me. I had applied for a rehearing of the application, after the order was granted, on discovering the documents which proved that if there was a *liar* in the case it was not *myself*. I had done everything I could to appeal to Mr. Anderson's better self, to afford him an opportunity of cooling down into common sense and common decency. But it was all in vain. At the first meeting of my creditors, therefore, I offered no further opposition; I accepted an adjudication in bankruptcy; in short, I let him work his will.

Unfortunately, I was unable to see Mr. Anderson's face at this meeting. He was seated in front when I entered the room, and he never looked round, nor did he turn his head to the right or the left. I should think his face must have been a study. Perhaps, if I had watched it, I might have read his master passion.

My public examination will come off in due course.

That will be Mr. Anderson's last chance of being offensive. I am told it is a shocking ordeal, but I do not know that I have anything to fear, and I dare say I shall be able to correct impertinence, even in the witness-box. Mr. Anderson has plenty of money; at least he ought to have plenty; and if he likes he can spend some of it on a big counsel to "worry" me; but I assure him that I am not frightened at the prospect. I shall meet his legal bloodhound with tolerable equanimity. He will tear nothing out of me, for there is nothing to be torn.

My solicitor has already approached the Official Receiver with a view to redeeming my effects at my residence. Probably there will not be much difficulty if we can come to terms. By-and-bye I shall have a statement to make on this point. Perhaps it will be as well too—considering that full publicity (when it *must* come) is better than semi-publicity—to make a complete statement of my affairs. The Freethought party will then know the whole truth, and will be able to judge what a pack of malignant lies and malicious misrepresentations have been following me for years.

The other possible revelations and criticisms, alluded to in last week's *Freethinker*, will, of course, await their proper opportunity—which is not yet.

One thing I may say in passing—namely, that almost everybody who is anybody in our movement has expressed great sympathy with me in this crisis, and a confidence in me which is certainly not abated by Mr. Anderson's attack. As far as *he* is concerned, I have not heard of a single person who takes his part in this affair; indeed, the language of some Freethinkers with regard to him is quite unprintable. It smacks too much of the Bible.

When I get home again—a few days after writing this—I will put my hand on a volume of Emerson, which, as I recollect, contains a fine passage that might almost have been written with an eye on this Anderson affair. It puts the higher ethical view of such an affair in the pointed and beautiful style of the great American essayist; a style which I cannot hope to emulate, and which, therefore, I will let my readers have in the original.

And now I will draw to a close for the present week. My holiday is not quite over, and I do not want to write more than is necessary. I will simply ask my friends not to let it be incumbent upon me to continue this appeal much longer. A dead lift now is the thing required. I beg all who can afford a donation to forward it promptly, say in the course of next week. Let the cloud over the central, the most vital, part of my happiness be rolled right away. With my home and my dear ones safe, I shall recover my peace of mind, and with it freedom to put forth my best energies, with utmost fruitfulness, in the service of our cause.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Fund for Mrs. Foote.

R. S. Brown, 2s.; W. Rowland, 4s. 6d.; John Grange, 9s.; T. Taylor, 1s.; Henry Smith, 5s.; H. S. Munns, £2 2s.; Old Friend, £1; C. and M. E. P., £5; Mrs. Baker, £5; J. Phillips, 2s.; T. Birtley, 1s.; A. C. Brown, 1s.; H., 3s.; J. McMunns, 2s. 6d.; J. D. and S. Holmes, 2s.; J. and B. Sage, 5s.; West London N. S. S. Branch, £2 2s.; W. Hunt, 10s.; G. Paul, 10s.; Wm. Smith, 10s.; H. Bennett, 2s. 6d.; A. C. Brown (second donation), 2s. 6d.; W. B. Thompson, 5s.; M. G., 6s. 6d.; W. S., 1s.; M. Stark, 3s.; R. L., 2s.; C. Douglas, 5s.; W. Constant, 3s.; F. W. Curtis, 5s.; Mr. Shepherd, 5s.; J. Bauden, 5s.; M. P., 2s.; J. B., 1s.; Mr. and Mrs. G. L. Alward, £5; Luigi Reggiori, £2 2s.; J. Oscar, 1s. 6d.; J. F. Aust, 2s.; His Friend, 2s.; Mrs. G. Dickinson, 1s.; J. T. Ross, 5s.; P. Cassidy, 2s.; Harold Elliott, 5s.; Silverstein (second donation), 5s.; J. P. Smith, 2s.; J. Foy, 2s.; W. Brierley, £1; W. Bailey, £2; Alfred Corley, 5s.; Jas. Ralston, 10s.; Mrs. Ralston, 10s.; W. Muir (second sub.), 5s.; J. Walker (second sub.), 5s.; S. A. W., 3s. 6d.; Stamps, 1s.; S. J. Rose, £2; R. Mitchell, 5s.; T. Sharp, 3s.; J. Easton, 2s.; J. Burrell, 2s.; W. Appleby, 1s.; A Lady Friend, 5s.; Miss Johnson, 10s.; Four Shiny Row Sympathisers, 10s.; Members of the Blackburn Branch, 10s.

