

Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XXII.—No. 9.

SUNDAY, MARCH 2, 1902.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

Atheism and Natural Order.

"How on the Atheistic hypothesis do you account for order, law, exquisite harmony amidst extreme intricacy, constant adaptation of means to ends—in a word, the amazing programme from nebular fire-mist to cosmos, carried out without a hitch?"

The above question reached me the other day from a valued correspondent, a scientific man, in the course of a series of arguments against the Atheistic position. There is nothing novel in the question; it has been asked times innumerable of Atheists, and I suppose the same query will continue to be put so long as there is an Atheist and a Theist within speaking distance of each other. The frequency of the question forms, indeed, the best apology for dealing with it once again, and for trying to make plain what kind of an answer an Atheist may make to this supposed staggering problem.

It is worth noting at the outset the common mistake of imagining that the Atheist is bound to explain the whole process of cosmic evolution, and also the nature of the forces engaged therein, before he is justified in rejecting Theism as unsound. No bigger blunder could be made than this. I may, for instance, be quite unable to explain how the movement of a glacier is effected, but I should be a fool to accept, for no better reason than my own ignorance on the subject, the hypothesis that it was moved by the wriggings of an imprisoned giant. Whether the Atheist can *account* for cosmical phenomena, or *explain* natural processes or not, can in no way affect the validity or strength of the Atheistic position. It is all the better if the Atheist can give such explanation, but the position is hardly the worse if he cannot. His sole concern is that there is not sufficient evidence to justify the holding of the Theistic hypothesis as even probably true, and if the Atheist can show that in this rejection he has neglected no legitimate piece of evidence and overlooked no relevant fact, this is enough.

The error is akin to that made in trying to fix upon Atheism some definite theory of cosmic evolution, and in afterwards demolishing this, assuming that Atheism has been destroyed likewise. Again, all that one need point out is that Atheism is committed to no definite scientific theory, and to no theory as to the ultimate nature of "matter" or "energy." Any scientific theory is agreeable with Atheism so long as it does not involve the assumption of intelligence as an agent in natural evolution. Short of this one can agree that matter may one day swallow up energy, or that matter may be absorbed in energy, or that both may disappear in some scientific conception as yet unframed, or even that we know nothing, and never can know anything, of the ultimate nature of either matter or energy. The Atheist does, of course, utilise scientific theories and results in his attack on Theism; but the discovery that the weapons he has been wielding have not the strength he imagined them to possess can in no way disprove Atheism or prove its opposite. Short of the qualification I have named, that of rejecting the belief in intelligence in nature, the Atheist is free to adopt or reject any scientific hypothesis he pleases. At any rate, that the Atheist *cannot* explain would not prove that the Theist *can*. You cannot demonstrate knowledge on your own part by proving ignorance on that of your adversary; nor can you logically build an affirmation upon a pure negation. It is the Theist who pretends to explain; it is the Atheist who rejects the proffered

explanation as unsatisfactory; and all that is necessary to justify this is to show either that it does not rest upon adequate evidence, or that it does not square with known facts.

Such might be the reply of an Atheist acting strictly on the defensive. But he need not defend his own position only—he can attack that of his opponents; and the attack might be by way of attempting to discover precisely what is meant by "natural order," and what we may legitimately infer from its existence. A little reflection will show that the Theist blunders in the use of the word "order" in precisely the same manner as he does in the use of the word "law." Both words, indeed, are at bottom synonymous, and in both cases there is present, consciously or unconsciously, an identification of natural order with, say, the order imposed by a government upon a people. But this is obviously begging the question. Social order proceeds according to a predetermined plan, and we may know the nature of the order to be secured long before it is an actual fact. In nature we know nothing of any predetermined plan; all that we have is the bare fact of existence—all else is pure inference or assumption.

The first question to decide, therefore, is what can be scientifically meant by "natural order"? That there is a certain regularity in our mental states is admitted, and analysis will prove that order in nature is ultimately an orderly succession of states of consciousness. With certainty this is all that can be said. That there is something outside consciousness, of which consciousness is a faithful reflection, *may* be true; but, if so, we can never *know* it. In actual life we infer such to be the case, and it serves us well enough in practice; but it is an inference none the less. Still, it may easily be that the order itself is a product of consciousness. That the world of color, for example, is what it is, is entirely the result of our senses being what they are. A modification of the organ of sight might make the ultra-red and ultra-violet rays visible, and so enlarge our color-vision to a corresponding extent. And it is at least conceivable that the "order" of nature may be due to our nervous structures having evolved along such lines as enable it only to take notice of certain natural happenings, and passing by all others unaffected. In this way there might be a perfectly chaotic universe, and yet the mind might *create* order by its eliminating all discordant elements.

At all events, the certain thing is that what we call natural order is only the observed succession of events; and were this order entirely different to what it is—did wood sink in water and iron float, or cold air rise and warm air descend—our feeling of regularity would not be disturbed in the slightest degree. This being so, there are plainly no data here from which to logically infer design in nature. It is not order, as such, that would prove design, since there cannot be anything else; what is needed is a *particular* order, viewed as the working-out of a predetermined and known design.

What we have left, therefore, awaiting explanation is the bare fact of regularity; and this, as I have pointed out, may be a purely mental product. But, even though it were not so, far from natural order demonstrating a guiding intelligence, it logically yields an inference of quite the opposite character. Theist and Atheist both agree as to the bare fact of existence. Now, if we symbolise existence *per se* by A, B, C, and its manifestations in consciousness by D, E, F, then all phenomena will consist of D, E, F, or varying combinations of the three. We cannot even think of any alterations in the effects D, E, F without assuming a corresponding

alteration in the causes A, B, C; just as we cannot think of H₂O failing to produce water under appropriate conditions without, in thought, changing the nature of the factors. So far as any legitimate inference can be deduced from the bare fact of regularity in natural events, it makes for Atheism, not for Theism. It would give some shadow of probability to the Theistic hypothesis if it were impossible to observe any orderly sequence in natural events. Were that the case, then, just as the existence of Neptune was inferred from the irregularities of the other planets, so the absence of identical effects from identical causes would give reasonableness to the theory that they were coerced by some extra-natural force.

And it is worth while pointing out that scientific calculation is only possible on the assumption that we have no active power to deal with save mutual or unconscious forces. Prevision, which is the very essence of science, would be simply impossible if we had to always take into account an irresponsible intelligence that might suspend or modify the normal effects of natural forces. Whatever scientific men may believe, science itself is impossible save upon an Atheistic basis.

As for the argument drawn from the adaptation of means to ends, the answer to that is plain and easy. To say that means are adapted to ends is really only another way of saying that things are as they are. Every phenomenon is the resultant of all the conditions necessary to its production, and whatever exists must always bear an exact relation to such conditions. The effect, in other words, always bears an exact relation to its cause, for the simple reason that the effect is only a summary of all the causes necessary to its production.

There is only one way in which the adaptation of means to ends might prove design, and that is if we knew beforehand the end that was to be reached, and were thus enabled to judge of the wisdom with which such means were selected. But this information we certainly have not; nor, if we choose to assume such knowledge, and to say that the end to be reached is human happiness, does it seem that these means have been selected with unquestionable wisdom. The development of animal life has been brought about by methods so cruel and so wasteful that all men tacitly condemn them as such by their refusal to emulate nature's methods in social life. The animal frame is shown, by the number of premature deaths, to be clearly unequal to the burden cast upon it if it would survive. The eye, *made* for seeing, we are assured, is full of flaws from which the commonest optical instrument is free. And much the same may be said of other organs of the body. All show imperfections, all admit of improvements, that a tyro in science could indicate. And, finally, is not all *human* improvement, all civilisation, a testimony to the fact that, if we assume an anthropomorphic end, the means are not by any means exquisitely adapted to realise it? The issue is simple: if there be a God, and if he had adopted the most perfect means of realising his end (although, in truth, all talk of means and ends would be absurd if Deity be assumed), then human improvements would be impossible, and the progress of civilisation a meaningless phrase. But, since these things are, then their very existence is a clear proof that the adaptation of means to ends is not as perfect as might be.

