

# Freethinker

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## Judgment Day.

THE end of the world has been a fertile and profitable theme with pulpit mountebanks and pious adventurers. Ever since the primitive ages of Christianity it has served to frighten the credulous and feather the nests of their deceivers.

In the apostolic days the Second Coming of Christ was generally and constantly expected. According to the twenty-fourth of Matthew, Jesus predicted that the end of all things would soon arrive. The sun and moon were to be darkened, the stars were to fall from heaven, and the Son of Man was to come through the clouds with great power and glory, and gather the elect together from every quarter of the earth. According to the twenty-fifth of Matthew, this wondrous scene was to be followed by a Great Assize. All the nations were to be judged before the heavenly throne, and divided into two lots—one destined for heaven and the other for hell. And Jesus significantly added, "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled."

St. Paul also, in the fourth chapter of the first of Thessalonians, said that the Lord would "descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air."

Nothing of the sort has happened. There is no sign of the Lord's coming, and he is already nineteen centuries behind date. "Behold I come quickly"—"Surely I come quickly." Such was the announcement. But, like many other divine promises, it has been falsified. The only orthodox way out of the difficulty is to say that the Lord does not reckon time as we do; with him a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day.

The general public, however, nineteen hundred years ago, did not know how long the prophecy was to remain unfulfilled, and it had an extraordinary power over them. Being mostly very ignorant, and therefore very credulous, they were easily terrified by the notion that the world was to be burnt up speedily; and they as readily embraced the doctrine which promised to bring them safely through the catastrophe. From the way in which the game answers still with the Christian mob, after nearly two thousand years of exposure, we can understand what a splendid instrument of proselytising it must have been in the hands of the fanatical preachers of the early Church. Combine with it the Millennium promised to the saints after the Second Coming of Christ, in which they were to enjoy themselves royally, and you will feel the justice of Gibbon's remark that "it must have contributed in a very considerable degree to the progress of the Christian faith." It was inculcated by a succession of Fathers, from Justin Martyr to Lactantius. But when it had served its purpose it was allowed to drop. As Gibbon says: "It was at first treated as a profound allegory, was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism." The Millennium is stigmatised, in what once stood as the Forty-first Article of the English Church, as "a fable of Jewish dotage." We wonder whether the plain-spoken divines who drew up that article included Jesus Christ, St. Paul, and St. John among the Jewish dotards.

No. 1,103.

At the end of the tenth century the doctrine of the Second Coming was revived. The people were led to believe that the old serpent's thousand years of bondage was nearly up, that he would be let loose about the year 1000, that Antichrist would then appear, and that the end of the world would follow. Churches and houses were therefore left to decay, as they would cease to be wanted. Whenever an eclipse of the sun or moon took place, the people ran into caverns and caves. Multitudes hurried off to Palestine, where they supposed Christ would make his descent. They transferred their property to the priests, who could say with Iago, "Thus do I ever make my fool my purse." Others not only gave their property to the priests, but actually became their slaves; hoping, says Mosheim, that "the supreme Judge would be more favorable to them if they made themselves servants to *his* servants."

Jortin justly observes that the priests industriously cherished the delusion for the sake of filthy lucre. They accepted the gifts of their poor dupes, although earthly possessions would be as useless to them as to the laity if the last days were at hand. Donations to the Church were given by fools and received by knaves. The reason assigned for the gift is generally thus expressed: *Appropinquante mundi termino—The end of the world being now at hand.*

When the tenth century ended without a sign of the Second Advent, people looked at each other and said "He is not come then." And the priests chuckled, "No, he has not come, but your property is gone." There was no chance of bringing an action for obtaining money under false pretences, and Holy Mother Church never gives back a farthing of what she obtains, for what is once devoted to God can never be alienated without sacrilege.

Although the delusion has been milder since then, it has always lurked among the ignorant, and occasionally become acute. Silly Christians still shake their heads when a comet is visible, and regard it as a blazing portent. They even hint that one of these wanderers through space may collide with our globe and cause the final smash; not knowing that comets are quite harmless, and that hundreds of cubic miles of their tails would not outweigh a jar-ful of air.

Dr. Cumming foretold the grand collapse several times. His books were read by thousands of superstitious people. Finally, he was played out, and he went to his grave a discredited prophet. Had he been wiser he would have fixed the event some time after he was likely to be buried. Then the game would have lasted his lifetime, and what does it matter if you are found out when you are dead?

How far Cumming believed his own prophecies is a moot point. It is said that he bought the lease of a house, which expired about twenty-five years after his date for the day of judgment.

Prophet Baxter, of the *Christian Herald*, now runs the business. He wrote a book to prove that Louis Napoleon was Antichrist. Louis Napoleon is dead and nearly forgotten. Then he proved that Gambetta was Antichrist. Gambetta is dead and not forgotten. Then he proved that Prince Jerome was Antichrist. Prince Jerome is nowhere, and Baxter looked out for a fresh Antichrist. Yet his paper is read by hundreds of thousands. As Heine said, the fool-crop is perennial.

Over in America the Second Adventists are a numerous body. They watch and pray for the coming of Christ, and keep white robes ready for their

ascension. Some time ago they donned their linen in the expectation that the Lord was coming that very night. But the Lord did not put in an appearance, and the robes were laid up in lavender again. A fat matron trying to fly in that outfit would be a sight worth seeing. It would take several angels to float some of them. Even the archangel Michael might shrink from tackling twenty-stone.

Like everything else in Christianity, except the accursed doctrine of salvation by faith, the idea of the end of the world and a day of judgment is derived from older sources.

The Hindu *Kalpas*, covering thousands of millions of years, are periods of creation and destruction, and each is called a day of Brahma. During this enormous interval the universe begins and ends. Brahma wakes from his slumbrous solitude, and his thoughts and emotions embody themselves in worlds and creatures. When he falls to rest again, the whole system of finite things vanishes like the baseless fabric of a vision.

The Stoics also believed in a periodical destruction and renovation of all things. They, as Alger says, "conceived of God as a pure artistic force or seed of universal energy, which exhibits its history in the evolution of the cosmos, and, on its completion, blossoms into fire and vanishes. The universal periodical conflagration destroys all evil, and leaves the indestructible God alone in his pure essence again."

The Persians entertained a similar conception, which more closely resembles the Christian doctrine. Ahura-Mazda creates all things good, and the race of men happy and immortal. But Angra-Mainyas, his adversary, the old serpent, corrupts them, brings upon them misery and death, and leads their souls to his dark abode. Good and evil spirits fill all creation with their conflict. But at last Ahura-Mazda subdues Angra-Mainyas, nullifies all the mischief he has done by means of a great deliverer, who is sent to instruct and redeem mankind, raises the dead, purifies the world with fire, and restores all nature to its paradisiacal condition.

The Scandinavians had their Ragnarök, or Twilight of the Gods, when all the powers of good and evil join in battle. The horn sounds, the last day dawns in fire and splendor from the sky, in fog and venom from the abyss. Flames destroy the earth, the combatants mostly slay each other; but Gimli, the heaven of the All-Father, is a refuge for the survivors, and the beginning of a new and fairer world.

Chiefly influenced by the Persian, and partly by other systems, the later Jewish theology, as represented by the Pharisees, taught that Jehovah would reappear in the last days; and the Day of the Lord, which in former ages meant any national calamity, became transformed into the Day of Judgment. What was to happen on that occasion is described in the Book of Enoch. This was written about a century before Christ, yet it is quoted in the Epistle of Jude as the work of old transported Enoch, the seventh from Adam; a fact which throws a singular light on the critical acumen of the early Christians. Jesus Christ, Paul, and especially the author of Revelation, are indebted to the Book of Enoch. It provided them with nearly all the plot, dialogue, and scenery of their judgment drama.

As judges of the dead, the Greeks had Minos, who presided at the trial of souls from Europe; Rhadamanthus, who examined those from Asia; and Æacus, who tried those from Africa. America and Australia were then unknown, and souls from those continents were not provided with inspectors. Of course the dead who held communication with the living, never told them more than they knew. The same thing continues to this day. All the messages from the departed given at all the Spiritist *séances* have not added a single fragment to the world's stock of information.

The ancient Egyptians believed in "after death the judgment." Souls were tried in the Hall of the two Truths, or the double Justice. They were weighed in the balance. Thoth noted the result, and Osiris pronounced sentence. Before burial, also, the Egyptian dead underwent a saner trial. The friends and relatives, the enemies and accusers of the deceased, assembled around the sarcophagus before forty-two assessors. He was put on his trial before them; and, if justified,

awarded an honorable burial; but, if condemned, disgraced by the withholding of funeral rites. Kings, as well as commoners, were apparently subject to the same ordeal. Does this account for the beneficent character of their government, and the prosperous content of the people, which is reflected in the placid smile of their sphinxes?

Probably the antique notion of a general Day of Judgment arose from the imposing trials, where the King sat in judgment, throned, jewelled, and guarded; where all were free to approach and claim justice; and where the sentences were executed by the soldiers directly they were passed. Add to this scene a general *auto da fé*, in which Christ plays the part of Grand Inquisitor, the saints that of familiars, and the Devil that of executioner, and you have a very fair idea of the Christian Day of Judgment.

"Day," we presume, must not be taken too literally. The Mohammedans believe the Great Assize will last thousands of years. In that case the people who are fond of hearing trials will have a fine time, until their own turn comes. After all, even the Mohammedan computation seems too slender. To say nothing of the scientific antiquity of man, and reckoning according to the Bible chronology, about two hundred thousand million souls have passed into eternity already, and the Lord knows how many more will join them. Imagination fails in conceiving the time it would take to try all that multitude, especially if there are a good number of Tichborne cases. Besides, the whole thing seems unfair. Those who get a ticket for heaven at the end of the Day will enjoy a few thousand years less of bliss than the more fortunate ones who came early; and those who get a ticket for hell in the first hour will suffer a few thousand years of torture more than those who are sentenced at the finish.

The criterion at the Day of Judgment will be Faith. That is a difficult virtue to wise men, and an easy one to fools. The ninnies, therefore, will have the best chance. This must be very consoling to mankind if Carlyle's estimate of England's population—"thirty millions, mostly fools"—may be extended to the rest of the world.