He is happy who, seeing his duty, can do it.—*Seneca*.

Sugar Plums.

THE Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, London, W., will be reopened for Sunday evening Freethought lectures on September 1. Mr. Foote will occupy the platform on that occasion and deliver a special and important address, dealing with the present state of the Freethought party and his own position in it. No doubt the Freethinkers of London, at any rate, will be anxious to hear what he has to say; and arrangements will be made to seat as large an audience as possible. A fuller announcement will appear in due course.

Mr. Foote will also lecture from the Athenæum Hall platform on Sunday evenings, September 8 and 15, for which dates he is preparing two new discourses. He will afterwards visit Manchester and other provincial cities.

In consequence of the ever-increasing number of speakers and platforms in Hyde Park on Sunday evenings, the N. S. S. Executive, at their last meeting, decided to confine their lectures to mornings and afternoons, and to transfer those already arranged for the evening meetings in Hyde Park to Regent's Park, near the fountain. Two excellent meetings have already been held, and there is every promise of future success. As this park closes early, the meetings commence at 6.30 p.m.

We beg to draw attention once more to the effort that is being made by a gallant little band of Freethinkers at Liverpool to secure the Alexandra Hall and its attached premises for the exclusive use of the N. S. S. Branch in that city. This enterprise ought to succeed, and to succeed promptly. Only £400 is required, and that amount of capital is being raised by £1 shares in a Limited Liability Company, whose advertisement appears in this week's *Freethinker*. The founders have had encouragement enough to proceed to allotment, we are happy to say; and we should very much like to hear that the rest of the Shares have been subscribed. Some support may be forthcoming from other parts of the country, and especially from South Lancashire. But there are really enough Freethinkers in Liverpool, if they all did their duty, to take up the whole of those 400 Shares immediately. It will be an absurdity as well as a scandal if they let this opportunity slip past them.

The Liverpool friends have had a very uphill struggle for several years, and it has proved too hard for the fortitude and devotion of some who considered it hopeless. Perhaps the greatest difficulty arose through the fussy interference of the police. These gentlemen are far too prone to meddling with outside business. They have enough on hand if they wish to deal effectively with the vice and crime of that rather flagrant city. But instead of giving all their energies to this great task, they must pry about a Freethought meeting-place, where honest and law-abiding citizens assemble, and see whether money is taken for admission. According to Mr. Justice Collins's decision, it is perfectly legal to do that, as long as a few free seats are kept open for the public; and the Liverpool police, after a trial, know that they cannot frighten Freethinkers into compliance with a bigoted misreading of the law; nevertheless they find it easy to frighten the lessees and proprietors of licensed premises, and this was the policy they pursued in respect to the Alexandra Hall. But if the Freethinkers get the place under their sole control they will be able to snap their fingers at the police, and to tell them to go to—well, wherever their legitimate business lies. Admission money will be taken at the doors, the meetings will pay their own way better, and the Branch will no longer have to face a perpetual deficit. Evidently, then, the Alexandra Hall must be secured, if the Freethought movement is to be sustained in Liverpool; and we call upon the Freethinkers of the city to secure it forthwith. We shall be very happy to open the Hall for them under new and better auspices.