I have said that the only ground the Theist has for his belief is the assumed ignorance of his adversary. And when one has said that, one has said all. How often is it said that Atheism cannot explain this, or Atheism cannot explain that, with the implication that therefore Theism is justified. This, at best, is only an argument of ignorance. That we cannot explain proves only that we cannot; it does not warrant our taking up with an utterly unwarrantable and unverifiable hypothesis. Moreover, the argument is a dangerous one for the Theist to use—it is a two-edged sword, and cuts both ways. It may well be said that the whole ground for assuming intelligence to be at work in the cosmos is the difficulty of our understanding how all is produced as the result of the play of unconscious forces. And in this respect we are in a position not altogether unlike that of a savage, who might find it easier to believe a steam-engine to be alive than to realise its movements as the result of pure mechanism. The savage, in such a picture, may well stand for ourselves

in the eyes of the scientific thinker of some centuries hence.

And all Theistic arguments are of this class. The wisest man that ever lived, in using the word "God," never used it but as a cloak for his ignorance or his helplessness. "God only knows," cries the man searching for knowledge, and finding it not; "God help me," cries another, who feels that man is powerless to do so. Always helplessness, mental or physical; and the argument of the present-day theologian, building his reasons for believing in God upon the present ignorance of science, is exactly of the same class. Again a dangerous procedure. "I believe in God because you cannot explain certain natural processes" is another way of saying that, if these things could be explained, the belief would disappear. And with this I heartily agree. Historically, "God" has never been anything but a synonym for ignorance. It flourishes most where men know least; it declines step by step with the advance of knowledge; and it is to-day being slowly realised that it is a far more helpful course to admit ignorance in the face of unsolved problems than to veil our helplessness with idle pretensions or loud-sounding, but meaningless, phrases.

C. COHEN.

The "Praise of Folly."

WHAT is the greatest novel in the English language? This is a hard question, which we shall not attempt to answer. We leave every one of our readers to enjoy his own selection. Sir Walter Besant declared his opinion that the greatest novel in the English language is Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth*. That it is a *great* book no one fit to judge will deny, or hesitate to affirm. It is full of adventure and hairbreadth escapes; it exhibits a large variety of life and character; its wit, insight, and pathos show the mind and hand of a master; and a certain vivid actuality is derived from the fact that its pictures and portraits are to a large extent historical. Gerard and Margaret, the hero and heroine of the story, are the father and mother of the great Erasmus; respecting whom Charles Reade closes his book with a noble and pregnant piece of writing:—

"First scholar and divine of his epoch, he was also the heaven-born dramatist of his century. Some of the best scenes in this new book are from his mediæval pen, and illumine the pages whence they come; for the words of a genius, so high as his, are not born to die; their immediate work upon mankind fulfilled, they may seem to lie torpid; but, at each fresh shower of intelligence Time pours upon their students, they prove their immortal race; they revive, they spring from the dust of great libraries; they bud, they flower, they fruit, they seed, from generation to generation, and from age to age."

Erasmus was born at Rotterdam, probably on October 28, 1467. He was a "love child." His father, Gerard of Tergou, being engaged to Margaret, daughter of a physician of Sevenbergen, anticipated the nuptial rites. Gerard's relations drove him from his country by ill usage; when he went to Rome, to earn a living by copying ancient authors, they falsely sent him word that his Margaret had died; upon which he took holy orders, and became a sworn son of the Church. Finding his Margaret alive on his return, he of course lived apart from her, and she did not marry another. They had a common interest in their boy, whose education they superintended. Margaret died of the plague when Erasmus was thirteen; and Gerard, inconsolable for her loss, soon followed her to the grave. Their boy was left to the guardianship of relatives, who cheated him of his little patrimony, and compelled him to adopt a religious life. Erasmus was thus a priest, though a very uncommon one. How curious that so many great wits and humorists should have worn the clerical garb! To mention only four, there were Rabelais, Erasmus, Swift, and Sterne; each of whom has added to the world's gaiety, and also helped to free it from superstition. Christians who prate about the "ridicule" of holy things in which Freethinkers indulge should be reminded that these four priests of the Christian religion could easily,

between them, carry off the palm for profanity; while for downright plain speech, not always avoiding the nastiest of subjects, there is hardly a professed sceptic who could hold a candle to them.

Erasmus divorced himself from religious duties as early as possible. He detested the monks, regarding them for the most part as illiterate, bigoted, persecuting, and parasitical vermin. His life was devoted to literature, and in the course of his travels he contracted a friendship with the most eminent and able men of the age, including our own Sir Thomas More, the author of the famous *Utopia*. Erasmus died on July 12, 1536. The money he had accumulated by the exercise of his pen, after deducting some handsome legacies to personal friends, he left to relieve the sick and poor, to marry young women, and to assist young men of good character. This was in keeping with his professed principles. He always regarded *charity* as the chief part of *useful* religion, and thought that men should help each other like brothers, instead of fighting like wild beasts over theology.

Erasmus was a contemporary of Luther, and there is an excellent essay by Mr. Froude on both these great men. He gives the palm to Luther on account of his courage, and thinks that Erasmus should have joined the Reformation party. But the truth is that Erasmus had far more *intellect* than Luther; he knew too much to be a fanatic; and while he lashed the vices and follies of the Catholic Church, he never left her fold, partly because he perceived that Luther and the Reformers were as much the slaves of exclusive dogmas as the very Schoolmen themselves. Erasmus believed in freedom of thought, but Luther never did. To sum up the difference between them in a sentence: Luther was a Theologian, and Erasmus a Humanist. "He was brilliantly gifted," says Mr. Froude; "his industry never tired, his intellect was true to itself, and no worldly motives ever tempted him into insincerity."

The great mass of the writings of Erasmus are only of interest to scholars. His two popular books are the *Colloquies* and the *Praise of Folly*, both written in Latin, but translated into most of the European tongues. The *Colloquies* were rendered into fine, nervous English by N. Bailey, the old lexicographer. The *Praise of Folly*, illustrated with Holbein's drawings, is also to be read in English, in the translation of Sir Roger L'Estrange—a writer who, if he was sometimes coarse and slangy, had a first-rate command of our language, and was never lacking in racy vigor.

Erasmus wrote the *Praise of Folly* in the house of Sir Thomas More, with whom he lodged on his arrival in England in 1510. It was completed in a week, and written to divert himself and his friend. A copy being sent to France, it was printed there, and in a few months went through seven editions. Its contents were such that it is no wonder, in the words of Jortin, that "he was never after this looked upon as a true son of the Church." In the orthodox sense of the term, it would be difficult to look upon the writer of this book as a true Christian.

Folly is made to speak throughout. She pronounces her own panegyric. She represents herself as the main-spring of all the business and pleasure of this world—yes, and also of its worship and devotion. Mixed up with capital fooling, there is an abundance of wisdom, and shrewd thrusts are delivered at every species of imposture; nay, religion itself is treated with derision, under the pretence of buffoonery.

Long before Luther began his campaign against the sale of Pardons and Indulgences, they were satirically denounced by Erasmus. He calls them "cheats," for the advantage of the clergy, who promise their dupes in return for their cash a lot of happiness in the next life; though, as to their own share of this happiness, the clergy "care not how long it be deferred." Erasmus anticipated Luther in another point. Speaking of the subtle interpreters of the Bible in his day, who proved from it anything and everything, he says that "they can deal with any text of scripture as with a nose of wax, and knead it into what shape best suits their interest." Quite as decisively as Luther, though with less passion and scurrility, he cendemns the adoration of saints, which he calls a "downright folly." Amidst a comical account of the prayers offered up to their saintships, he

mentions the tokens of gratitude to them hung upon the walls and ceilings of churches; and adds, very shrewdly, that he could find "no relics presented as a memorandum of any that were ever cured of Folly, or had been made one dram the wiser." Even the worship of the Virgin Mary is glanced at—her blind devotees being said "to think it manners now to place the Mother before the Son."

Erasmus calls the monks "a sort of brain-sick fools," who "seem confident of becoming greater proficient in divine mysteries the less they are poisoned with any human learning." Monks, as the name denotes, should live solitary; but they swarm in streets and alleys, and make a profitable trade of beggary, to the detriment of the roadside mendicants. They are full of vice and religious punctilios. Some of them will not touch a piece of money, but they "make no scruple of the sin of drunkenness and the lust of the flesh."

Preachers are satirised likewise. They are little else than stage-players. "Good Lord! how mimical are their gestures! What heights and falls in their voice! What toning, what bawling, what singing, what squeaking, what grimaces, making of mouths, apes' faces, and distorting of their countenance; and this art of oratory, as a choice mystery, they convey down by tradition to one another." Yes, and the trick of it still lives in our Christian pulpits.