All who have faith enough to secure a seat in heaven are called "sheep," and they could not be labelled better. All the others are called "goats"—that is, lusty, strong-legged fellows who despise the game of follow-my-leader, who object to walking along the road made for them, and are always leaping the fence to see what is on the other side. There was war in heaven once, we are told, but that was before Satan and his crew were kicked out. There will never be war in heaven again. Jesus Christ will easily be able to manage his sheep. But the Devil will have a tougher job with his goats. There will always be a kingdom in heaven, but ten to one there will be a republic in hell.

Christianity says we are to be saved by faith. Our view is different. Men are saved by thinking and acting. While Christian monks were trying to degrade men below the level of brutes, some unknown Secularists invented windmills and glass windows. While the Inquisition was exterminating heresy and purifying the faith, Galileo was inventing the telescope. While Church of Englandism and Methodism were fighting over the faith in England, Watt was discovering the use of steam. Faith never saved men here, and why should it save them hereafter? God, if he exist, must be too humane and sensible to judge men according to their belief; and if he endowed us with reason, he will never damn us for exercising it.

Wandering in an immense forest during the night, said Diderot, I have only one little light to guide me. A stranger comes to me and says, "My friend, blow out your candle to find your way better." That light is reason, and that stranger is a theologian.

Science, no less than common sense, dispels Christian superstition. Evolution destroys the idea of a general catastrophe. There was a time when life could not exist on the earth, and there will probably come a time when it will cease to exist. Long before then man will have disappeared. But the æon of our race may extend to millions of years. Is not this time practically infinite? And do not those who make it a cause for lamentation and despair resemble the man that Spinoza

ridicules, who refuses to eat his dinner to-day because he is not sure of a dinner for ever and ever? Sit down, you fool, and eat.

—Reprinted.

G. W. FOOTE.

### The Advance of Rome.

THE Protestant demonstration at the Albert Hall, taken in connection with other events of recent occurrence, provides ample food for reflection for all students of religious and social phenomena. The meeting in itself was a huge one, and, judged from the standpoint of its promoters, a successful one. But, then, it is not so very difficult to get a meeting to protest against something or the other. It may be because we feel present burdens much more keenly than we realise anticipated benefits, or it may be that the explanation lies with the existence of a certain streak of "cussedness" in human nature; but the fact remains that the average Englishman never seems to enjoy himself so thoroughly as when he is protesting. The object appears to matter but little—it is the fact of protesting that is everything; and the Albert Hall meeting afforded ample scope for this. And so, we presume, everybody went away from the meeting satisfied—everybody, that is, except Mr. Kensit, who was not allowed to speak.

With the purely religious aspect of the meeting I am not concerned. Personally, I do not care the value of a brass button whether people worship God with or without candles or vestments or incense, or whether, in saying their prayers, they turn to the east or the west, or go flat upon their stomachs. All methods are, I suppose, equally efficacious, and one is certain not to lose anything by their choice. The only pitiful thing is that people should fill up their time and dissipate their energies on such absurdities. The sight of one set of people discussing for weeks the question of the kind of millinery to be worn at the coronation, and another class discussing vestments and candles and incense, is enough to make one despair of human reason altogether. The one thing that stands out plainly to the view of the outsider in this protest against Romanising clergymen of the Established Church is the incurable mental dishonesty that is characteristic of all religion. To take money for preaching things they ought not to preach, or omitting to preach things they are paid to preach, is characteristic of all classes of religious people nowadays; and, if a strict examination were made into the conduct of preachers of all sects, both as to sins of commission and omission, it is probable that not many would come out of the ordeal scatheless.

In the present instance the extreme Protestant party base their conduct—including an application to a magistrate to put in force an old Act against Jesuits settling in Great Britain—on social as well as religious grounds; and this, while partly evading one criticism, opens them to another of a more serious kind. Certain practices in the Church do, and any proposed alteration in the coronation oath would, weaken the Protestant faith and strengthen the power of the Roman Catholic Church, and the growth of that Church in Great Britain would be a serious blow at English liberties. So said the various speakers, and I do not feel called upon to contradict them. Only, one may ask, "Why should this be so?" The reply of the Protestant is that the Roman Church has always been a tyrannical Church, using the arm of the State for the enforcement of its teachings. True enough, as far as it goes; only the thoroughness of the reply is weakened by the reflection that the Protestant Churches have been no better. They have tyrannised where they could, and as for invoking the power of the State, why, what else were the Albert Hall demonstrators doing? The reply might be made that in this case they only wished to keep the State Church free from certain practices that smacked of the Church of Rome. The reply would have some logical force if the Church of England were a State Church in the sense that all the people of England believed in its teachings. But this is clearly not the case. It may be questioned whether even a bare majority of the people believe in it. The only sense in which it is a State Church is that it is paid out of the public funds, and all, whether they believe in it or not, are compelled to contribute towards its support. It is undeniable, then,

that the Albert Hall crowd were also invoking the aid of the State for the purpose of imposing the beliefs of a section upon the rest of the people.

A further defence might be set up by contending that Protestantism allows liberty of choice in matters of religion, whereas Roman Catholicism does not. To the first part of this plea a direct negative may be offered. There is no real liberty of choice in Protestant countries while certain offices in the State are open to the holders of particular opinions and closed to all others. There is no real liberty even while obstacles are placed by the various Protestant bodies to the circulation of the freest and fullest criticism of received religious beliefs. It is true that in the absence of Roman Catholicism we have a larger liberty of choice than we should have with that Church dominant; but this is not because Protestantism extends it, but because it is powerless to prevent it.

The real danger to society in the dominance of the Roman Church (and I admit the danger as readily as Mr. Kensit and his followers) springs from two causes. First, the Roman Church has realised what Protestantism has always been seeking to realise, but in which it has never succeeded—a unity of doctrine and teaching. In actual life this means a single sect on the one side and a multiplicity of sects upon the other. And a single sect becomes a greater national danger than a number of competing sects, not because it is more bigoted or more intolerant, but simply because it has greater chances of crushing opposition. As organised bodies Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, or Episcopalians are every bit as intolerant in spirit as Roman Catholics. Why they are not so in practice—not always, that is—is because generally their conditions are not favorable to its development. But just as history shows that "new Presbyter is but old Priest writ large," so the persecuting policy of religious bodies has usually been exactly equal to their opportunities.

The second cause which makes the dominance of Roman Catholicism a danger to the best interests of society is that it has not surrendered its claim to override the temporal power of the State. And this, again, springs from its unity of teaching and its organisation. Whether Protestantism has any real superiority in this respect is open to question. It is certain that in the maintenance of a Puritan Sunday, in the retaining on the statute-books of various laws against the equality of all opinions before the law, in the historic opposition of Protestant bodies against the extension of the franchise to Catholics and Jews, and in the appeal to the courts to expel Jesuits from England, Protestants show themselves no less ready to use and, where possible, direct the temporal power, than their rivals. So that, once again, we are warranted in saying that it is the opportunity and not the spirit that is lacking.

But it is a peculiarity of religion that in its advocacy the balance of logic lies with the bigots, and not with those of more liberal opinions. There is no doubt that, if Roman Catholicism were strong enough, it would stamp out heresy by force. Protestants assert this, its own writers admit it, and there is no reason for Freethinkers to doubt it. I am equally convinced that any Protestant sect in the same position would act in an identical manner; its leaders, however, assert the contrary, and herein lies the absurdity of their position. Religion (by which is meant the Christian religion), they say, is the most important thing on earth; so important that no man or woman can honestly fulfil their functions in life without it. The Rev. Mr. Horton has even gone so far as to say that were it not for Christianity we should all be Chinese, and to propose that all Atheists and Agnostics should be banished from civilised society. It is hard to keep a straight face over such rubbish; but once assume Christianity to be true, and there seems to me to be pretty well as much reason for the State enforcing religion as there is for it enforcing anything else.

It is the height of absurdity to say that without Christianity a man becomes a kind of moral cesspool, a centre of contamination to all around him, and a positive danger to society at large; but if you do not care for Christianity, you can go without it, and even preach to others against it. This position can only be taken up with reason by one who regards all religious beliefs

as matters of pure speculation that have no vital and no necessary connection with practical life. But clearly neither Protestant nor Catholic can believe any such thing. To both religion is the one important thing in life; its importance transcends all other questions, and consequently the Catholic, in aiming at subordinating the temporal power to the Church and to suppress heresy, is only carrying out Christian convictions to their logical conclusion. In brief, assume Christianity to be a demonstrated fact, and persecution becomes one of the most sacred of duties. Toleration in religion is always, historically and logically, an unfailing sign of the weakening of religious convictions.

There is something in the New Testament about casting out Beelzebub by the power of Beelzebub; and the simile receives a curious illustration in the Protestant application to the courts to expel the Jesuits from England. One of the evils of Catholicism is that it utilises the power of the State to enforce its religion. Well and good; but what else is the other party doing by their application? Is it not as ridiculous to suppress Roman Catholicism by State power as it is to suppress Protestantism by the same means? Once again we see how much sincerity there is in the Protestant cry of liberty, and how much more favorable to real freedom any religion is when it sees an opportunity of using force against its enemies. The truth is that none of the religious organisations have courage enough to advocate that a fair field be given to all opinions, religious and non-religious, and that favor be shown to none. All of them, Catholic and Protestant alike, feel instinctively that, unless they can make unfair use of social forces, control education, secure statutes penalising liberty of thought and speech, and place obstructions in the way of the freest circulation of knowledge, religion is doomed. And, above all, Protestantism feels that in an open field it must give ground to its ancient enemy. Protestantism, as Froude reminded us, has made no triumphs worth speaking of since the close of the seventeenth century, while Catholicism has won much of the ground it lost during the Reformation period. Religion for religion, the elder Church need not fear the younger; while the only effective bar against the power of Rome, complete freedom of thought and speech and publication, Protestantism dare not adopt, because it would commit suicide in so doing.

Personally, I have no fear whatever as regards the Roman Church regaining its old power. The Pope may issue prayers for the conversion of Great Britain, and, while these may soothe the declining years of an old man and inspire the ardor of his followers, their influence will not in the least affect the ultimate fate of Christianity. Converts here and there may be gained by Rome, or by the Church of England, or by various dissenting bodies; but, for all that, the world is not becoming more Christian, but less so. These conversions are merely exchanges effected between the various divisions of an army; the total strength is not increased thereby, and meanwhile there is a certain percentage of loss by deserters to the common enemy of both parties. Of course, any one of these parties may swallow the remainder; but the great fight—the *essential* fight—between supernaturalism and naturalism still goes on, and these internal quarrels and conquests cannot materially affect the issue of *that*. Moreover, one may safely assume that Rome does not dread Protestantism; against that it may feel, and probably does feel, secure. The enemy that Rome really dreads is Freethought, for with that it knows there can be no truce, and against its attacks no complete and final protection. The wisest of its modern English leaders said that there was no logical halting-place between Rome and Atheism, and in humanity's truly great wars compromises are usually allowed to drop out of sight, and the struggle concluded on a really vital and important issue.