Magpies and Parsons.

I HAVE sometimes been half tempted to believe that the Magpie first suggested to tyrants the idea of having a tithing-clergy. The Magpie devours the corn and grain; so does the Parson. The Magpie takes the wool from the sheep's back; so does the Parson. The Magpie devours alike the young animals and the eggs; so does the Parson. The Magpie's clack is everlastingly going; so is the Parson's. The Magpie repeats by rote words that are taught it; so does the Parson. The Magpie is always skipping and hopping and peeping into others' nests; so is the Parson. The Magpie's color is partly black and partly white; so is the Parson's. The Magpie's greediness, impudence, and cruelty are proverbial; so are those of the Parson.—*William Cobbett.*

A Children's Evening.

ON a recent Sunday evening our Secular Hall at Leicester was brightened with a double audience—adults in the body of the hall and some sixty children on the platform. Between the two audiences rose a gay hillock of flowers. When we had all sung the ethical song written by Dr. Adler,

Would you gain the Golden City
Pictured in the legends old?*

I proceeded to take the young folk through a series of Responses, or, to use an old-fashioned word, their Catechism. That Freethinkers often entertain a warm objection against catechisms I am quite well aware; but I feel a cheerful malice in flouting the superstitions of my friends, and it is a superstition among a group of the Emancipated that it is foolish to teach children by rote any facts or precepts relating to conduct. Perhaps, therefore, it may be well if I sketch the manner in which our Responses are carried out.

The first question ran: "What is our religion?" and the answer, delivered simultaneously, was given in the immortal words of Paine: "To do good is our religion." Here I briefly told the story (which, as I blandly observed, was not true) of Abou ben Adhem and the Angel, and the golden register in which those men ranked highest who loved their fellows; and then one of our rosy-cheeks recited, in her best manner, Leigh Hunt's poetic version of the legend. What was goodness? The children responded: "We may learn what goodness means from good men and women of the past, and from good men and women who live among us to-day." When I asked for examples, the girls and boys chose such names as Socrates, Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Bradlaugh, George Newell (a lately-deceased Co-operator, well known in Leicester), etc., though we could not help smiling when one child selected the terrible Euclid, and another admired Lord Charles Beresford. To the inquiry, "What is duty?" the explanation was: "Duty is that which we ought to do; duty is right conduct"; and then the young voices sang my friend Gustav Spiller's lines:—

May duty be our guide to-day,
May love and truth illumine the way;
May nothing warp or stain the soul,†
May noble aims the will control.

"What is conscience?" I asked, and the chorus came: "Conscience is the power by which we tell when we do right and when we do wrong"; and I made a comparison between the volunteer who conscientiously joins the army in South Africa and the Tolstoyan peasant who conscientiously refuses to use the rifle thrust into his hand by the Russian Government. Some people might doubt the wisdom of suggesting that conscience is not infallible, but it appears to me that that is just what ought to be suggested. Conscience is not a divine and perfect monitor; it is the product of reflection and discussion, and grown-ups and children alike should be made aware of their individual part in the shaping of the moral sense. We passed to the subject of Virtue; and I reminded the children that the Latin word *vir* signified "man," and so virtue meant manliness. The idea of Self-control I made concrete by speaking of the boy who bursts into the room all fun and noise, but hushes himself when he notices his mother lying on the couch tired and faint. Again the children sang:—

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.—*Tennyson.*

When we came to Truthfulness, I told about Bishop Colenso, who loved truth more than he loved the Bible, and would not teach the legend of the Flood, etc., when he was convinced it was not historical; and this sentiment was enforced musically by the children:—

Think truly, and thy thoughts
Shall the world's famine feed;
Speak truly, and each word of thine
Shall be a fruitful seed;
Live truly, and thy life shall be
A great and noble creed.—*Dr. H. Bonar.*

* The Golden City of the song is the world of men and women transformed by justice into what Robert Owen would have called the New Moral World.

† Would controversial readers please note that, warned by past experience, I shrink from a debate on this use of the word "soul"?