"Good old tun-bellied divines," and others of the species, come in for their share of raillery. They know that ignorance is the mother of devotion. They are great disputants, and all the logic in the world will never drive them into a corner from which they cannot escape by some "easy distinction." They discuss the absurdest and most far-fetched questions, have cats' eyes that see best in the dark, and possess "such a piercing faculty as to see through an inch-board, and spy out what really never had any being." The apostles would not be able to understand their disputes without a special illumination. In a happy phrase, they are said to spend their time in striking "the fire of subtlety out of the flint of obscurity." But woe to the man who meddles with them; for they are generally very hot and passionate. If you differ from them ever so little, they call upon you to recant; if you refuse to do so, they will brand you as a heretic and "thunder out an excommunication."

Popes fare as badly as preachers, monks, and divines. They "pretend themselves vicars of Christ." Reference is made to their "grooms, ostlers, serving men, pimps, and somewhat else which for modesty's sake I shall not mention." They fight with a holy zeal to defend their possessions, and issue their bulls and excommunications most frequently against those "who, at the instigation of the Devil, and not having the fear of God before their eyes, do feloniously and maliciously attempt to lessen and impair St. Peter's patrimony."

Speaking through the mouth of Folly, the biting wit of Erasmus does not spare Christianity itself. "Fools," he says, "for their plainness and sincerity of heart, have always been most acceptable to God Almighty." Princes have ever been jealous of subjects who were too observant and thoughtful; and Jesus Christ, in like manner, condemns the wise and crafty. He solemnly thanks his Father for hiding the mysteries of salvation from the wise, and revealing them to babes; that is, says Erasmus, *to fools*. "Woe unto you scribes and pharisees" means "Woe unto you wise men." Jesus seemed "chiefly delighted with women, children, and illiterate fishermen." The blessed souls that in the day of judgment are to be placed on the Savior's right hand "are called sheep, which are the most senseless and stupid of all cattle."

"Nor would he heal those breaches our sins had made by any other method than by the 'foolishness of the cross,' published by the ignorant and unlearned apostles, to whom he frequently recommends the excellence of Folly, cautioning them against the infectiousness of wisdom, by the several examples he proposes them to imitate, such as children, lilies, sparrows, mustard, and such-like beings, which are either wholly inanimate, or at least devoid of reason and ingenuity, guided by no other conduct than that of instinct, without care, trouble, or contrivance."

"The Christian religion," Erasmus says, "seems to have some relations to Folly, and no alliance at all to wisdom." In proof of which we are to observe: *first*,

that "children, women, old men, and fools, led as it were by a secret impulse of nature, are always most constant in repairing to church, and most zealous, devout, and attentive in the performance of the several parts of divine service"; *secondly*, that true Christians invite affronts by an easy forgiveness of injuries, suffer themselves like doves to be easily cheated and imposed upon, love their enemies as much as their friends, banish pleasure and court sorrow, and wish themselves out of this world altogether. Nay, the very happiness they look forward to hereafter is "no better than a sort of madness or folly." For those who macerate the body, and long to put on immortality, are only in a kind of dream.

"They speak many things at an abrupt and incoherent rate, as if they were actuated by some possessing demon; they make an inarticulate noise, without any distinguishing sense or meaning. They sometimes screw and distort their faces to uncouth and antic looks; at one time beyond measure cheerful, then as immoderately sullen; now sobbing, then laughing, and soon after sighing, as if they were perfectly distracted, and out of their senses."

But perhaps the worst stroke of all against Christianity is the following sly one. Folly is said to be acceptable, or at least excusable, to the gods, who "easily pass by the heedless failures of fools, while the miscarriages of such as are known to have more wit shall very hardly obtain a pardon."

Did space permit, we might give several extracts from the *Praise of Folly*, showing that Erasmus could speed the shafts of his satire at the very essentials of religion, such as prayer and providence. Were he living now, we may be sure that he would be in the van of the Army of Liberation. Living when he did, he performed a high and useful task. His keen, bright sword played havoc with much superstition and imposture. He made it more difficult for the pious wranglers over what Carlyle would call "inconceivable incredibilities" to practise their holy profession. Certainly he earned, and more than earned, the praise of Pope.

At length Erasmus, that great injur'd name
(The glory of the priesthood and the shame!),
Stemm'd the wild torrent of a barbarous age,
And drove those holy Vandals off the stage.

Erasmus was, in fact, the precursor of Voltaire. Physically, as well as intellectually, these two great men bore a certain resemblance. A glance at the strong, shrewd face of Erasmus is enough to show that he was not a man to be easily imposed upon; and the square chin, and firm mouth, bespeak a determination which, if it did not run to martyrdom, was sufficient to carry its possessor through hardship and difficulty in the advocacy of his ideals.

—Reprinted.

G. W. FOOTE.

Secularism Triumphant.

THAT the principles of Secularism are triumphant is a self-evident fact. In whatever field of activity we may look it will be found that Secular philosophy is the lever that moves and regulates modern progress. To me it is a pleasure to recognise that, if the victory of Freethought in the last century can be attributed to the labors of one man more than to any other, that man was Robert Owen, who devoted his life to the secular welfare of the people. It has been truly said of him that, "undeterred by toil, undaunted by danger, unchilled by calumny, even in his old age, when other men grow cold and conservative, his heart beat with the generous hope of youth, and he moved among us with that radiant smile which never waned, and that kindly voice which never varied; unhasting and unresting, he knew neither selfishness nor apathy." Although the system with which the name of Robert Owen is associated is not, as a whole, largely accepted in Great Britain, many of the principles to which he devoted his life have entered into almost every phase of modern life, and are now forming the basis of the constitution of the country. Infant schools, which are to-day so much appreciated, were founded by this much-misrepresented philanthropist. The doctrines of circumstances and utility as taught by

Owen were the precursors of Social Science Congresses, co-operation, prison discipline, sanitary amelioration, and the general amendment of the relations between capital and labor. The vindictive character of our penal system is gradually disappearing from our statute-book. We are beginning, through our laws, to look upon the criminal more and more as unfortunate, and less as guilty. Accordingly, our treatment of those who offend against our laws is becoming more preventive and less punitive. This is undoubtedly a recognition of Mr. Owen's principle that man does not form his own character, but that it is formed for him by the circumstances which surround him. And our co-operative stores are a step in the right direction of that true democracy, that thorough principle of social equality, which was so consistently enunciated by the apostle of New Lanark. The tendency of the legislation of progressive modern thought is to relieve all classes alike. Its influence has been brought to bear upon the highest educational establishments in the country—namely, the Universities. By the abolition of religious tests these great institutions—whose names are linked with our history—have been made more truly national.

As might have been expected from the conquest of political influence by the working classes, these shortly began to perceive that want of knowledge was a formidable stumbling-block in the way of their prosperity. Hence there arose a demand for a better and more complete education of the children of the poor. The subject was much agitated throughout the country, and excited, as might have been expected, great hostility from the clergy, the landlord, the tenant-farmer, and the capitalist. These, of course, only saw, or pretended to see, in the question of education a scheme for sweeping away all class distinctions, bringing everything to one dead level, and overturning the sacred British Constitution. But the army of progress moved steadily forward. They knew the justice of their cause; they knew, also, that the people were resolved to secure the priceless boon of knowledge; and, therefore, no effort was spared to interest the country in the matter. Finally, in 1870, the great Educational Bill was passed; and, although it was not equal to the expectations of certain ardent reformers, it worked a marvellous change in the rising generation. Prior to the last century the indifference of the Government to the education of the people was, alas! too manifest; grants of money from the public exchequer were allowed for almost everything except for the education of the people. Another fact in connection with the endeavor which was made to secure a system of national instruction for the masses was the opposition of the clergy to secular education. Lord Brougham found this in 1820; Dr. Birkbeck experienced it in his endeavor to establish Mechanics' Institutes; and we have seen the same truth painfully illustrated of late years. In fact, in less overt ways, the same clerical opposition is still going on.

The Church of England now wears a kind of variegated coat like the chameleon; she presents one appearance to one man, and an opposite one to another. However disadvantageous this is to herself, it is clearly conducive to liberty of opinion. An association which knows not if it is High Church, Low Church, Broad Church, or Evangelical, is compelled by the State to tolerate much that is accounted heterodox. And here in this brief retrospect of human progress and enlightenment during the last century we especially draw attention to the great change which has come over pulpit teaching. Now, many of the clergy, yielding to Freethought impulse, endeavor to inculcate lessons of every-day life, teaching their hearers how to live happy and useful lives. The great difference between intelligent Christians of to-day and their predecessors is that, while the latter sought principally to learn from the clergy and ministers how to die, the former wish to know, if possible, how to live aright, and they trust to themselves to discover how to die. This is indeed a triumph for Secular philosophy.