And the issue between Protestantism and Rome is neither important nor vital. It is really a sectarian fight, only we are apt to overlook its sectarian character owing to the size of the sects involved. But the size does alter the quality, and the fact remains that, at bottom, all the Churches are based upon substantially the same errors and wedded to substantially the same interests. The real issue and the real fight is between Rome and Atheism; and here, although the contest

may be a long and an arduous one, there does not seem much room for doubt as to the side with which victory will finally rest. Freethought is no longer the property of a privileged few, whispered in secret conclave or circulated by stealth in privately printed documents. It has become the possession of nearly all, and is permeating the whole of our modern civilisation. It is in the very air we breathe, and those who are least conscious of its presence are often the more profoundly affected by it. Against an intangible influence of this kind religion fights in vain. Its struggles may give it a slightly longer lease of life, but they cannot purchase immortality. However long the end may be delayed, it must come at last, and that it will come in the shape of a complete justification of the principles of Freethought none who read the signs of the times aright can doubt.

C. COHEN.

## Science and its Opponents.

IT IS NOW a generally-admitted fact that science has proved itself to be the secular savior of the human race. What the religions of the world have failed to accomplish through countless ages, science has done during the last hundred years. And, judging from present scientific activity, its victories are by no means exhausted. Reliance upon God, Christ, and prayer no longer satisfies progressive minds; but faith in human energy, based upon a knowledge of the potency of natural law, has taken the place of dependence on the teachings of theology. This is a marvellous indication of the triumph of reason over traditional belief; the more so when it is remembered how persistent the opposition to science has been. Buckle has admirably pointed out that, among other evils, the inveterate one of religious persecution has not been diminished "by moral feelings, nor by moral teachings, but solely by the activity of the human intellect, and by the inventions and discoveries which, in a long course of successive ages, man has been able to make." To the impartial student of history it will be found evident that the so-called moral teachers and spiritual directors of mankind have steadily resisted those truths which they themselves did not teach. They have, during many centuries, elected to array themselves and their influence against the "profane sciences," as they termed every branch of knowledge which was not immediately connected with, and derived from, that which they maintained to be a revelation from God. This most unjust conduct upon the part of the priests and ministers of Christianity has seriously retarded civilisation, and for many centuries it militated against the welfare of the human family. As Dr. White observes in his *Warfare of Science*: "A hard contest it has been; a war waged longer, with battles fiercer, with sieges more persistent, with strategy more shrewd, than in any of the comparatively transient warfare of Cæsar or Napoleon or Moltke."

Throughout the whole range of the modern history of the world Christianity has been opposed to science and to scientific investigation. Probably some of this opposition has been offered by men who have been actuated by good motives, who have conscientiously imagined that the work they had set themselves to do was designed to arrest the progress of that which they deemed to be errors tending to injure Christianity, and to destroy faith in the Bible. While, however, granting this, it appears to us too true that by far the majority of the opponents to science have been animated by a spirit the reverse of fair, and that they have objected not so much to the teachings of the students of the physical sciences as to the desire manifested by the latter to make the world wiser and better by the diffusion of the knowledge acquired by the few. It should not be overlooked that for centuries the theologians of the various churches identified the Christian religion with opposition to science. It is thoroughly misleading to urge that Christianity can ever be dissociated from this action of its leaders. The latter have taken care to place revelation in juxtaposition with science, and have demonstrated to the world, without a shadow of doubt, that, if scientific doctrines be right, then it must surely follow that Christianity is

utterly fallacious. The earliest ecclesiastical writers, whom Christians to-day affect to reverence because they lived at a period when "apostolic tradition" was fresh in the minds of men, were bitterly opposed to those who introduced innovations into the field of physical knowledge. Such knowledge was to them altogether trifling and unnecessary. "It is not through ignorance of the things admired by them," wrote Eusebius, "but through contempt of their useless labor, that we think little of those matters, turning our souls to better things."

The principal fault we find with the Christian opponents of science is that they were so prejudiced against it as to refuse to examine the arguments adduced by the students of nature. The theologians' blind bigotry rendered them incapable of impartiality, and fairness was altogether unknown to them. It is not the men who have made the system, but the system which moulded the men. We must therefore remember that the errors of many of the opponents of science were committed in pure ignorance, but still it is our duty to condemn a system which could so far prejudice benevolent men as to enlist them on behalf of falsehood. The gist of all opposition to science, which Christians have manifested, was contained in the remark of the German philosopher, Leibnitz, when he said that "Newton had robbed the Deity of some of his most excellent attributes, and had sapped the foundation of natural religion." The attributes of God have been declared to be in danger upon almost every occasion when a new and important scientific discovery was announced. The Bible was regarded for a long period as an arsenal of weapons with which the Christian hoped to subdue his heretical antagonist. Both the Catholic and Protestant Churches determinedly and avowedly made the Hebrew Scripture the only standard of scientific truth. This position, as they took means of assuring the world, was a definite and a final one. Whoever inculcated the facts of science in opposition to "God's word" thereby placed himself in direct opposition to the Christian Church, and therefore to Christianity. Strange as it may appear, there is nothing inconsistent in this. The authorities by whom this hard-and-fast line was drawn had received as a legacy from their predecessors the doctrine that the Bible was a complete revelation from God. They had been told, and they believed, that this book was divinely inspired; they concluded that divine inspiration could never have dictated and sanctioned what was intrinsically false. If it had been asked if it were a fundamental doctrine of Christianity that the Bible was originally written by men who wrote under the influence of divine inspiration, the immediate answer would have been in the affirmative.

The question, then, which necessarily follows is this: Can the teachings of a divinely-inspired book be wrong, its science false, and its narratives be opposed to truth? The early Christian opponents of science concluded that such a book could not possibly be opposed to actual truth; therefore they became the most persistent opponents to that science which contravened the teachings of the Bible. Hence arose the long contest between Christianity and science. Draper very justly states: "It is to be regretted that the Christian Church has burdened itself with the defence of these books, and voluntarily made itself answerable for their manifest contradictions and errors. . . . Still more is it to be deeply regretted that the Pentateuch, a production so imperfect as to be unable to stand the touch of modern criticism, should be put forward as the arbiter of science." No one deploras more than the present writer the obstacles which science has had to contend against through the opposition of Christian exponents; yet these obstacles have no doubt greatly expedited the final emancipation of mankind from the thralldom of superstition. It has taught scientists to pursue their own course, regardless of those who would endeavor at any cost to enforce upon credulous persons religious creeds and dogmas that were as false as they were misleading. Further, it has established the fact that the only alternative to unrestricted knowledge is intellectual somnolence, or even death.

Fortunately, of late years the claim for the inspiration of the Bible has been much relaxed; but this does not alter the fact that the *literal* acceptation of the Scriptures was formerly almost universally insisted upon

throughout Christendom. Freethought has proved as conclusively as possible that the Bible itself contradicts the claims that have been advanced in aid of its baneful authority. Modern criticism has proved that the so-called Books of Moses are not historically true, and thereby has compelled the modern Bible adherents to seek what refuge they can in such explanations and subterfuges which their predecessors would have scorned to have recourse to. Christianity first drove the scientists to ally themselves with the repudiators of revelation; now that this alliance has resulted in the deposition of the Bible from its pedestal as an object of unconditional reverence, Christians assure us that the Scriptures were never intended to teach science. If this were so, how can it be truthfully urged that the Bible is a sufficient guide to man in daily life? Science is the greatest help known to man, and if the Bible is silent upon it the deficiency of the book is at once apparent. The fact is the writers of many portions of the Old and the New Testaments did treat scientific questions; but their teachings upon such subjects were opposed to what is known as science at the present time.

Despite centuries of priestly opposition to science, it has established itself as "the true providence of man"; and the surprise is that the fallacies of the idle stories of Christianity have succeeded so long in misleading the human mind.

CHARLES WATTS.

### The Morality of the "Mob."

MR. G. K. CHESTERTON, a Radical journalist who writes very readable articles in the *Speaker*, the *Daily News*, and other papers, has been discussing in the *Daily News* the old question of "The Meaning of the Theatre." These discussions as to the functions of the drama or of the novel always strike me, like most *a priori* theorising, as somewhat inconclusive. The test of art, like the test of all things, is experience. Mr. Chesterton enters into an elaborate metaphor to prove his contention—a contention which half reveals a Puritan or Nonconformist training—that a play must be festive, it must be a "treat." "A play may be happy," says Mr. Chesterton, "it may be sad, it may be wild, it may be quiet, it may be tragic, it may be comic; but it must be festive." It is the outlook of a man to whom theatre-going is exceptional—a something to be looked forward to as children look forward to a pantomime—the experience of a twelvemonth. Mr. Chesterton says that an artist cannot express darkness in a stained-glass window, or humility in a pillar of stone; and one can follow his idea. But, all the same, one fine day the genius comes along, and shows us darkness in a window and weakness in a pillar of stone—and we wonder at the simplicity of it all. When Ibsen came forward the orthodox dramatists of Europe shouted their anathemas; he was dull, trivial, weak; his subjects were too commonplace; above all, he was "undramatic." He had certainly broken the conventional rules; whilst no one, whatever other description they applied to it, could call *Ghosts* "festive." Yet Ibsen triumphed, and to-day, when his work is done, stands as the master-dramatist of Europe, influencing every modern "maker of plays." Let anyone consider Ibsen's position at present, and then look at the criticisms passed on him ten or twelve years ago in England, and cruelly gibbeted for all time by Mr. Shaw in his *Quintessence of Ibsenism*, and then let him say what is the test of anything but—experience.