"Tell me," I continued, "about the duty of Kindness." Answer: "We ought to be kind towards all living things, towards men and women, towards playmates, and towards animals"—and I referred to the story of St. Martin (we have a St. Martin's Church in Leicester) dividing his cloak to shelter a poor neighbor from the winter winds. The Responses led on to the thought of the best aim in life, and the duty of thinking of others besides ourselves. Music and story helped again; the children chanted Tennyson's line, "Kind hearts are more than coronets," and the Golden Rule (Christian version), "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them." I contributed my share by relating how little Joseph Mazzini embraced the hoary beggar, and how the old man said to the mother, "Lady, love him well, for he is one who will love the people."

"Why," I went on—"why ought every healthy man and woman to work?" "Every healthy man and woman ought to work," replied my listeners, "because the wealth of the world is created by the labor of the brain and of the hand." It was a simple definition, but did it not sufficiently emphasize three important principles—the first, that no social class is exempt from the call to work; the second, that only by work do we obtain the fruit of life and comfort; and the third, that equal honor should be accorded to the toil of mind and muscle? To show the close connection between work and daily life, I had found a tale in Longfellow's poems. An artist had failed to carve, from a piece of precious Eastern wood, a figure that satisfied his own sense of the beautiful. He dreamed, and the idea came to him that he might at least try his craftsman's hand on a log of half-burned oak from his hearth. He awoke, took the oaken log, and, from this homely material, chiselled the form of a fair woman. In this way we might each of us find a task in the near world without looking to distant or brilliant spheres. And here we had a recitation by one of our bright lads. Distinctly and with expression he repeated Lowell's democratic verses on "The Heritage." We next talked of Justice. "We ought to deal justly towards each other," repeated the class. Yes, and what was justice? "Justice," they said, "is giving to each man his due reward and his rights as a citizen." Very well, and what were the rights of a citizen. "The rights of a citizen are to take part in the government of the city and the country, and to enjoy freedom of speech and action." It was an apt saying on a Freethought platform; and I brought in a very modern incident in the history of Leicester—the disgrace which some of the townsmen had incurred by interrupting and upsetting a meeting held in opposition to the South African war. And here the children sang a sentence from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: "Neither the evening nor the morning star is so beautiful as Justice." I may be wrong, but I suspect that no words of Aristotle were ever set to music before the publication of these Responses.* Which was happier, to work for ourselves alone, or to work with others for the common welfare? The girls and boys agreed it was happier to work with others for the common welfare. While the answer clearly lays down co-operation as the basis of society, its terms are such as to win the assent of either Socialists or Individualists. A man, I remarked, might plant a tree for his own profit, but it was a happier thing to do as children and teachers did on a certain day every year in Switzerland—they planted trees on the hillside for the good of the whole village. What (this was the last question) did we mean by Society? "By society," was the reply, "we mean our family, our nation, and all mankind." My comment was that society included Frenchmen, Germans, Chinese, and even Boers. We closed this part of the program by singing our little song of Fellowship:—

Together to be,
Each other we see,
As comrades, to share
Foul weather or fair
Love we.

We had now occupied three-quarters of an hour, and

* The Responses are printed at the end of *Songs of Love and Duty*, a collection of secular hymns for the young.

the meeting ended with a ceremony which I propose to describe in another issue.

Well, I want to put the question to the extremely observant persons who are sometimes good enough to class me among those who lean to Church methods. What do you find in all this to object to? For my part, I consider it a wise plan to lodge in the children's minds a few lucidly-framed definitions of moral principles. The mutual play of questions and answers serves to impress the fact that these principles are not dogmas to be imposed, but ideas to be discussed. The danger of staleness through frequent repetition is almost abolished by the interweaving of anecdotes and comments (which, of course, should be changed at each occasion). And, from time to time, it is well to suspend the use of the Responses for a while, so that they may be resumed later on with increased interest.

F. J. GOULD.

Uncle Josiah on the Bible.

"It seems kinder hard to believe that air book,
Said Uncle Josiah one day.
"It might be all right if you'd swaller it down,
And believe what the preachers all say.
But somehow I've jest been a thinking
Why reason and sense won't fit in,
With a few little facts to convince us,
Can't be that'd be any sin.