Looking at the world, we are convinced by what human reason has already discovered in it, and by the experience which has verified the discoveries, that it is perfect order, in the sense that its operations follow unvarying laws, and that the like antecedents have always the like consequents. This immutable constancy of

what are termed the Laws of Nature gives us a stable foundation on which to build up physical science. The laws, we know, we cannot change; but the more we learn of them, the better we can adapt ourselves and the conditions of our lives to them, the better we can avoid such of their workings as would otherwise be harmful to us, the better we can avail ourselves of all that in the workings is profitable to us. Upon these principles has been established a system of daily life that has borne the brunt of many storms, and which promises to become a mighty agent in changing the aspect of society. Without doubt, as Secularism becomes more widely known, it will be more generally appreciated by thousands of earnest workers, who have long looked for an association with which to labor and to fraternise. Then, as it begins to open its expansive bosom, we shall find scientists, poets, historians, and philosophers hastening to avail themselves of a society whose basis is the love of mankind. In proportion as the old theological systems are weakened, so will our non-theological system grow stronger and more competent to deal with the great problems of life and society. To the Secularist a noble career lies open in the future. The time will come when the existing anomalies of the community will have to be more fully considered and amended, when something will have to be done to effect a peaceful revolution which shall enable the poor to live in more comfort than many of them have at present. Secularists should stand forward in the cause of the people, should act as strongly and confidently as did the brave pioneers of the past. Our cause ought not to be allowed to languish until the arrival of some pressing necessity for exertion. It is desirable that we work assiduously in propagating our principles throughout the rural districts, so that there shall not be a single portion of the country where Secularism is unknown. It should be remembered that, although many Secular triumphs have been won, there is still much more to be accomplished. Secularism has a good deal before it in the direction of strict emancipation from laws which were passed in bygone periods, but which, while they are permitted to go unrepealed, may always be turned into ready engines of oppression. Probably no oppressive power will again arise in this country to the degree that it has in the past; but it is wise to make it utterly and absolutely impossible for either bigotry or tyranny to visit Freethinkers with pains and penalties under the shelter which might be afforded by the unrepealed Blasphemy Laws.

The course of the triumphs of Secularism has been nearly a circular one, if we may use the word. Two thousand years ago we find the Alexandra Museum in all its glory, teaching an unrivalled philosophy. Then we see a new element introduced, Christianity, which, after a long battle, obtains a partial victory, and manages to secure imperial patronage. Then follows a long era of mental obscurity, which only finds relief at the period when Mohammedanism triumphs in its turn. Ultimately the Mussulman revival of literature and learning, and Freethought is again thrown back because of the dissensions which divide the world of Islam. Once again darkness begins to prevail; but the gifts brought to Europe by the Arabs are seeds which germinate at length. Martin Luther and the Reformation strike a deadly blow at the old intolerant theology, which had endeavored during so many ages to fetter and enslave the mind. Once liberated, we behold free inquiry acquiring new energy in every generation. Laws are framed against Freethought, Freethinkers are imprisoned and persecuted; but their principles are everywhere triumphant. Men of brilliant genius and solid learning enlist themselves on the side of freedom, and the battle once again becomes a combat of great proportions. Finally, a relaxation of politically-unjust laws is obtained, science lends her assistance to Freethought, new discoveries are made, and the triumph of reason may be said to have been accomplished.

CHARLES WATTS.

The Shepherd—"Don't you know how wicked it is, my boy, to play cricket on the Sabbath? How your Father Above grieves at seeing you." Young Sabbath-Breaker—"Oh, dad don't mind. He's all right: he's umpiring for us!"

Souls.

THE man with the coat of appropriate red,
Or the garb that's suggestive of dust,
His blood for the cause of Sir Snatchall has shed.
(Sir Snatchall is English—and *just*.)
We weep for the loss of our friend, but we cheer
When we hear of the slaughter of those
Who for Snatchall have not one iota of fear—
Those pestilent people, our foes.

"They've no souls to save or lose, like you and me.
Stamp the ground upon the brutes! Blood is waiting to be spilt.
Shoot them! Damn them! in Christian-like fraternity—
Savage creatures one and all; they're not built as *We* are built—
They've no souls!"

The man who's unwilling to go forth and fight
For the "honor" of Snatchall the knave
May yet achieve glory: it is every man's right
To shed all the blood he may crave.
The sight of a fox done to death by the hounds
Should surely give pleasure to all!
And the heart of a "sportsman" with ecstasy bounds
As, lifeless, our feathered friends fall.

"*They've no souls!* These creatures all were made for us;
Made for us to kill or wound (sport which is magnificent!).
Sinful you say it is?.....Ah well, the Lord has paid for us.
Who killed Christ to please himself? God, the Most Beneficent!
They've no souls!"

So anxious are we that the heathen may win
A crown for the sweet by-and-bye,
We dose them with Bibles, with rum, and with gin
(God's Word they find terribly dry).
Their souls we must gain for the sake of their land
(Not the "Land that is fairer than day"),
And if to our *own* poor we give not a hand,
Well, their souls!—of what value are they?

"Sisters, Brethren," chirps our pastor cheerfully,
"Though you're poor, yet happy be—Jesus shed his blood for you;
Though your darling little ones for bread are sighing tearfully,
Think upon your Throne above! Poverty is good for you,
Poor, dear souls!"

JOHN YOUNG.

"The Fool Hath Said in His Heart."

SAID David, the ruffian ruler, that ruled with a rod
(If Scripture is false, why the deuce does it libel the dead so?),
"The fool hath said in his heart that there isn't a God"—
Well, the Atheist isn't the fool, for he never has said so.

The fool is the Theist; he says in his heart there's a God;
He keeps not the thought in his heart, but he loudly proclaims it.

We ask, "What is God?" and we're told we're in danger of
"quod,"
Or the "bottomless pit," or the "lake of hell-fire," as he names it.

The Theist, who says in his heart there's a God, is the fool—
The Theist must thank Holy Writ that we thus designate him;

What's sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose, as a rule—
He believes in a God, but can neither define nor locate him.

The Atheist isn't the fool; he admits that a boon
It would be to mankind if a Deity only existed;
But he sees no more sign of a God than a "man in the moon"
In nature's blind forces and ways so contorted and twisted.

The fool is the Theist; he says there's a God, whom he terms
All-good and Almighty, and totally free from all evil;
Yet admits the existence of "miserable sinners" and "worms,"
And everything else that is bad, from the shark to the weevil.

The fool hath said there's no God? Why, a God would have
blushed
To have fashioned the brains in the skulls of the fools that
have made him—
The fools who can see with their eyes how the people are
crushed
'Neath the heel of the ogre whose God is the gold that
they've paid him!

ESS JAY BEE.

Acid Drops.

THE *Northern Mail* publishes, under the heading "Our Pagan Allies," what it calls "a striking letter." The writer, said to be thoroughly conversant with his subject, deploras in no measured terms the alliance of "Christian England," whose noblest sons have given their lives in defence of the creed of the Cross of Christ (we wish he had named these noblest sons, as history seems to have taken no heed of them), "with a nation which at its best is Pagan; at its worst is hopelessly and hideously given over to Materialism of the basest description."

The writer says, "I know Japan"; so we are glad to have his assurance that at *their worst* the Japanese never fall below Materialism of some sort, into the depths of superstition that engulf many of our own people. As Freethinkers we really ought to welcome our new allies on this account, at any rate; but the "plum" of the letter is a naive admission that, "so far as our attempts to Christianise Japan are concerned, the result is far more in the direction of the Japanisation of Christianity." Well! that's good. It wanted some sort of alteration badly, and the Japanned variety will probably be an improvement on the original!

This writer is much concerned with the "moral damage" that must ensue if "Bible England" becomes allied with Pagan Japan, and cites the massacre of the Chinese at the taking of Port Arthur as an example of the conduct of our new friends. Well, we have no desire to defend massacre by either Japanese or others; but it may be as well to bear in mind that the Port Arthur affair was mere child's play contrasted with the massacre of Chinese by the Russians in Manchuria, and also that, when the allied forces set out on their recent attempt to "civilise" China, it was the Japanese who gave the Christian Powers an example of sobriety and good behavior. And our own dealings with China, particularly in relation to the opium traffic, make a page of history that is anything but pleasant or elevating reading.