The point, however, for which I notice Mr. Chesterton's articles—there were two—was an interesting and vigorous plea for the moral instinct of the "mob." "In fundamental ideal, in essential taste, in right and wrong, the people are always right; the mob is always moral." And he goes on to tell us that "there was a truth fantastically hidden in the saying that the voice of the people is the voice of God, for, like the voice of God, the voice of the people is broken and mysterious, and needing many centuries to understand and interpret." Frankly, I am not enamored of fantastically-hidden truths, which the dealer in paradox is always producing for our edification, and which frequently turn out on examination to be rather plain and obvious

falsehoods; but in this case no one can dispute the mysteriousness of the "voice of God," nor the fact that it takes many centuries—very many centuries—to interpret it. What, however, Mr. Chesterton means is that the moral instinct of the mass of men is sound, the intention is right, the essential preferences just. And it is true.

Now there are few Freethinkers who have ever engaged in argument that have not had some such proposition as this thrown up by way of justifying some current piece of dogmatism. The mass of men believe this and that and the other, which the Freethinker rejects; therefore, it is argued, he is setting himself against the fundamental instincts of the race. And I have seen this argument at times employed by men who themselves dissented on one point or another from popular opinion, and in that case found no difficulty in reconciling their disagreement with a recognition of the moral instinct as a necessary characteristic of human nature. But Mr. Chesterton's case is interesting. He, though seemingly a Christian, happens also to be a Radical and what is called a Pro-Boer; and, finding himself thus at variance with the "mob," whose moral instinct he has been extolling, he is too clever not to see the necessity of reconciling his proposition with his beliefs. So he explains matters as follows:—

"But though the people have a profound instinct for what is most right and what is most wrong in ethical types and positions, they have one incidental but rather ruinous defect. In denouncing the types of the vices they most detest they invariably denounce the wrong people. Ever since they crucified the greatest exponent of reverence for the great sin of blasphemy they have always been at work stoning the great philanthropists for hating mankind, cursing the great artists for producing ugliness, shouting at the great idealists for being realistic, abusing giants for being small, and pigmies for being large; denouncing negroes for being white, and white men for being black."

In other words, the mass of men with the best intentions possible are always going wrong, though it must be admitted it is small consolation to the "great philanthropist" to tell him he is being stoned in mistake for a ruffian. Mr. Chesterton seems to mean, however, that it is the ignorance of men, rather than lack of moral feeling, that leads them astray; and, if the people were only wise, they would hail the Stockmanns as deliverers of society, not curse them as its enemies. In point of fact, immorality can mostly be resolved in the last analysis in terms of unintelligence, and in the case of nations can always be so resolved. Again, Mr. Chesterton's argument seems to me sound; and it carries with it some obvious corollaries. What is needed amongst men is more knowledge rather than more exhortation. It is comparatively easy to preach to men to be good and virtuous and all the rest; it is more difficult, especially in public things, to find out the good and get clear about the line of virtue. One man thinks one policy virtuous, and another ascribes the same characteristic to a quite opposite policy; and even in private things, as Herbert Spencer has shown in one of his luminous illustrations, a man may carry an unenlightened altruism to a point at which much preventible suffering is inflicted on those dear to him. Science is really the savior, and one competent sociologist, say, is worth a battalion of merely moral preachers, though one recognises that a great moralist like Carlyle or Tolstoi may suggest paths to science which she might otherwise miss.

Of course, on such subjects as these we all speak of the "mob" as people beneath us—the fact of a man writing in a newspaper being held to imply a moral and intellectual superiority, the grounds for which are not quite obvious. As a matter of fact, we must, of course, modestly confess that we all form parts of the "mob," and are—most of us—as likely to go astray at the point where our knowledge ends as another, except in so far as habits of systematic thinking may keep us from gross errors and habits of intellectual scrupulousness may prevent our dogmatising in our ignorance. There is one characteristic of the "mob" which Mr. Chesterton's words suggest, and which may come home to himself in some respects. The mob always discovers its heroes several generations too late, and it praises its "great philanthropists" and great "exponents of

reverence"—let the phrase pass—often several centuries after they are dead. The test of a man's intelligence, therefore, is scarcely whether he praises the dead pioneers—that is easy; the test is whether he recognises the living ones. There are those to-day, for instance, accused of blasphemy because they are exponents of the reverence due to Truth and to Humanity, because they brush away the cobwebs of outworn creeds. But the "mob," if they do not stone, at least calumniate them, and sometimes even stone. Is Mr. Chesterton sure that his sympathies are with these new "blasphemers," or does he just praise the ancient blasphemer when that very praise, if ever merited, has become a superstition, and because the mob now hail the "blasphemer" as a god. Mankind begins by hating and cursing its thinkers and pioneers; afterwards it grows to praise them; and when the praise passes into worship it has already lost its savor, and it becomes a duty to repudiate it, even as it would have been repudiated by its object if he were really a great man at all. To the great mind the unintelligent homage of men is even more repulsive than their unintelligent hate.

FREDERICK RYAN.

### The Bible Creation Story.—V.

ONE point worthy of notice in connection with the manifold attempts of Christian advocates to reconcile the Bible Creation story with the proved facts of science is the passing lightly over, if not altogether ignoring, Elohim's great work of the second day. This, it will be remembered, was the making of a firmament, and the storing above it immense bodies of water in readiness to be cast down from time to time in the form of rain. This portion of the narrative is, perhaps, the most palpable of the many fictions contained in the story—which fact, no doubt, accounts for the general desire of Bible reconcilers to pass it over in silence.

In the large and imposing volume by W. W. Howard, from which I have already quoted, I can find on this subject only the following bald statement:—

"The second day's work consisted in constructing the atmosphere, arranging evaporation, and forming to some extent the ether."

This is a fair sample of the way in which a story, exhibiting the most childish ignorance of natural phenomena, is twisted into an accurate record of scientific facts. The Bible writer, it is needless to say, does *not* record—nor had he the smallest idea of—the matters Mr. Howard credits him with recording.

Everyone knows at the present day that a considerable quantity of water, all over the globe, is constantly being converted into invisible vapor; that this vapor, being lighter than the air at the earth's surface, ascends into a higher and more rarified air, until it reaches a stratum of its own specific gravity; that clouds of vapor thus formed, when carried by winds into cooler latitudes, become lower in temperature, and therefore with a less capacity for holding so much vapor in solution; consequently the excess falls to the ground in the form of rain, snow, or hail, according to the temperature of the atmosphere of the locality. This simple process, understood by everybody now, was known to no one who lived in Biblical times. For centuries before, as well as after, the commencement of the Christian era, it was the common belief, both among Jews and Gentiles, that an immense body of water, equal in capacity to all the oceans, seas, lakes, and rivers of the globe, was stored above the clouds and kept from falling to the earth by a solid crystalline roof or partition, which formed part of the "firmament." This belief among the Jews was perpetuated and confirmed by the statement in the first chapter of Genesis recording the work of the second day:—

"And Elohim said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it *divide the waters from the waters*. And Elohim made the firmament, and *divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament*: and it was so. And Elohim called the firmament *heaven*" (v. 6-8).

There is not one word in the foregoing account which

indicates that the writer knew anything about "constructing the atmosphere, arranging evaporation, and forming to some extent the ether"; but what the writer *does* say proves that he had no knowledge of such matters. Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (A.D. 180), tells us how this passage was understood in his days. In his Letters to his friend Autolycus, whom he was endeavoring to convert to the Christian religion, he says (ii. 13):—

"Wherefore also the prophet mentioned that the creation of the heavens first of all took place as a kind of roof.....after which this heaven, which we see has been called 'firmament,' and to which half the water was taken up that it might serve for rains and showers and dews to mankind. And half the water was left on earth for rivers and fountains and seas."

The meaning of the passage in Genesis is here given with absolute correctness, save upon one point: the author of the Creation story does not say what proportion of the water was placed above the firmament. The same reticence is observed by other inspired writers. Thus in Psalm cxlviii. 4, 5, we read:—

"Praise him ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens."

The antediluvian patriarch, Enoch, being a fully-inspired prophet, was, of course, aware of the large reservoirs of water stored above the firmament. Speaking in his prophetic character, he says (liii. 7):—

"In those days shall punishment go forth from the Lord of Spirits, and the receptacles of water which are above the heavens shall be opened, and likewise the fountains which are under the heavens and under the earth."

Of course, if rain-water were stored above the heavens, so also, we should be led to expect, were snow and hail; for all three fall in the same way from the skies. And such, we find, was really believed to be the case. In the veracious account of the Lord's dealings with his servant, Job, we obtain further light upon this matter. There, in the silliest speech ever put in the mouth of any deity, the Almighty endeavors to convict that unfortunate patriarch of ignorance and presumption. Says El Shaddai:—

"Hast thou entered the *treasuries* of the snow, or hast thou seen the *treasuries* of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?" (Job xxxviii. 22, 23).

Poor Job had neither seen nor entered any of the Lord's celestial chambers, and had therefore no knowledge of the contents of these store-rooms. The main point, however, is that the Almighty himself knew the exact quantities of water, snow, and hail-stones stored in "treasuries" above the skies. A notable example of the use which the Lord made of his hail-stones "in the day of battle and war" is recorded in the book of Joshua (x. 11):—

"And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel.....that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them.....They were more which died of the hail-stones than they which the children of Israel slew with the sword" (see also Exod. ix. 23).

Here it may be remarked that the word "treasuries" in the passage quoted from the book of Job (Heb., *otsar*) means precisely the same as the "receptacles" mentioned by Enoch—that is, a place where something was stored or laid up. The following examples will make this clear:—

1 Kings vii. 51: "And put them in the *treasuries* of the house of the Lord."

2 Chron. xxxii. 27: "He provided him *treasuries* for silver and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of goodly vessels."

Neh. xiii. 12: "Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the wine, and the oil into the *treasuries*."

We find, further, that the Lord kept other things besides water, snow, and hail in his storehouses above the clouds, amongst which may be mentioned the winds, bread, fire and brimstone, and lightning.

Ps. cxxxv. 7: "He bringeth forth the wind out of his *treasuries*."

Exod. xvi. 4: "Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you."

Ps. lxxviii. 23, 24: "Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the *doors of heaven*; and he rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them of the corn of heaven."

Gen. xix. 24, 28: "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom

and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.....and lo, the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace."

Enoch xvii. 3: "And I beheld the receptacles of light and of thunder at the extremities of the place, where it was deepest. There was a bow of fire, and arrows in their quivers, a sword of fire, and every species of lightning."

2 Sam. xxii. 14, 15: "The Lord thundered from heaven.....and he sent out arrows and scattered them; lightning and discomfited them."