"But then—thar was Eve and the devil
In the style of a serpent they say,
And he tempted fair Eve of the fruit to partake,
Which caused our downfall to this day.
And 'twas jest because reasons and knowledge
She gained by the taste of that fruit;
If she hadn't adventured to do sich a thing
We'd been still nothing more than a brute.

"For 'tis reason that leads to progression,
And 'tis reason they teach us at school,
And they say 'He that is without reason
Hain't much more or less than a fool.'
Tho' I don't want to be too hard on 'em,
But if God was as good as they say,
And he had all the power of knowing
All the things from that time 'til this day,

"Would he made man the poor, weary mortal
That he did here on this earth to dwell,
And too weak to resist the temptations
So's to send the poor creatures to hell?
If he knew all the pain and the sorrow
And the suffering we'd have to endure,
Why he didn't stop Eve in her mischief
Remains quite a mystery, I'm sure.

"And they tell us now doomed is creation,
From the first disobedient pair,
And we're cursed, so the preachers all tell us
And it don't look to me hardly fair.
We're on a straight road to Tophet,
For morals and truth don't relieve,
Unless we kneel down 'fore the parson
And the story I've mentioned believe.

"And praise God for his infinite wisdom,
For the sunshine and beautiful snow,
And if we dare doubt his salvation
A hot place that's waiting below.
And when we ask preachers these questions,
They squint up their eyes towards the blue,
And, clasping their hands in front of them,
They take in a long breath or two;
Then, looking so wise and so saint-like,
Their answer it pleases them so,
'Tis something that God has kept from us,
And isn't for mortals to know."

—*Freethought Magazine.*

ELIZA D. MAILE.

Minister—"And how do you get on at Sunday-school, Billie?" Billie—"Pretty well; I've just learned about the whale swallowing Jonah." Minister—"That's good." Billie—"Yes, sir; and next Sunday I'm going to begin to believe it."—*Pittsburg Bulletin.*

He who exchanges truth and independence for so-called unity and harmony has made a very poor bargain.—*Sentinel of Liberty.*

Correspondence.

ATHEISM AND MORALITY.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Permit me to say that I do not think Mr. Ball has treated Mr. Kingham's contributions to your Correspondence column with quite that urbanity I have been in the habit of associating with Mr. Ball's controversial methods. This lack on Mr. Ball's part has arisen, I fancy, from some feeling of irritation at what Mr. Ball has felt to be the somewhat suspicious character of Mr. Kingham's mental position. But this need not have unsettled so experienced a veteran of the pen as Mr. Ball. Even George Borrow, whose pose was habitually that of the straightforward thinker, found pleasure, I remember, in some old Welsh ditty which he calls "the melody of the ambiguous word." Now, granting there was a *suspicion* of ambiguity about Mr. Kingham's suggestive letters, that was no reason for meeting his contentions in any other than a purely intellectual way and apart from all personal questions.

Now, even supposing that Mr. Kingham attacks the theory of morality—no matter what its basis—need that irritate us? If there are no morals, our opinions will not alter that fact; and, if there are any, neither will our opinions alter that fact.

For God exists, or not, indeed,
Quite irrespective of our creed;
We live, or live not, after death
Alike, whatever be our faith,
And not a single truth, in brief,
Is modified by our belief.

So sang James Thomson. The facts, then, being safe, why should we fear any investigation concerning them? Fancies and untruths, indeed, are the creatures of our belief, for they cease their pseudo-existence when our belief in them ceases. My cat, for instance, now lazily stretched out on the hearth-rug, really does not depend on my belief for her existence, mortifying to my pride as it may be to admit so much. On the other hand, that famous relative of hers, the grinning Cheshire cat, depends for her or his tabby-life wholly on the belief of myself and others. So let our speculations have fullest scope and the utmost latitude of expression—ironic, sincere, ambiguous, or what not. Facts are stubborn things—in fact, "they're all right"; and as for the other things, well, if they be neither truths nor facts, let them take care of themselves in their own fanciful way—if they can.