However, we may be sure of one thing, and that is that alliances between nations will be conducted with a regard to mutual profit and convenience rather than with an eye to the promotion of religion. And, as the *Northern Mail* writer has nothing to say against the general character of the Japanese, but only that they are becoming hopelessly Atheistic, we venture to trust that even the lofty morality of "Bible England" may survive contamination with the Great Britain in the East.

The death of a well-known man usually serves as the occasion for stupid religious anecdotes or outrageous clerical falsehoods in the religious papers. In this respect the death of Mr. Sidney Cooper, R.A., has proved no exception to the general rule. Although not a *great* painter, he was a very eminent and hard-working one, and, as he reached nearly a century, his death naturally attracted notice. Moreover, he appears to have been a fervent Christian, and great men who are this way inclined are getting too scarce to be passed over lightly. According to a writer in *The Christian*, when he was informed, about a year ago, that people were inquiring concerning his health, he replied: "It is very kind; but I am less anxious they should hear about my health than that they should hear that God has rescued me, by the blood of his beloved Son, for an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away, 'reserved in heaven' for me. I want everyone to know that I am going to enjoy that inheritance with Christ."

How on earth Mr. Cooper came to know about his destination after death is difficult to discover and useless to inquire. The verdict of a great man on such a subject is worth about just as much as that of the average Sunday-school scholar. If the story has any moral at all, it is that greatness in one direction may be compensated by stupidity in another, and that, when a man steps out of the region in which he can legitimately command attention, he becomes an object of pity rather than of admiration. When Lord Leighton, who was a much greater painter than Mr. Cooper, was handed a tract by an officious and over-religious R.C., he turned upon him with the retort, "My God is my Art." Story for story, the latter seems to contain the largest measure of common sense.

À propos of this subject, a great deal of nonsense is continually being spoken and written on the subject of religion and art. Because most of the old painters chose religious subjects for their brush, and sculptors used their chisel on the same class of studies, it is asserted that religion has always been a patron of art. Of course, the real reason for the choice of subjects was an economic one, and the scarcity of other subjects is, when properly studied, a condemnation of Christian influence on European civilisation. Painters and sculptors worked for the churches and chose religious subjects for the exercise of their art, for the simple reason

that life had been so narrowed by the influence of Christianity that the Church was the one customer left. But, as life was again made more human, other subjects demanded the artist's study, and painters, poets, and sculptors were no longer driven to prostitute their talents in the interests of an overbearing and intolerant superstition. Life is too many-sided for it to be properly healthy when attention is directed to one aspect of it only.

A preacher the other day revived the old story of how Charles Bradlaugh was silenced at one of his meetings by a question asked by an old woman who formed one of his audience. "What," asked the old lady, "have I left in life if you take the Bible from me?" And the great Iconoclast was dumb. Well, we can sympathise with Bradlaugh. There are questions and questioners before whom one must be dumb. We have met this old lady (in print) several times before, and our only wonder is at the stupidity of the Churches in not engaging this wonderful old lady to silence Bradlaugh in every town he visited. She would easily have been worth a thousand a year for the work.

The Mayor of Bath has been waxing indignant concerning the "dirty, disgraceful, and dustbin-sort of a compilation" circulated among boys and girls in the old Roman city by the Kensit Brigade, and advises all parents who come across it to put it into the fire forthwith. It is a pity Christians were not equally indignant with the same people who for years made a living by circulating filthy libels concerning Colonel Ingersoll and other great Freethinkers.

Every now and then curious illustrations of the character of Hindoo converts to Christianity come to hand. Sometimes they are concerned with professional converts who travel regularly from station to station getting converted at market rates; at other times with probably earnest individuals whose language throws a curious light upon their conception of a typical Christian. Here is one of the latter sort, and, as it appeared in a religious paper, it is probably genuine. It is the story of the Good Samaritan as told to a Hindoo congregation by a native evangelist: "There was a man going along a road; he was attacked by robbers—looted, ill-used, and thrown to the side of the road half dead. A Mullah came by, but paid no attention to him; similarly a Pundit; but a Christian followed—he helped him (*being a Christian he had liquor with him*), and restored him to consciousness."

The religious press, or at least a very large portion of it, is at present much concerned over the probable legalisation of marriage with a deceased wife's sister. Its passage through the Commons was successfully obstructed the other day by that extremely zealous Churchman, Lord Hugh Cecil. This object was achieved by methods which were denounced on all sides as extremely dishonorable, and many of the daily papers expressed surprise that such a very spiritual man should have been so little hampered by feelings of common honesty or decency. To us there was nothing surprising in the occurrence. The only principle of conduct which ultimately influences a thorough-going religionist is the interest of his church, chapel, or doctrine. Before this everything must give way, and all considerations of common justice or social expediency count for naught. Lord Hugh Cecil was only demonstrating in his own person how extremely *non-moral* religious morality can become when necessary; and the sooner all recognise this the better it will be.

But the religious press appears to recognise, nevertheless, that all these shifty tricks can only postpone the end for awhile; they cannot prevent the measure becoming law in the end. And so very grave lamentations are raised concerning the sanctioning of people "living in sin," "incestuous marriages," and the like. All this is, of course, pure humbug. One sister is no more a blood-relation of a man than another, and it is blood-relationship which should determine the degree of prohibition, and nothing else. And, after all, marriage is essentially a civil or social function; it is only a religious one by accident. And sooner or later people are bound to recognise the wisdom of adjusting sex and family relationships upon the grounds of common sense and social convenience. The antics of religious fanatics, who belong to the twelfth rather than to the twentieth century, are only of importance meanwhile so far as they prevent a common-sense measure being incorporated in the law of the land.

"Merlin," of the *Referee*, complains this week that his political and sporting notes attract far less attention from his readers than his excursions into theology. We are as surprised as "Merlin" to find that among sporting gents politics and athletics should be rank outsiders, whilst the betting is 100 to 1 on Jesus Christ.

At the big meeting at St. James's Hall, held recently, to consider the Water Bill, one of the speakers quoted some lines from Thomas Paine, which met with the appreciation of the vast audience. It is pleasant to find that Paine, who,

when living, laid the foundations of a great nation, has still the posthumous power of evoking the enthusiasm of the people.

Some sky-pilots are advocating the use of prayer as a preventive against small-pox. They might as well try to tempt an earthquake with a penny bun.

Providence was too busy last week watching the sparrows to notice such a trifle as the death by starvation of three unfortunate women in London.

Court dress suits, complete with sword, are being sold at £25 if of velvet, or £20 if of cloth. Is this the Christian country which worships a Carpenter-God?

Do young men go to church? The *Sussex Daily News* asks the question. Some of them do, Mr. Editor; but more wait outside for the girls to come out.

President Roosevelt has published a volume of essays and addresses, under the title of *The Strenuous Life*. On perusing the pages one forgets the Chief Citizen of a Republic, and remembers the ex-colonel of cowboys, who ignobly insulted the memory of Thomas Paine by calling that great man "a filthy little Atheist."

The *Morning Leader* has picked up in Paris a pretty little story of the discovery of an "actual" photograph of Christ. It has certainly more of "actualité," in the French sense of the word, than in the English. A winding-sheet, in which Christ's body is supposed to have been wrapped, is kept in Turin Cathedral in a coffer with three keys, which are held respectively by the King of Italy, the Pope, and the Archbishop of Turin. Ten years ago this relic was exhibited to the public, and an enterprising photographer obtained permission to make a picture of it. The photographer seems to have taken a good deal of trouble over the job, for we are now informed that, although the winding-sheet bore only a few stains, the developing-plate bore a positive image of Christ—"a little indistinct at the edges, but still clear enough!" The curious point is, that the photographer is surprised; but perhaps he had reason to expect a clearer impression. The art of "faking" composite photographs has reached a pitch of perfection which perhaps justifies an operator in expecting that, with reasonable care, he will get a clear and distinct picture. If, however, the affair should, as we are told, be brought before the Academy of Sciences, and the Pope graciously allows the winding-sheet to be photographed again, no doubt they will do better. The resources of science are infinite, and "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again" is always a good motto. And if they do succeed, how the faithful will rejoice at this up-to-date miracle!

Dr. Hanson, of the Marylebone Presbyterian Church, W., does not approve of King Edward's visits to Sunday concerts. We sincerely trust that His Majesty will not be much upset when he hears this. It will, Dr. Hanson says, "increase the difficulties in getting a fair hearing for the Gospel." Poor old Gospel, if in 1900 years all the forces of Christendom haven't been able to get it a fair hearing, we really think it might be given up as a bad job.