Returning to the narrative in Genesis, it will no doubt be remembered that the Hebrew word *rakia*, translated "firmament," signifies something stretched out or extended—"that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain" (Is. xl. 22)—and may therefore be rendered "expanse"; but the word denotes, at the same time, something firm and solid, and is so translated in the Greek Septuagint. It was inevitable that this firmament should be conceived of as extended to all points of the compass, and stretched over the whole earth; but part of it—probably that just above the clouds—was believed to be solid, and "doors" or "windows" were imagined to be opened, at times, to allow the rain and all the other things stored there to fall. The mere fact that this firmament was supposed to support vast reservoirs of water, besides "treasuries" filled with other goods, is conclusive upon the latter point.

In accordance with this view, we are told in the account of the Deluge that "the windows of heaven were opened, and the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights." Again, later on, it is stated that "the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained" (Gen. vii. 11, 12; viii. 2). In Psalm civ. 13 we read: "He watereth the mountains from his chambers." There can be no possible doubt, then, as to the meaning of the writer of Genesis with regard to the "waters which are above the firmament."

The regular distribution of these "waters" was, moreover, believed to be withheld, at times, as a punishment for sins committed by the nation, the result being a famine, due to the prolonged absence of rain. The wise king Solomon, aware of this fact, made, in a prayer to the Lord, the following request on behalf of his people:—

"When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray towards this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin.....then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sins of thy servants.....and send rain upon thy land."

To this the Lord replied:—

"I have heard thy prayer.....If I shut up heaven, that there be no rain.....if my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. vi. 26-27; vii. 12, 14).

We also find in the Bible "history" several occasions upon which the rain is said to have been withheld by the Lord for the cause mentioned by Solomon.

It would seem that the ancient Jews, as well as the early Christians, imagined "the heavens" to consist of several floors, in one of which dwelt the Lord and his holy angels. The Apostle Paul tells us that he was "caught up even to the third heaven," where he heard "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." It was, no doubt, on this floor that the heavenly host resided, the lower ones being devoted to the storing of water, snow, hail-stones, manna, fire, and all the other substances laid up in the Lord's store-chambers. It would appear, also, that the Lord appointed angels to attend to the supplying the earth with these blessings. We know from Enoch that at stated times angels came and opened the receptacles of water, and sent forth the rain, so that, in the words of that prophet, "there is a regulation in the quantity of rain." We are told, further, by the same reliable authority, that frost, snow, mist, and dew were under the charge of angels and spirits, who saw to their proper distribution. Much more information relating to natural phenomena, penned by this sacred writer—all of the same unimpeachable character—must remain unnoticed. And here I would remind any Christian reader who may have doubts as to the reliability of Enoch that the inspiration and perfect knowledge possessed by that prophet is fully guaranteed by the inspired Apostle Jude.

## Acid Drops.

WE see a notice in one of the daily newspapers of a new book which is said to be a "very labored attempt to find a new basis for orthodox theology." The author appears to have made (in his own opinion) a fresh discovery of God. The interstellar Ether he assumes to be "pure spirit," and as the Bible says that "God is spirit" the Deity must be this Ether, the fundamental substance of the Universe. This is rather a funny idea when you think it out, but that is a common feature of theological conceptions. It is certainly odd to think of chemical compounds as so much "God" worked up into complex forms. On the other hand, it is not inappropriate that "God" should be a "simple" existence.

"The Irish, of course," the *Daily News* says, "voted solidly for Disestablishment." This is in relation to Mr. Jones's motion in favor of the Disestablishment of the State Church in Wales. It is a pity that the writer—Mr. H. W. Massingham—did not explain that "of course." He can hardly mean that the Irish members voted against the Welsh Church for the same reason that the Welsh members did. Those who want a Catholic University set up by the State in Ireland are hardly the men to vote against the State establishment of religion on principle. They take their tip from the Romish hierarchy on such matters, and will vote for a Catholic State Church, and against a Protestant State Church, every time there is a division. Let there be no mistake on that point.

Father Thurston, the Jesuit, addressed the Society of Arts recently on "The History of the Rosary in All Countries." Cardinal Vaughan occupied the chair, and praised the lecturer's erudition. We presume, therefore, he did not disagree with Father Thurston's statement that the use of rosaries was a practice common to many Oriental races long before the birth of Christ. As a matter of fact, there is no part of Christian ritual—any more than there is of Christian doctrine—which is not far older than Christianity. In other words, there is nothing original in the "only true religion." It is one of many Oriental systems, and has the characteristics that are common to the East.

Father Thurston pointed out an interesting fact in relation to London topography. It is generally supposed that Paternoster-row was always associated with the book trade. But this is a mistake. The name was derived from the Paternostri, who carried on their business there. They turned, polished, perforated, and mounted beads for devotional purposes.

Dr. Kuyper, the Prime Minister of Holland, seems to be nearly as pious as President Kruger. To him the Bible is the beginning and the end of true statesmanship. "Whoever," he says, "leaves the firm ground of God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, as the only true basis for private and public action, can have neither sound politics nor sound economics." Perhaps this accounts for the rather poor stroke of diplomacy he attempted on behalf of the Boers. A little less trust in the motions of the Spirit, and a little more worldly wisdom, might have rendered his action more intelligent and more successful.

"A Requiem for the Soul of Our Sovereign Lady Victoria" was not allowed to pass off peaceably at St. Matthew's Church, Westminster. As the large and fashionable congregation passed out of the building someone shouted, "The service we have been witnessing this morning is a blasphemous insult to Queen Victoria's memory." Another man, who put on his hat before reaching the pavement, cried out, "This is a Joss house." We agree with him. Only he should have got outside before saying so.

Pastor Cuff, of the Shoreditch Tabernacle, turned up as a speaker at the great Protestant demonstration in the Albert Hall. He declared that the Nonconformists would stand shoulder to shoulder with Churchmen in the fight against Rome. We are glad to hear it—for Rome is the great enemy of freedom and progress, after all. But that is no reason why King Edward should be compelled to announce a religious crusade in his Coronation Oath. The less any religious party has to do with the State the better. Besides, the interest of English sovereigns in the Protestant faith was never anything but dynastic. We are of opinion that King Edward, if he can sit upon his throne with ease and security, doesn't care a farthing about the struggles of the sects.

In another column of this week's *Freethinker* will be found a newspaper report of the trial and sentence of a colored gentleman in the religious line of business. His chief pastimes were seduction and blackmail. Had he kept out of prison he might have aspired to fill the vacancy in Christian Evidence and Anti-Infidel circles caused by the death of the late Celestine Edwards.

## Quicunque Vult.

(Recommended to be read by all men of God after Morning Prayer instead of the Apostles' Creed.)

RIDDLE-ME, riddle-me-ree !  
 Oh, parson learned, in choker white,  
 Punch the Book with a mighty smite ;  
 Bite your nails with a wrathful bite,  
 And polish your brains (if any) ;  
 Squirm and squeak, for you're on the roast  
 Of Father and Son and Holy Ghost.  
 And, riddle-me-ree, I beg of thee,  
 The tangled trick of the Trinity,  
 Of the Three in One and the One in Three ;  
 The Sacred Spectre, Pa and Son,  
 Who built the earth and stars and moon,  
 And got mixed up to such a tune  
 By Mr. Athanasius  
 That, when we read this famous Creed,  
 We all exclaim, "Good gracious !"   
 Oh, riddle-me-ree, I beg of thee,  
 The tied-up knot of the Trinity,  
 They are not one and they are not three,  
 They are not three and they are not one.  
 (To be flippant, this "just takes the bun.")  
 Oh, parson harpy, with choker pale,  
 Tell me another simpler tale—  
 Samson's jaw-bone and Jonah's whale  
 Are easier of digestion.  
 Oh, I *must* have faith, my parson wise ?  
 Well, here's another question :  
 I place this shilling before your eyes  
 (Don't snatch it before I put it down !)—  
 Will faith turn that into half-a-crown,  
 Oh, gospel-gusher of renown ?  
 Riddle-me-ree ! tell no more lies  
 Of golden harps beyond the skies,  
 Of hell for some, or of heaven sure,  
 Damnation and forgiving.  
 Robber of brainless dupes and fools !  
 You need a newer stock of tools  
 To earn an honest (?) living !  
 Then riddle-me, riddle-me-ree,  
 My parasite parson, in choker white !  
 What you will do for a crust to bite,  
 And where you will find a lodging at night ;  
 And riddle-me-ree, I beg of thee,  
 How you'll live—for the question puzzles me  
 As much as your tied-up Trinity !  
 On Athanasius ?—  
 Oh, good gracious !!!

E. J. M.

## Blasphemy.

UNDER no circumstances can the expression of an honest opinion, couched in becoming language, amount to blasphemy. And right here it may be well enough to inquire: What is blasphemy?

A man who knowingly assaults the true, who knowingly endeavors to stain the pure, who knowingly maligns the good and noble, is a blasphemer. A man who deserts the truth because it is unpopular is a blasphemer. He who runs with the hounds, knowing that the hare is in the right, is a blasphemer.

In the soul of every man, or in the temple inhabited by the soul, there is one niche in which can be found the statue of the ideal. In the presence of this statue the good man worships—the bad man blasphemers; that is to say, he is not true to the ideal.

A man who slanders a pure woman or an honest man is a blasphemer. So, too, a man who does not give the honest transcript of his mind is a blasphemer. If a man really thinks the character of Jehovah, as portrayed in the Old Testament, is bad, and he pronounces it good, he is a blasphemer and a coward.

All laws against "blasphemy" have been passed by the numerically strong and intellectually weak. These laws have been passed by those who, finding no help in logic, appealed to the Legislature.

Back of all these superstitions you will find some self-interest. I do not say that this is true in every case, but I do say that, if priests had not been fond of mutton, lambs never would have been sacrificed to God. Nothing was ever carried to the temple that the priest could not use, and it always so happened that God wanted what his agents liked.

Now I will not say that all priests have been priests "for revenue only," but I must say that the history of the world tends to show that the sacerdotal class prefer revenue without religion to religion without revenue.

—Colonel Ingersoll.



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

February 23, Athenæum Hall,  
March 2, Glasgow.

### To Correspondents.

CHARLES WATTS'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—February 16, South Shields; 23, Liverpool. March 2, Camberwell. April 6, Sheffield; 13, Bradford; 20, Glasgow.—Address, 24 Carminia-road, Balham, London, S.W.

C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—February 16, Bradford; 23, Birmingham. March 2, Athenæum Hall; 9, Aberdare, South Wales; 16, Pontypridd.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.