Mr. Kingham has raised one very old and interesting question, involving *our opinions* on the possibility of morals and conscience. I trust Mr. Ball will thrash this question out with Mr. Kingham, and I promise them one attentive reader in

NATURAL MORALITY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I would like to ask Mr. Kingham, who argues that "morality stands or falls by the existence of a supernatural sanction," whether he imagines that morality is a "gift," obtainable only by dint of praying for it?

He seems to argue that, unless one admits the "supernatural sanction" for morality, one cannot logically inculcate morals or moral doctrines.

According to this thesis, then, an Atheist, who does not admit that there is anything supernatural in the universe, has no base to work upon in any attempt to teach morality.

Mr. Kingham also objects to Mr. Ball's assertion that the "inevitable laws and blind forces of nature produce and maintain moral responsibility." I ask where, or how, would moral responsibility come in but for the existence of these laws and forces? Together with the forces that are not "blind"—viz., mental activity—they are man's environment, and can truthfully be said to produce and maintain moral responsibility.

He is morally bound to adapt himself to "play" of these forces, and when he runs counter to them he acts immorally, and suffers the inevitable consequences of so doing.

If I, as a Secularist, induce, by advice and example, a fellow-creature to "amend his ways," am I bound to admit a "supernatural sanction" to or for his improved conduct? Do not my advice and example, and the knowledge of the benefits accruing to me through the plan of life I adopt, influence the will of my fellow? My advice, example, and well-doing are my fellow's environment—they are a part of nature's forces—they *cause* my fellow creature's resolve to amend.

"Volition," Mr. Kingham says, "can *only* exist as causal." Can he cause a ditch by "willing" to leap over one? The fact of the ditch being there causes his resolve to overleap it, and the same fact may cause him to perform a moral act—viz., to throw a rude bridge across the ditch so as to enable another man, who cannot perform the feat of leaping it, to cross without wading through the mire.

There are thousands of subtle causes for morality, and all natural. There is no such *thing* or force as "free will." It is a pure dogma founded in delusion—invented to bolster up the doctrines of "original sin" and "the fall of man."

I conclude that a Secularist is a safe and sure moral philosopher—a supernaturalist has nothing solid to stand on.

WM. JONES.

MR. ALCOCK'S GOD.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—If Mr. Alcock will judge his God by his God's own Ten Commandments, I venture to say that he will find that his God has broken them all but one, and that one the first.

Thou shalt not murder, ordains Mr. Alcock's God, and this God murdered the whole human race at one time, excepting only Noah and his precious family, and not counting the murder of all animate life on this globe, with the exception of the crowd in the Ark. And, by the invention of death, this God of Mr. Alcock's has committed murder ever since the "creation" by disease and want and war, and is, in fact, the arch-murderer of the universe.

Thou shalt not commit adultery, says Mr. Alcock's God, and this God peopled the world by incest, and was born into it when he masqueraded as a man in Judea, by adultery!

Thou shalt not bear false witness, commands Mr. Alcock's God, and puts lying words into the mouths of his prophets, and makes lying promises to his "Chosen People."

Thou shalt love thy neighbors, says Mr. Alcock's God, and instructs the Chosen People to kill their neighbors, rape their neighbors' wives, and violate their daughters.

Thou shalt not steal, says Mr. Alcock's God, and commands his Chosen People—helping them personally at times—to steal their neighbors' cattle and wealth of all kinds.

I suggest that if Mr. Alcock's God does not, in the end, find himself the sole occupant of his own hell, no one need fear breaking his precious Commandments.

COMMON SENSE.

P.S.—Considering that this God of Mr. Alcock's was married and had sons of his own, who "came down" and married with the daughters of men, it looks as though the sins of the *Father* were indeed likely to be visited on his children's children's children to all generations! We are, according to Mr. Alcock, all sons of his bloodthirsty God, so no wonder we are "a discreditable episode on one of the meanest of the planets! Worthy descendants of such a monster!"

C. S.

The Decline in Church-going.

For many years religious circles in the United States have been agitated by the relatively small attendance upon church services, and the best minds in all denominations have sought in vain for something which would arouse interest in religious matters, says the *Troy Record*. Services have been varied and popularised, texts have been chosen from the affairs of the day, music has been made a leading feature, but the numbers gathering in the churches as a rule bear only a small proportion to the population.