Of course, Dr. Hanson trotted out the time-honoured wheeze that Sunday pleasures would lead to Sunday work, by which it is always sought to frighten the British workman from the Continental Sunday; but as this does not happen across the Channel, there is no reason why it should on this side. As we have often pointed out, it is not the interest of the working man that is the point at issue. The Churches have at present a monopoly in Sunday trading, and want to keep it! Hence these tears.

The voluntary offerings of the Great Lying Church of England for the year ending last Easter have been computed at nearly £8,000,000. This is not so bad, considering that its alleged founder was a tramp.

Mr. Benjamin Kidd's new book, which has been facetiously called *The Gambols of Kidd*, has been received by the orthodox press with a shout of approval. Mr. Kidd need not get "swelled head" in consequence. The same journals gave the same flattering notices of the "anti-infidel" pamphlets written by a manikin of the name of Hastings.

Some of the newspapers have been discussing the question as to whether the Pope is rolling in wealth, or whether he is on the verge of poverty. There is really not much doubt as to the financial position of the present successor of the "stony" Galilean fisherman.

The Design Argument is still in favor with our mentally weaker Christian brethren. Still, they need not make so much fuss as a giraffe with a bad attack of sore throat.

Amongst the strange Christian sects of America is one

called the *Children of the Ark*. They have their headquarters at Philadelphia. There is a picture of them in the *Sunday Companion*, holding their first dinner. The memory of Noah was toasted with something stronger than the fluid he saw so much of for twelve months. Every member of this association "claims Noah as his great ancestor," which rather surprises the *Sunday Companion*. But according to the Bible we are all descended from Noah, and the Children of the Ark should include the whole human race. Perhaps the Philadelphia society is, after all, only another excuse for a public dinner.

It is not stated whether any of the children of the Ark left the banquet in the state of intoxication in which Noah is said on one occasion to have been found. It may be hoped that their admiration for their illustrious ancestor did not extend to the imitation of that recorded weakness.

The late Dr. Newman Hall once paid a visit to the Principality, where the Rev. John Parry tried to teach him Welsh. Dr. Hall said he was afraid he would never be able to learn it. "Then," said his companion, "you will find it very dull in heaven."

Welsh is not the only language that is supposed to be spoken in heaven. Hebrew is another. Then there is Basque, which is declared to be the language that God taught Adam. Perhaps it was. Who knows? It was as likely to be Basque as anything else.

Arthur Bulman, who attempted to murder his wife by shooting her at Margate, and then shot himself in the jaw, had written a letter which he concluded with the words, "Into thy hands, Lord, we commit our spirits." Notwithstanding the pious sentiment thus expressed, he was sentenced to twelve years' penal servitude.

There are many people who still believe in wearing "charms." In Paris the fashion for wearing little models of elephants has been set by a celebrated prophetess and "psychometrist," who displays many of these little elephants in her drawing-rooms, and always advises ladies who consult her to wear similar charms. Santos-Dumont, the popular aeronaut, ascribes his many escapes from death to the fact that he wears a medal of St. Benoit. As he considers this holy medal confers a charmed life upon him, he should get another and let his balloon wear it, so as to save his navigable air-ship from the accidents that so continually befall it. The medal, however, has not saved him from illness in consequence of a chill from immersion when he and his balloon fell into the Mediterranean recently.

We are told that Providence tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. Fourteen people died of exposure to the cold during a single day in Paris recently. Providence did not temper the wind much in the case of these unfortunate individuals.

By many scientific devices of his own, man is circumventing the devices by which Providence spreads disease and death wholesale. Providence evidently made gnats and mosquitos to bite man, and by this petty kind of vivisection to inject the germs of all manner of diseases into his blood. Yet man rebels against the decrees and intentions of his Maker, and does his utmost to thwart them. We wish him all success in this rebellion. For this success is the triumphant success of practical Secularism, which works for human welfare by the application of science, to the neglect or overthrow off the childish prayers and processions and other enchantments and magical devices by which religion endeavors to combat disease.

In England we find even Royalty itself joining the conspiracy against Providence by helping schemes for discovering cures for consumption, which is such a scourge in many parts of the globe that it carries off every year over a million human beings, mostly adults in the earlier stages of manhood and womanhood, or in the prime of life.

A band of men recently attacked the Jesuit College at Zaragoza. The Jesuit fathers fired on their assailants. Evidently they do not believe in the Scriptural texts which tell us to resist not evil and to turn the other cheek. They take their name from Jesus, and disobey his commands just the same as other Christians disobey them.

If the alleged God of the Christians turns the hearts of kings and governors, and, of course, men in general, why does he not so dispose and keep them that his worshippers should refrain from such senseless rioting and mutual slaughter?

Nakaye Tokusuke, a Japanese reformer who recently died of cancer, spent the last few months of his life in writing an account of the reasons which led him to be an Atheist and a non-believer in the existence of a soul. His book has had a large sale. The author died "with a smile on his lips." His body has been cremated.

The Pope has just celebrated the jubilee or twenty-fifth year of his pontificate. Of the 257 occupants of the chair of St. Peter only two have hitherto ruled for as long a period as Leo XIII., and one of these popes—namely, St. Peter himself—is purely traditional. The other was Leo's predecessor, Pius IX. The reason of the general shortness of the papal tenure of office is that the popes are almost always old men when they are elected by the cardinals, who more readily agree to vote for the oldest candidate, seeing that he is likely to die the sooner and to give them the earlier chance of succeeding to the triple crown. The present pope was sixty-eight when the coronation ceremony was performed.

The conflict between the Church and State in Italy now rages round the question of divorce, the Liberals supporting the proposed laws, and the Church bitterly opposing them. The Pope has expressed his high satisfaction at an event so grateful to his heart as the resignation of the Minister of Public Works, who objects to the royal announcement of the intended legislation.

The resignation of Count Giusso has been followed by the resignation of the whole Cabinet, which was deserted by a group of Socialist deputies. Superstition has thus won a temporary victory in Italy, and the Pope and his clericals will exult over this defeat of the Liberals.

"Wast ever at Court, shepherd?" is a question which may now be answered affirmatively by Rev. Hugh Price Hughes. At any rate, he has been so far at Court that not only was he "presented" last year at a royal levee, but recently he "attended" the King's first levee—and don't you forget it. He, at least, intends that none of his following shall forget it, for he has written a long account of his attendance in the Presence Chamber at St. James's for last week's *Methodist Times*. The account is penned, as might be expected, in the true spirit of a flunkey. He is evidently overjoyed at this mark of royal favor, shared, at the same time, by about one thousand others—comparative nonentities as well as celebrities.

Of course, he was not originally presented, nor has he since attended on his own merits. It has all been owing to his election as President of the Wesleyan Conference. He says, somewhat unnecessarily, that when he saw the new regulations and the date of the levee he "lost no time" in writing to the Lord Chamberlain, as an ex-President who had already been "presented," for a card to "attend." He corrects the "foolish" statement that he went as a Sheriff's chaplain. But then the low scribblers of the press will gossip about the notabilities of the land, whether their gossip be true or false. One gathers that Price Hughes found himself a little lost in the crowd, but he spotted "my friend, Sir Walter Foster, M.P.," and to him, he says, he "clung."

Price Hughes makes one sensible remark in this connection. He says: "Five hundred years ago society grovelled before my profession with as much ignorance and superstition as it now grovels before the profession [of medicine] of which Sir Walter is so distinguished an ornament." The grandiloquent phrase, "my profession," is hardly applicable in this instance, unless Price Hughes classes himself with priests and clerics. Society, at the time mentioned, could hardly be said to grovel before Wesleyan preachers. Any way, the ex-President seems to have "grovelled" pretty well before Royalty. His supreme moment was "when I heard the words, 'Reverend Price Hughes,' and found myself bowing to Edward VII."

Thanks to his numerous dupes, "Old Dowie" lives in luxury in America by professing to be a reincarnation of the prophet Elijah. As Elijah was fed by the ravens, so Dowie is fed by the gulls.

As if there were not enough Bishops already—enough at least for obstructive purposes—a proposal is made to create a new Bishop. His diocese is to be Southwark. Those who know the state of grinding, abject poverty in which the vast majority of the inhabitants of Southwark live will appreciate the proposal that the new Bishop is to have a stipend of £4,000, and that an endowment is proposed of something like £130,000.