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### Personal.

I HAVE to beg the indulgence of my readers this week. They will miss some customary features of the *Freethinker*. I am too ill to supply them. Nor was I able to lecture on Sunday evening, my place being taken by Mr. A. B. Moss. I cannot be at the Athenæum Hall this evening (Feb. 16) either. Miss Vance has the duty of providing a substitute. Any further announcement must be left until next week. I am not out of the wood yet, and must not start shouting. One thing is pretty certain, from my own feelings and from what my doctor says, and that is that I shall have to take care of myself for some little time. For months I have been seriously overworked; sleeplessness came on again, and I was bent on getting away if only for two or three days; but the opportunity did not present itself, and early last week I felt that my condition was becoming more serious. I struggled on till Friday, and then I broke down badly. It seemed like influenza, but it developed into acute bronchitis too. I am writing this on Tuesday afternoon, worn out with many things, including want of rest; and this scrawl is the hardest bit of "literary" work I ever did in my life. But I think I am right through the worst, and the *Freethinker* (at any rate) will probably look more like its old self again in the next number.

G. W. FOOTE.

### Important.

I MUCH regret to inform our readers that Mr. G. W. Foote's unfortunate illness will again prevent him from keeping his engagement at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday evening (Feb. 16). As I consider Mr. Foote far too unwell to be even consulted, I have, acting entirely upon my own responsibility, invited the Rev. J. J. B. Coles to occupy the platform. This invitation has been most kindly and promptly accepted, and Mr. Coles will take as his subject "Some Mistakes of Freethinkers in their Criticism of the Bible." After the address there will be ample opportunity for discussion, and I ask all those who have expressed a desire to cross swords with Mr. Coles to be present.

EDITH M. VANCE.

### A Missionary Meeting in East Anglia.

By much adroit wire-pulling and personal influence, a large and "unsectarian" platform had been got together for the annual meeting of the Church Missionary Society at Little Pedlington, an old-fashioned market town in the Eastern Counties. There was the Archdeacon, rich and handsome, who floated a flag over his mansion, when he was at home, and who objected to seeing curates riding on bicycles; there was the Ritualistic Vicar of Spiffton; there was the Evangelical Rector of Croxton, in whose church evening communion was celebrated monthly; there was the deaf and blind Protestant, Rev. Mablethorpe; there was the Rev. Silas Snooks, who was a Broad Church clergyman, and never used the Nicene or the Athanasian creed; there was the Congregationalist minister, who was violently hated by all the Anglicans because of the popularity of his sermons, there were the local secretaries of the S. P. G., S. P. C. K., G. F. S., S. P. C. A., B. and F. B. S., and many other societies. There were also many influential laymen: the Earl of Shalford, who had lately married a beautiful barmaid; an old scrofulous banker; the leading doctors, lawyers, merchants, and retired people of the district, together with a huge mass of undistinguished nobodies who filled the dirty old Corn Exchange, and made the atmosphere suggestive of Tartarus.

The Mayor, a nervous and skinny draper, entered the committee-room at eight o'clock, and found the clerics kneeling on the floor, while the Rev. Josiah Mablethorpe was extemporising prayer. He had wandered off into an account of a railway accident: "The great engine lay upon its side, snorting and puffing. Oh, the cries of the wounded! Oh, the marvellous greatness of God!"—while Snooks was blowing his nose with singular vigor. Presently the *cortège* filed on to the platform, while the Old Hundredth was sung with great gusto by the mixed multitude—a raucous and gruesome performance. The curate of the parish, finding no room on the platform, displaced a small boy from a chair in the front row of seats; he told the boy to sit on the steps leading to the platform, where his head soon dropped on to a rung, and he slept peacefully until the second hymn was called. The Mayor began by speaking of Moses overlooking the Promised Land, and grumbled at by the people; Moses being compared to General Kitchener—much to the joy of the audience, which had rioted against a Pro-Boer meeting some weeks previously. The Mayor then introduced the Rev. T. F. Russell, who had never been out of Great Britain, but was very unctuous and fervent about the Empire, and the blessings of freedom and Christian comfort, besides trade and profits, which invariably followed the advent of the British flag. He contrasted English Mansion House relief funds with the cruelty of the Spaniards of the sixteenth century, and observed that the Teutonic race excelled in character and the sense of duty, which were due to Protestantism. Here the Vicar of Spiffton sniffed. "People say to me," he went on, "why do you not go and be a missionary, as you are so interested in the cause? The answer is simple: Why are you not Julius Cæsar?" He then told a story of a naval chaplain, who had been caged in the bows of a ship and pelted with coal and pork. During his sufferings he had dropped tracts about, and on one of these the words, "After Death, the Judgment," had been printed in red letters, and the sight of this had led to the conversion of the boatswain. The Rev. Hugh Taylor was then introduced to the meeting. He unrolled an enormous map of China. "This province," he said, pointing to a large piece of map, "is called Pish-Bosh; it has a population of forty millions, more than the population of England, and all dying for lack of the gospel light. They stretch out eager hands for your help. Can you refuse it?" The speaker then dilated upon the evils of infant marriages, of poverty, of tight boots, of infanticide, and of the superstitions of the Chinese, all of which would vanish before the appearance of the Christian missionary. He pointed out that, if England did not look alive, Russia would swallow up most of China, and would bring the debased idolatry of the Greek Church to the Chinese, besides drilling soldiers for the future invasion of India.

The Congregationalist minister then made a fervent "temperance" speech, exhorting the people to abstain from alcohol, tobacco, and sugar, and to send their savings to the missionary cause. He was glad to see men of all sects combining for a good work, and he hoped the time would soon come when all Christian ministers would interchange pulpits. (Strong dissent from the Anglican clergy.) An emancipated blacksmith, from the rear of the room, wanted to ask a question. He was given permission, and inquired whether anyone present had read of Mrs. Jellaby, and whether superstition, slums, sweating, and cheating did not exist in England, and whether the clergy could not try and cure these evils by financial and land reforms. He was shouted down by a crowd of young men, who commenced singing "Soldiers of the Queen." After the blacksmith had got down, the Mayor regained the attention of the meeting, which was soothed by singing "From Greenland's Icy Mountains." The net result of this great affair was a collection of £28 for the C. M. S., and that three young ladies

devoted themselves to missionary enterprise. Two were sent to China, where they were promptly killed by Boxers, while the third fell out of a bullock-waggon in Zululand, and was sent back to England with a less efficient brain than she had carried with her to Africa.

### Long Ago.

In the days of adolescence I believed  
That the Holy Spirit I had oftentimes grieved ;  
That the Father for me waited,  
And my fate with Christ debated,  
And I wish he'd not created  
Me to suffer endless woe.  
(How I wished it—long ago !)

So I vowed I'd try to gain eternal bliss ;  
And the parson said : " O praise the Lord for this !  
If we do as did dear Jesus,  
Satan soon will cease to tease us ;  
Of our loads the Lord will ease us.....  
First of all, *the cash must go !*"  
(And it *went*—long years ago !)

Like the Lord, to lose my temper I was apt ;  
But I turned the other cheek whenever slapped.  
When to be like *him* I started,  
With my coat and cloak I parted ;  
People said : " He *is* soft-hearted !"   
(*Soft enough*—my acting so,  
In the days of long ago !)

For salvation surely none should grudge to pay ;  
All the savings from the stocking passed away,  
And that coat and cloak I needed,  
So I *asked*, but no one heeded,  
Save one aged crone, and she did  
Urge me to depart—below.  
(*She departed* long ago.)

And my "bread" upon the water I had cast ;  
Like the son of Yahveh, I was forced to fast,  
And found little consolation  
In the story of salvation,  
In the nightmare of damnation.....  
REASON waved her wand, and lo !  
Save *Myself* I saw no foe,  
Save *Myself* saw no Redeemer—  
In the days of long ago.

J. YOUNG.

### The "Promising Preacher" from New Calabar.

#### HOW HE TURNED OUT.

BEFORE Mr. William Robert McConnell, K.C., at the County of London Sessions, Clerkenwell, yesterday, Aumore Ashaker, a colored man, aged twenty-five, described as a student, was found guilty of having maliciously sent to William George Child, a hotel keeper, of 86 and 87 Chiswell-street, Finsbury, a letter threatening to kill and murder him. Mr. W. H. Leicester prosecuted. Mr. Purcell appeared for the prisoner, at the suggestion of the Court.

The prosecutor, who had known the prisoner since November, 1900, had befriended him, and advanced him money to a very considerable extent. At the beginning of January, Mr. Child, having learnt something of the man's former career, assisted a young fellow to get his sister away from the influence of the prisoner, who had persuaded her to live with him as his wife at an address in Claremont-square, Pentonville. When Ashaker learnt that, in his absence, the girl had been removed into the country, he was greatly angered, and immediately sat down and penned an epistle, which he posted to the prosecutor. It contained such phrases as : " You have got to get your brains blown out. My six chambers are ready for you. If they put me in prison a thousand times, I shall kill you before I am satisfied. This week is for me. I chase you in vain at present ; but I know where to find you." There was also a great deal of offensive language intermixed with the threats, and, on the letter being handed to the police, Detective-Sergeant Walter Selby arrested the prisoner.

Mr. W. H. Leicester told the Court that Ashaker was a native of New Calabar. In consequence of his natural intelligence he was selected by the natives as a promising preacher. A subscription was raised to supply him with the necessary funds to enable him to come to England and undergo a training for religious duties. He was sent to a college at Colwyn Bay, but he left there, apparently of his own accord.

Detective-Inspector Morgan said that since that time he had been living by fraud. On January 16, 1900, he was convicted at Bedford, and sentenced to four months' imprisonment for obtaining credit by false pretences. He was then

known as the "Rev. Claude Bevington Wilson." Ashaker, continued the inspector, had lived by a system of black-mailing. He became acquainted with white women, induced them to live with him, and then used his victims as a means of extortion from their friends and relatives. He armed himself with gilt-edged visiting cards, upon which he fraudulently described himself as a B.A. of Balliol College, Oxford.

The learned Judge sentenced Ashaker to twelve months' hard labor.

—*Daily News* (February 7, 1902).

### A Final Word on Blake.

" I mock thee not, though I by thee am mocked ;  
Thou call'st me madman, but I call thee blockhead."—*Blake*.