That this condition of things is not confined to the United States is shown by statistics recently gathered in Scotland. At Presbyterian assemblies not long ago in that country the question of non-churchgoing was discussed at length, and it was shown that there was a decrease not only in church attendance, but also in the number of Sunday-school teachers and scholars. In Glasgow the attendance per 10,000 of population is placed at 1,711, in Aberdeen at 1,751, and in Dundee at 1,635. Dr. Howie, of Glasgow, figures from this that there are in that city 462,000 people who do not attend church, in Dundee 82,000, and in Aberdeen 72,000. The Scotch are credited with being a religious people, but apparently they have the prevailing indifference to religious things.

A Blasphemer's Faith.

The Catholics of Chicago announced awhile ago that special service at their church, corner of California-avenue and West Thirty-eighth-street, would commence on July 18, and extend to the 26th, on which occasion "an authentic relic of Saint Anne would be exposed to worshippers."

Saint Anne, according to Catholic claims, was the mother of the Virgin Mary, who gave birth to the infant Jesus, who was sired by the Holy Ghost, a fraction of the Godhead, who, in fact, was God himself. As Jesus is worshipped as another fraction of the Godhead, "very God of very God," therefore the worshippers at St. Joseph's Church have had the pleasure of looking upon a relic, probably a fraction of that wrist-bone, of the grandmother of God.

The idea is blasphemous in the extreme, and dishonoring to "Infinite Intelligence."

Gods in Grecian and Roman mythology, a multitude of them, were generated by the amors of the supreme gods with mortal maidens. Of such were Apollo, Adonis, Bacchus, Pollux, Castor, etc. On one occasion Jupiter changed himself into a serpent to accomplish his purpose. On other occasions he personified a bull, a swan, a cloud, a satyr, a dove.

What a pity that Christianity did not rise above paganism in its concept of its junior God; but in that case we should have no wrist-bone of his grandmother to admire.

—Progressive Thinker.

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.): Re-opened September 1.

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, ante-room, first floor): 11, J. E. O'Dell, "The Democratic Ideal."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, W. Heaford, "Is Religion Necessary?"

BROCKWELL PARK: 3.15 and 6.30, W. J. Ramsey.

STATION-ROAD (Camberwell): 11.30, F. A. Davies.

CLERKENWELL GREEN: 11.30, W. J. Ramsey, "What Think Ye of Christ?"

EDMONTON (corner of Angel-road): 7, A. B. Moss, "Nature and the Gods."

FINSBURY PARK (near Band Stand): 3.30, A. B. Moss, "The Bible as a Guide."

HAMMERSMITH BROADWAY: 7.30, W. J. Ramsey, "The Ladies of the Bible."

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, E. B. Rose, "Old Trinities—and a New One"; 3.30, W. Heaford, "Faith, Hope, and Charity."

REGENT'S PARK (near the Fountain): 6.30, S. E. Easton, "Jesus Christ."

MILE END WASTE: C. Cohen—11.30, "The Holy Bible"; 7.15, "Woman and Christianity."

PECKHAM RYE: 3.15, F. A. Davies.

STRATFORD (The Grove): 7, E. White, "From John the Baptist to Judas Iscariot."

VICTORIA PARK: 3.15, C. Cohen, "Christianity at the Bar of History"; 6.15, F. A. Davies, "The Devil."

KINGSLAND (corner of Ridley-road): 11.30, R. P. Edwards, "The Character and Teachings of Christ."

COUNTRY.

BRADFORD (Vacant Ground, bottom Morley-road): 6.30, H. Smith, "Why I am a Secularist." August 19, at 6.30, S. H. Pollard, "Darwinism and Christianity."

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

FAILSWORTH SECULAR SUNDAY SCHOOL: E. Treharne Jones—2.45, "Man Progressing, not Retrogressing"; 6.30, "Religion an Obstruction to Progress." Hymns and Choruses by the Choir, assisted by the Failsworth String Band.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Lecture or reading.

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