Here is a wonderful story, related in the recent annual report of the London Tramcar and Omnibus Scripture Text Mission, and communicated by Archbishop Sinclair. A curate who was undecided as to whether he would accept the charge of a parish in a grim and neglected region was travelling in a 'bus when his eyes fell upon a transparency in the 'bus window: "Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." He accepted the text as a divine call, and prospered in his new parish. Very probably he found side by side with the Scriptural advice a recommendation of something else to "sustain" him—*e.g.*, "Eat Davies' Pea-Fed Bacon." Such a juxtaposition is quite in accord with the ordinary Christian idea of treating Divine injunctions with decency and respect.

"A Mother of Three" writes to the *British Weekly* on the subject of Sunday toys. The three young hopefuls are, of course, "bright" children, and the eldest is now sixteen years of age; yet, says the fond and proud parent, "they were never allowed toys on Sundays." She argues that, if you give young children toys, the older ones will undoubtedly join them in the play, and, whilst the games may be perfectly harmless in themselves, "you are lowering the Sabbath."

She further says that, if you supply the little ones with bright, suitable picture-books, "and tell them Bible stories," toys will not be missed. Her children, she states, "look back on those Sunday evenings spent by the fireside, listening to Bible stories, etc., as the brightest and most enjoyable of the whole week." We should be inclined to doubt this statement if it were not for the indefinite and widely-embracing "etc.," which may have supplied the sugar-coating to the pill.

The church adjoining Rockingham Castle has been badly damaged by fire. This is a prosaic mishap compared with the fate of the First Presbyterian church, which cost £25,000, and is one of the handsomest stone edifices in Middletown, Ohio. Insects are gradually eating up this "house of God." The church was erected and solemnly dedicated to the service of the Lord only six years ago; but already the busy insects, under God's will, have made the tower a mass of holes.

Rev. W. H. Stone, M.A., vicar of St. Mary's, Kilburn, deploras the "appalling indifference to religion of vast masses of the people." We have the word of the Archbishop of Canterbury for it that "five millions of baptised members of the Church of England never enter the churches." The Rev. Stone says there are scores of parishes in which not two per cent. of the population are known as communicants of the Church of England. "What are we to think when we find that there are not 150 communicants in parishes containing ten or twelve thousand people?"

The C.M.S. *Intelligencer* says that since last May there has been a serious falling off in the number of clergymen offering for foreign missionary work. Still, as far as any evidence to the contrary presents itself, the One Above goes on smiling as self-complacently as ever.

The Lord's Day Observance Society is once more to the fore. It has sent a communication to the trustees of the Alexandra Palace deploring the suggestion made to them by the Duke of Argyll that Sunday afternoons should be devoted to physical exercises, in addition to the Sunday school. It is indeed a "deplorable suggestion"—as far as any approval of the Sunday school is concerned. Cardinal Vaughan is taken to task for sanctioning the Sunday physical exercises, and may be expected to care as much for the censure of the busybody bigots as for the braying of wild asses.

The Bishop of Manchester, it seems, has lately pointed out that the young people in a Lancashire valley—a typical one—were forsaking public worship and occupying their Sundays in preparing for various classes and examinations. This the Lord's Day Observance Society regards as "forsaking Christianity for the Pagan ideal." If this sort of thing is permitted to go on, what, indeed, can we expect except national demoralisation and decay?

Life and Death.

So he died for his faith. That is fine—
More than most of us do.
But say, can you add to that line
That he lived for it too?

In his death he bore witness at last
As a martyr to truth.
Did his life do the same in the past
From the days of his youth?

It is easy to die. Men have died
For a wish or a whim—
From bravado or passion or pride.
Was it harder for him?

But to live—every day to live out
All the truth that he dreamt,
While his friends met his conduct with doubt,
And the world with contempt.

Was it thus that he plodded ahead,
Never turning aside?
Then we'll talk of the life that he led;
Never mind how he died.

—Ernest Crosby, in "Conservator."

To Correspondents.

- CHARLES WATTS'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—March 2, Cambridge. April 6, Sheffield; 13, Bradford; 20, Glasgow.—Address, 24 Carminia-road, Balham, London, S.W.
- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—March 2, Athenæum Hall; 9, Aberdare, South Wales; 16, Porth.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.
- R. LEWIS.—Always glad to receive cuttings on which we may base a paragraph.
- THOS. SEARLE.—Pleased to hear from you again. There cannot be very many, like yourself, readers of the *Freethinker* from its birth. We are glad to note the progress you have experienced at Devonport and the vicinity in the administration of the Oaths Act. Judges, clerks, and other officials are gradually learning that persons who prefer telling the plain truth to swearing are not proper objects of outrage and insult.
- E. J. MURRAY.—Thanks. We have used them. The number of the *Spectator* you refer to did not reach our eye. We were too ill to read papers then.
- W. H. DEAKIN.—Not intrinsically of much importance, but no doubt it voices a wide-spread feeling. See "Acid Drops." Thanks.
- L. D. HEWITT.—The "Pastor Richard Copp," of New York, whom you were tempted to listen to at Merton, seems to be a prize religious imbecile. The Anglo-Israelite craze is one of the silliest in this silly world.
- E. PARKER.—We regret it, but the appeal would be too late now. Would it not have been better to have had one good rousing Freethought Demonstration at West Ham than four indifferent meetings—we mean from the point of view of numbers?
- F. L. WYNNE.—Thanks. But the same thing has been said so often in the *Freethinker* already. Still, we are glad to see it in other papers too.
- A. H.—The questions you ask would take whole articles to answer completely. All we can say here is that man has had to learn what is good to do, just as he has had to learn what is good to eat. When you say that "a given action, or line of conduct, might be successfully defended, on grounds of wisdom, which we may feel to be wrong, and, indeed, know to be wrong," you are surely using the word "wisdom" in a very narrow sense. The profit of the moment, at the loss of the future, is not wisdom, in any proper sense of the word.
- THE FRANCIS NEALE FUND.—J. Williams, 1s.; C. A. W., 1s.; A. Webber, 2s. 6d.; E. A. Charlton, 5s.; E. Conery, 5s.; G. J. Warren, 10s.; E. J. Murray, 10s. 6d.; Miss Hull, 10s.; H. Davies, 5s.; R. Gibbon, 2s.; A Friend, 2s.; T. J. Thurlow, 2s. 6d.; J. Hindle, 2s. 6d.; R. L. Martland, 10s.
- T. W. HINGHAM.—No offence.
- H. S. WISHART.—Mr. Foote's illness prevents his taking the matter up at present. Perhaps you will kindly write him again when you see he has recovered his health.
- A. J. WHITE.—Pleased to have your high opinion of the late J. M. Wheeler's *Bible Studies*. It is a book that should be in every Freethinker's library.
- J. ELLIS.—Though rather late in the day, we may say that we were very glad to hear of Mr. Cohen's successful meetings at Liverpool.
- F. R. THEAKSTONE.—Pleased to receive the full text of your letter to the *Daily Chronicle* on Thomas Paine.
- A. WEBBER.—Mr. Frederic Harrison is guilty of great nonsense in ascribing all the evils of modern life to "Materialism." What he means is "selfishness" and "luxury." Even a Positivist can play now and then to the orthodox gallery.
- We have received the following for Mr. Kelsey, the Hackney newsagent, whose case we referred to a few weeks ago:—C. A. W., 1s.; A. Webber, 2s. 6d.; E. A. Charlton, 5s.; W. Tipper, 2s.; Corsican Brothers (Liverpool), £2 2s.
- AN OLD SAINT.—Thanks for your letter. Your advice "to attend divine service as a cure for his insomnia" has been communicated to Mr. Foote.
- EMMA BRADLAUGH.—Mr. Foote fully appreciates the kind wishes for his recovery contained in your letter, and thanks you also for your effort on behalf of the *Freethinker*.
- THE National Secular Society's office is at 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C., where all letters should be addressed to Miss Vance.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C.
- THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.
- SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS:—Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

Personal.

I AM sorry to say I am still unfit for work. I have done a little Correspondence for this week's *Freethinker* and a few paragraphs—and that with very great difficulty. Most of the "Acid Drops" have been written by Mr. W. P. Ball, Mr. Cohen, "Mimnermus," and Mr. Francis Neale. Mr. Neale has left the East Dulwich Infirmary and gone to Birmingham, where some good friends are trying to nurse him back to a reasonable state of health. He reports a great improvement in his condition, which I am very happy to hear, and I daresay my readers will be happy to hear it too. "It must be very galling," Mr. Neale says in writing to me, "to be laid up at a time when there is such a pressure of work. 'Tis but the result, however, of having done too much in the past. The strongest man could hardly have expected to keep up under the strain of so much lecturing, literary, and business exertion."