LEST my readers be wearied, I will follow the example of "Mimnermus," just aiming a Parthian shaft or two as I withdraw. First, I shall try to transfix the assertion of "Mimnermus" that Blake in his old age wrote nothing but "drivelling nonsense." To do this, all that is needful is to point out that, up to the time of his death, Blake wrote letters of the most simple and clear character to Linnell and other friends, and that the "drivelling nonsense" was the accumulation of notes and memoranda of half a century which Blake expressly states he had asked his wife to burn, but that she refused to do so ; that this "drivelling nonsense" contained much that a student of Blake could make sense of, and much more that Blake himself could have translated into understandable writing and a residuum of only half-achieved images and incoherent conceptions, the drift of which perhaps even Blake could not, owing to lapse of time, have clearly explained. Indeed, he might have made for it the excuse of Jean Paul Richter for some of *his* writings :—

Gott knows I meant somedings  
When first dis book I writ ;  
But Gott only knows vat it means *now*,  
For I haf forgotten it.

The excuse is framed by Hans Breitmann, but it will serve.

The second shaft I will speed at "Mimnermus's" outrageous notion that a writer's philosophy can be more fully understood if we knew the state of the writer's liver ! Carlyle had no digester, and was therefore a pessimist ; but Von Hartmann had a digestion like that of a horse, and was a greater pessimist than Carlyle. Rousseau all his life was dyspeptic and an optimist. Henri Beyle, another genius with the digestion of an ostrich, was a pessimist ; and so we may go on, until "Mimnermus's" proposition is confuted from premises to conclusion. The fact is verifiable by anyone in the circle of his own acquaintance that you can tell no man's philosophy from the state of his stomach, any more than you can tell it from the length of his ears or the circumference of his calf. Only a crank would decide an intellectual question, requiring the widest possible knowledge, thought, and generalisations, from the state of his own single digestive apparatus.

Lastly, about posthumous biographical criticism, let me say that its value is extremely small, but if in the case of Blake "Mimnermus" had found out proof that Blake had been charged with insanity or put under restraint for it, and that these facts had escaped the knowledge of Blake's contemporaries, then "Mimnermus" would have had solid ground for his assertion that Blake was mad. But "Mimnermus" discovers nothing of the kind, and raises his, in my opinion, baseless charge against Blake on the symbolic or allegoric or phantastic or chaotic character of a quantity of memoranda unwillingly preserved by Blake.

If we consider the almost personal character of Blake's symbolism, how largely he provided his own special pantheon, and how he turned topsy-turvy—but with a system of his own which rendered the topsy-turveness clear to his own understanding—many of the conventional thought images of his and our time, we shall naturally conclude that much of even his obscurest manuscripts *was* intelligible to him, and, therefore, no proof—or even evidence of—madness.

I have no reason for believing that Clare was wrongly confined for insanity ; if I had, I would gladly urge it and try to rehabilitate his mental fame ; but Blake was never *en cette galere*, so needs no rehabilitation, and his fine illustrations to Dante done in his sixty-ninth year are a perpetual refutation of "Mimnermus's" charge, to say nothing of his other daily work done in those latter years to which "Mimnermus" looks for evidence of insanity, but in which I find only a confirmed and extended use of that symbolic expression which was habitual with Blake from youth to extreme age. Blake had imagination enough to furnish suggestions to a century of painters, and themes for a generation of poets. He was as sane as Michael Angelo or Martin Tupper.

SIRIUS.

Some people would like to know whence the poet, whose philosophy is in these days deemed as profound and trustworthy as his song is sweet and pure, gets his authority for speaking of "Nature's holy plan."—*Thomas Hardy*.

## INDEPENDENT DEPARTMENT.

[With a view to broadening the scope of the *Freethinker*, and thus to widen its interest for its readers, we have decided to open an Independent Department, in which other questions may be treated than those that come within the settled policy of this journal. Such questions—especially political ones—may be of the highest importance, and yet questions on which Freethinkers may legitimately differ, and on which they ought not (as Freethinkers) to divide. Our responsibility, therefore, in this Department only extends to the writers' fitness to be heard. Freethinkers may thus find in their own organ a common ground for the exchange of views and opinions; in short, for the friendly enjoyment of intellectual hospitality. Writers may be as vigorous and uncompromising as they please, as long as they are courteous and tolerant.—EDITOR.]

## Modern Slavery.

(Concluded from page 93.)

THE tyranny of capital and the slavery of labor are inevitable while they remain separate. Without property there is no liberty. The man who has nothing must be at the mercy of the man who has something. Trade unions have only assisted the workmen by using general funds to enable individuals to hold out for the price of their labor, instead of submitting it to a forced sale. That is, it has helped them by making them to a certain extent capitalists. There lies the secret of their complete emancipation. Working for wages is an unsatisfactory condition of things, and necessarily involves more or less dependence. The slavery of labor will disappear when capital and labor are not allied, but united—that is, when the capitalist is a laborer and the laborer a capitalist. Co-operation is the golden key to unlock the mystery of enfranchisement.

Slavery exists also in our political institutions. All Europe, with the exception of France and little Switzerland, is burdened with monarchy, which is the supreme embodiment of the hereditary principle. We are aware that many writers, even of the Liberal school, affect a philosophic regard for monarchy as a sort of beneficent evil. They point to its elevating and restraining influence, to its high function as a constant centre of national life, to its august forms as compared with the free and easy methods of elective executives. All this is very fine, but look at its cost. In so far as monarchy is real, its tendency is repressive and stifling; it is only not so where it has become a flagrant sham. The German monarchy is the symbol of German unity. True, but it was also an invulnerable shield for Prince Bismarck against all hostile criticism; and its fearful blood-tax is exhausting the nation's resources, and driving its young men into exile. Mr. Matthew Arnold well said that the great lack of Germany is civil courage, but the same truth was long ago expressed by Shelley, when he wrote of "King-deluded Germany." In Russia the monarchy has absolutely no power of progress; it merely sits, with a look of mingled hate and fear, plotting against plots. In Austria it only clings to a composite empire, fearful of accident, and dreading the nemesis of its past. In Italy it occupies the ground won by the Republican enthusiasm of Mazzini and the Republican sword of Garibaldi, and imagines that this is the end of all the nation's strife and sacrifice. In Spain it does little more than remind the people of their degradation. And in England it serves no other than a purely social purpose. Its political power has completely vanished, and all that remains is its faculty for supplying social excitement to the idle and luxurious classes.

Monarchy increases the slavery of war. The chief end of kings' lives is to inspect troops. Nothing more conclusively shows their obsolescence; for the military spirit of the past and the industrial spirit of the present are directly opposed to each other, and cannot be reconciled. Republics are more peaceful. The United States usually keep out of quarrels, and everyone may notice the great decline in the warlike spirit of the French since the fall of the empire. It might, indeed, be said that if kingly ambition and dynastic intrigues were wiped out of modern history, the causes of nine-tenths of its wars would disappear.

Monarchy is now an evil principle. It is the consecration of privilege, and all privilege is unjust, or in

other words legalised theft. Democracy will crush it out in time, and establish the universal rule of equality, not of talent or reward, but of opportunity and service.

The House of Lords is a further embodiment of the hereditary principle, and the largest home of privilege. While it exists we are not free. So long as a roomful of men are able to thwart the nation's will, we are virtually slaves; and so long as they exercise irresponsible power, they are virtually despots. What is the right of birth to the right of brains? If a man can rise to any eminence by force of intellect, strength of character, and virtue of public service, he shall not be envied, but admired. But if he is to be elevated on a preposterous pedestal by the accident of birth, and therefore to demand our reverence and live at our expense, we should plainly state that his pretensions are arrogant and absurd. We recognise no merit in his condescending to be born, and being the son of one's father (or mother) is the privilege of every person in the world.

Slavery is to be found, too, among the unenfranchised millions who are at present without any voice in the making of laws or the imposing of taxes, although they must obey and pay. The agricultural laborers of England are political serfs. They have no more influence in the State than pigs, and in a certain sense less than pheasants and foxes. And their disability is shared by multitudes in our great towns who are voteless, and partly by those who are enfranchised, but whose votes are largely nullified by an unjust distribution of seats. This kind of slavery will obtain until we get universal suffrage and perfect equality of voting power. We are acquainted with the objections to so much freedom, and we know that they all spring from the selfishness of privilege. They are full of pretences about the welfare of the excluded classes being best subserved by the present arrangement; but they all remind us of the apologetic fox-hunter who declared that the men liked the sport, the horses liked it, the dogs liked it, aye and the fox liked it. The honest gentleman meant well, but why did he decide the question for the fox?

Surely it is the poor and not the rich who most require the protection of law. Wealth has inherent advantages enough, without claiming factitious powers; and the poorer classes need not only the right of legislation, but a constant and vigilant exercise of it, to guard them against the encroachments of opulence. Every legal restriction is for the poor, every moral reform is for the poor. They get plenty of everything but justice. And one has only to stand in a court of law—whether magistrate's court, county court, or judge's court—and watch the proceedings for a few hours, to observe how synonymous a meaning is attached to wealth and respectability, poverty and rascality. The poor man, says the proverb, has no friends; and if he may not, once in seven years, give effect to his will at the ballot-box, he is in reality, and past all dispute, a serf.

Religious slavery is involved in the very existence of a State Church. It implies patronage to one form of belief and insult to others; not to mention that the revenues of property belonging to all are appropriated to the use of a section, who thus thrive on plunder in the name of righteousness. It is sometimes argued that a State Church, if more conservative than dissent, is less intolerant; but this is not historically true; and, on the other hand, all such tolerance, which is nothing but indifference, is purchased at the price of sincerity. Besides, it is rather extravagant to bribe religious fanaticism at the rate of ten or twelve millions a year.

The time is coming when State Churches will be abolished, when all opinions will be equal before the law, when statutes for the protection of certain beliefs will be abrogated, when every citizen will be free to think as he pleases, and to express his thoughts in his own way to whomsoever chooses to listen. That immaculate pair of Philistines, Mrs. Grundy and Mr. Bumble, will then be shorn of their sovereignty. Great writers will discuss with frankness and courage the deepest questions of religion and morals, and our whole life will gain in virility as its freedom is enlarged.

Let us hope, but let us also work. Liberty is never voluntarily conceded; it is always conquered. The warriors of freedom must raise the standard of revolt;

not in a spirit of anarchy, but in a spirit of reform; for order can only be conserved by progress, and the essential condition of progress is liberty.

G. W. FOOTE.

### War and Arbitration.

MR. RYAN "has reason," as the French say. As Secularists, at any rate, we are pledged to give a practical application to our ideas. If they are merely to remain in the air, they are entitled to no more credit than intellectual gymnastics; and theology or astrology will provide such recreation or amusement probably as well as Secularism. One of our chief claims to respect has always seemed to me to be an affirmation that all questions should be settled by rational investigation and debate, and that it is impossible to prove the correctness of any belief by knocking your opponent on the head—*except* the belief that you *could* knock him on the head! That all questions in dispute between men or nations may be settled by reason, and that for a Rationalist to attempt to settle complex questions with a pole-axe or a Maxim gun is to become a renegade to his professed beliefs. That for a Rationalist to refuse arbitration in a dispute would be as incompatible with his profession of faith as for a teetotaler to start drinking gin. The latter, to save his life, might justify himself in becoming a drunkard; the former might for a like reason shoulder a rifle and justify his so doing. But a true Rationalist would stick to reason, and a true teetotaler to his watery drinks, until by *force majeure* and in last resort he was driven to use the things he looked upon as evil. The refusal to arbitrate with weak nations, whilst we agree to arbitrate with the United States or France or Germany or Russia, is a national crime and a national cowardice. This refusal alone stamps our attack on the Boer Republics as open robbery of a weaker people. To have refused arbitration with the United States might have been reckless—it could hardly have been cowardly; but the bully is always full of sweet reasonableness towards his equal in size: it is only when he gets hold of the small boy that his brutal nature shows itself unabashed; a fight on equal terms no bully will take a hand in; he wants something "soft"—a woman or a cripple or a child!

However, I don't believe there are ten thoughtful men in the ranks of Secularism that would have refused to arbitrate with the Transvaal, and I don't believe that any party in England is so free from all responsibility in this vile war—not even the Quakers—as is ours. There are as few Secularists in favor of war as there were bishops speaking in favor of arbitration two years and a-half ago, and nothing much more gratifying could be said for us, nor a more damning comparison made for the Holy Men of Blood in the House of Lords.

BRITON.

### Correspondence.

#### ACHILLES AND THE TORTOISE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As "Head Master" and Mr. Ball differ on the question as to whether "decimal nine recurring equals one," I take heart of grace to suggest that both may be wrong, or, at any rate, beside the mark, in their agreement as to the solution of Zeno's puzzle of Achilles and the tortoise, and I call attention to the omission of both Mr. Ball and "Head Master" to deal with the statements I made concerning the said puzzle. On quietly considering the problem *as laid down by Zeno*, three conclusions emerge very clearly—viz., (1) that the distance covered, *on Zeno's conditions*, will never extend to a sufficient length to enable Achilles to overtake the tortoise; (2) that, the "race" being run in *heats*, the conditions of which are really identical, if Achilles cannot overtake the tortoise in the first heat—which he cannot—he cannot overtake the tortoise at all; (3) that, by making each heat twenty times longer than its preceding heat, it will be seen at once—by this reversal of that particular condition which makes each heat to be run twenty times *less* than its preceding heat—that it is utterly impossible for Achilles to overtake the tortoise; (4) that, after the seventh heat, *on Zeno's conditions*, neither Achilles nor the tortoise will ever be able to again move in accordance with the problem's conditions.

The first three conclusions, unless refuted by "Head Master" or Mr. Ball, show that your two able correspondents are in error, or have not taken the trouble to understand Zeno's conditions, and, therefore, Zeno's problem. The fourth shows that the problem is not, as Mr. Ball affirms, a practical one; for nothing could well be less practical than for two runners to run races, after the seventh heat, *ad infinitum*, without being able to move at all, *practically*.

I have looked up Grote's *Plato* since this correspondence

begun, and I find that Grote therein seems to accept the conclusion that Achilles cannot, in the terms of the problem as laid down by Zeno, overtake the tortoise. Perhaps Mr. Ball and "Head Master" will reconsider their decision, and, if of the same opinion still, will point out wherein my three conclusions are invalid, if invalid they be?

GORGAS.

P.S.—The problem is *not* whether A, running twenty times more quickly than B, can overtake B; but whether, with this advantage in pace, he can do so under the conditions laid down by Zeno—conditions *pour vivre* in my opinion, and containing the trap which has caught Mr. Ball and "Head Master," as it did Coleridge and De Quincey.—G.

#### THE PUZZLE OF THE INFINITE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Tracing the source of the fallacy in the case of Achilles and the tortoise to the neglect of the question of time, "Mathematicus" says that I have left this matter "untouched." He has apparently failed to notice that in my first letter (January 12) I pointed out that "the endlessly-diminishing fractions are concentrated into as rapidly-diminishing time-periods."

"Mathematicus" and "Head Master" both occupy an untenable position in denying that .9999, etc., equals 1, while at the same time they admit that Achilles catches the tortoise. By framing a case in which the tortoise moves  $\frac{1}{10}$  plus  $\frac{1}{100}$  plus  $\frac{1}{1000}$  plus  $\frac{1}{10000}$  plus etc. of a yard before it is overtaken, I showed that .9999 etc. is exactly equal to 1. No one has attempted to refute this clear and decisive proof. Yet "Mathematicus" thinks that I ought to give up the point at issue. He expects me to surrender a fortress before it is even attacked.

The chief source of fallacy or difficulty (as I have more than once pointed out) is that, in imagining the endless series of nines, people *will*, and indeed *must*, stop short of infinity. They see that the *uncompleted* series is less than unity, and they then (most illegitimately, yet most persistently) regard this incomplete series as fairly representative of the completed series, and conclude that the whole series is less than unity.

We are also misled or confused to some extent by an unqualified use of such words as "for ever," "never," "endless," "infinite," etc. The facts in problems like those of Achilles and the tortoise show that in such cases the "endless" or "infinite" series of diminishing distances *does end* within finite limits of time and space. It is only as numerical conceptions or operations of the mind that the diminishing series of fractions or figures would continue for ever, or could never be brought to an end, simply because the mind cannot carry out an infinite number of mental operations in a finite period of time.

The use of the word "limit" or "goal" instead of "sum," in cases of decreasing geometrical progression like those we are dealing with, does not affect the question at issue. If the limit is reached, the word "limit" is only another *name* for the sum-total of the infinite series. If the limit is never reached, it is not really the limit (just as a line of cliffs is not the limit of an ocean which never touches them); and, as a matter of much greater consequence, Achilles could never catch up to the tortoise, the hounds could never outrun the hare, the long hand of the clock could never overtake the hour hand, and races of all kinds would be a farce, since no race-horse or rowing-boat or steamer or person could pass another by superior speed.

W. P. BALL.

#### AN INFINITE SERIES.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The series is never completed, and it is a waste of time to keep persisting that it is.

The very meaning of .9 is that its terms go on *ad infinitum* without ceasing. .9 has no finish, but, like Tennyson's brook, goes on for ever.

The goal or limit of .9 is never reached, has never been reached, and never will be. Ask any mathematician of note in London to-day on the point.

Respecting the problem given in second paragraph, the quantities are simple finite quantities representing a result that takes place in a *finite* space of time, and the introduction of a *never-ending* decimal series to a *finite* quantity is improper and unnecessary.

A mind that can grasp the meaning of an infinite series in mathematics would never apply such a series to a finite distance to be fetched up in a foot-race.

To talk about grasping infinity is wasting words. We have only to understand what is meant in mathematics by a constantly-recurring series; there is "no grasping of infinity" required in the case.

Zeno's task was to work a simple proportion sum. Instead of doing that, he got talking absurdly about an infinite series as his *modus operandi*, and he landed himself in an absurdity—viz., that Achilles would never catch the tortoise.

W. P. Ball does the same when he speaks of being "summed up by nature and fact with the rapidity," etc.

It is the *imagination* of the operation that passes through the brain of W. P. Ball like "a flash of lightning."

Probably the thought passed through the brain of Zeno like "a flash of lightning," but the operation has not been performed yet, though many centuries have elapsed.

The statement that "the tortoise has completed all the fractional distances represented by .9 is absurd, and enough to fetch Professor De Morgan and Dr. Aveling back from the dead.

The tortoise covers one single finite yard, and Achilles covers ten finite yards. That is what they do, and they do nothing else. The tortoise no more covers the series represented by .9 than the cow jumped over the moon.

In fact, the tortoise would require an endless existence even if it had been born on what Milton called "creation's morn."

What can be imagined in a man's brain, and what can be done, are two very different things, even in mathematics.

Theologians imagine many things, but where are the corresponding objectives?

The statement that  $A^0 = 1$  is often seen. It is nonsense. Nevertheless, there is a *proof* of it to be given. None the less, the performance is bosh—simply juggling on paper with symbols.

HEAD MASTER.

### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

#### LONDON.

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

THE ATHENÆUM HALL (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, Rev. J. J. B. Coles, "Some Mistakes of Freethinkers in their Criticisms of the Bible." Discussion invited.

NORTH CAMBERWELL HALL (61 New Church-road): 7.30, Conference of South London Freethinkers.

EAST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Stanley Temperance Bar, 7 High-street, Stepney): 7, Debate between E. E. Hunter and T. Enfield, "Arbitration or War in South Africa."

EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Bromley Vestry Hall, Bow-road): 7, J. McCabe, "The Abiding Element in Religion."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Surrey Masonic Hall): 7, Harold Johnson, "Democracy in Whitman."

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, ante-room, first floor): 11.15, H. H. Quilter, "The Bible in the Board Schools."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, West Ham-lane, Stratford, E.): February 19, at 8, Mr. Ramsay, "Beyond the Grave—What?"

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, A lecture.

#### COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): H. Percy Ward—11, "The Philosophy of Secularism"; 3, "The Delusion of Spiritualism"; 7, "The Curse of Christianity."

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

HULL (No. 2 Room, Friendly Societies' Hall, Albion-street): 7, A lecture.

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, L. Bergmann, B Sc., "World Evolution."

MANCHESTER (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road): 6.30, J. B. Hudson, "Should a Socialist be a Christian?"

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): G. Berrisford, at 7, A Lecture or Reading.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Victoria Hall, Fowler-street): 7, C. Watts, "Freethought: Its Nature and Progress."

H. PERCY WARD, 51 Longside-lane, Bradford.—February 23, Manchester; 24 and 25, Debate at Manchester with the Editor of the *Two Worlds*. March 16, Liverpool. April 13, Glasgow.

### Ingersoll's Last Lecture.

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