The fact is, I have been very badly hit. Influenza, bronchitis, and insomnia were all upon me at once, and the last still has me in its grip. My doctor told my wife that if I had not been a strong man and a steady liver I might hardly have pulled through. He says it will be quite a couple of months before I shall feel myself again. And I am afraid he is right.

I am advised to get away to the seaside as quickly as possible. A kind friend invited me to his house on the north-east coast, but I have to choose a milder place on the south coast, and, in my present state, my wife will have to go with me. My doctor's advice is "Stay there until you are better, however long, and at whatever cost: your future life depends upon it."

It will be some time before I can lecture again, and I am sadly wanted at the Athenæum Hall, where the audience always dwindles in my absence. Still, the place must be kept open, as the platform is absolutely necessary, though I can ill afford the loss it entails.

Perhaps my friends will think it well to render me some assistance. If they do I shall be grateful. "Two Clifton Admirers" have taken the initiative themselves. They send me a postal order to aid me in my "struggle for health," and they say:—

"We wish with all our hearts that it was ten pounds instead of ten shillings. We should be pleased to see our small offering form a nucleus for other subscriptions, in order to give you a necessary and well-deserved rest at the seaside; for if any man deserves the practical gratitude of his followers, we are convinced it is you. For the sake of your wife and family, and your own, you must take care of yourself. You must also do it for the cause of Freethought, for what should we do without you?"

This is not a point I like to labor. I must leave it to my friends. I have worked very hard, and I am now stricken down. But my vital powers are reasserting themselves, however slowly; and if I do myself justice I believe I shall do a great deal more work yet for "the good old cause."

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

MR. W. HEAFORD was rather handicapped by the miserable weather on Sunday evening, which naturally affected his audience at the Athenæum Hall. Those who were present, however, much appreciated his discourse. This evening (March 2) Mr. Cohen occupies the Athenæum Hall platform. We hope the London "saints" will do their best to provide him with a good meeting, to listen to what is sure to be an able and eloquent lecture. His subject will be: "Mr. H. G. Wells and the Discovery of the Future." Mr. Wells raises many points of far-reaching interest to all serious thinkers, and the lecture should provide the materials for a profitable discussion afterwards.

Mr. Cohen's lectures at Gloucester passed off in a fairly satisfactory manner. The audiences were attentive and sympathetic, but discussion was altogether absent, except for a very mild young man who delivered a brief address that was obviously a stock article used by him in addressing Sunday schools and the like. At the conclusion of the last meeting several names and addresses were taken with a view to further propaganda and this may serve as the commencement of future activity.

Mr. A. B. Moss lectured at the Isle of Dogs' Progressive Club on February 20, taking for his subject "The Philosophy of Shakespeare." This is the first of a new departure made by the Executive of the N. S. S., which provides Freethought lectures free of expense to any club or society which applies for their services. We are pleased to learn that the lecture gave great satisfaction.

The following resolution was passed at the recent annual meeting of the East London N. S. S. Branch:—"That this Branch of the National Secular Society, in view of the recent attempt to discredit and ruin him, expresses its absolute confidence in Mr. G. W. Foote as President of the N. S. S. and editor of the *Freethinker*, and tenders its sympathy to him in his present legal disability."

The veteran W. H. Holyoak having retired from the bookshop in connection with the Secular Hall, Leicester, the "Reform Bookstore" has just been opened under new management. Special attention will be given to literature dealing with Rationalism, Religion, Ethics, Science, Philosophy, History, Economics, Social and Political subjects, etc. When desired, customers' purchases will be delivered at their houses. Old and new friends are cordially invited to look in and inspect the "Reform Bookstore" for themselves. It will be open from 9 a.m. to 7.30 p.m., closing on Thursdays at 1.30 and on Saturdays at 8.30.

Should Happiness be Our Aim?

"Secularism.....regards happiness as man's proper aim, and utility as his moral guide."—*Principles of the National Secular Society.*

THEISTIC and Intuitional moralists often challenge the Hedonistic or Utilitarian doctrines which are tacitly or expressly accepted by most modern Freethinkers. Some of us also ask ourselves at times whether we are justified in making happiness the aim of human life, or whether our aim should be some other and possibly better principle or object, such as duty, virtue, efficiency, success, the fulfilment of the laws of our being, especially "higher" laws, or "divine" laws, or evolutionary laws, or what not. As Freethinkers who question the authority of the Bible and other conventional sources of morality, we ought to clear our minds on such points. We should determine for our satisfaction and guidance what ruling consideration should govern codes of conduct, or, in other words, what should be the test of right and wrong. Without some definite means of distinguishing right conduct from wrong conduct, spurious morality will often pass undetected, and we shall be in danger of becoming blind slaves of custom, or of our passions, or fancies, or personal peculiarities.

I. HEDONISM.

HEDONISM, from the Greek word *hedonē*, pleasure, teaches and carries out the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the chief good and chief end or aim of man, and conversely, of course, that pain is the chief evil to be avoided or minimised.

Christians who condemn this great principle of action as base or ignoble are singularly inconsistent. They practically hold that happiness is our being's aim and end. For they set up eternal bliss as the great object we are to seek, and they teach us to avoid eternal torment as the worst of evils. They only despise, or affect to despise, earthly happiness for the sake of obtaining a far greater and more prolonged happiness, just as a Hedonist would deny himself brief immediate enjoyments for the sake of the greater and more lasting pleasures of a lifetime.

Why should not happiness be our aim? Nobody, except perhaps a few fanatics of the self-torturing type, will maintain that mankind should deliberately seek pain as the greatest good. I doubt whether even the cruellest of criminals or the craziest of lunatics could say that we should starve ourselves and all our fellow creatures to skeletons, and flog ourselves and the women and children to the point of death, and turn earth into a living hell in all possible ways, in order to make ourselves and everybody else as miserable as possible. Nature has built us otherwise. Her ever-active agent, Natural Selection, has preserved only those who habitually and instinctively avoided pain, which is the usual warning and accompaniment of destruction, and thereby the

means of saving us from innumerable evils, including premature death. "Nature," as Bentham says, "has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure." These have been evolved as guardians and controllers of all the higher forms of organic life, and presumably of all forms of conscious existence. By their guiding influence both the individual and the race are preserved from extinction. Defiance of their guidance is sheer lunacy like that of the imbecile child that destroys its fingers in the fire, or sheer suicide like that of the ascetic who refuses to obey the cravings of hunger and thirst. All who really reject this primary law of nature perish and are no more. Only those survive who, in practice, accept it. The avoidance of pain and the seeking of pleasure *must*, therefore, be accepted as a broad fundamental rule of life, whatever apparent exceptions may be made, and with whatever professions or pretences to the contrary we may delude ourselves.

Those who oppose this view may allege that if a man plunges into a fire to rescue another his instinctive impulse is independent of pleasure and pain. On the contrary, it is *sympathetic* avoidance of, or revolt against, the pain of burning. The man is animated by fellow-feeling, or sympathetically-felt pains and pleasures, including a painful feeling of shock or alarm which he desires to get rid of, and an instinctive and hopeful impulse which he finds pleasure in obeying; and these pains and pleasures prompt him to save a fellow-being from the pain and peril of burning just as he would save himself. The instantaneousness of such actions as the snatching of a child from danger may preclude conscious reflection or deliberate weighing of pleasure and pain, but the simplification, or even the total exclusion, of the intellectual process of reflection is not in the least identical with the exclusion of pleasure and pain. Some, it is true, urge that habits and instincts are followed automatically without any feeling of pleasure or pain. But we certainly feel satisfaction in following habits and instincts, and we experience a dissatisfaction sometimes amounting to very great pain when prevented. The pleasure and pain (like the reflection and judgment) may be *economised* by natural selection as less needed in such cases, but I think they are seldom, if ever quite, absent until we descend to reflex actions and other automatic activities which are independent of the will, or outside the domain of conscious choice or moral decision—thereby being irrelevant to our purpose. Even if man be regarded as mainly a bundle of habits, and habits as automatic "routine-processes" destitute of either pleasure or pain, there will still be decisive periods in which volition, and the pleasure and pain to influence it, must consciously determine the formation or re-formation or permitted continuance of those automatic processes.

The distinguishing characteristic or test of pleasure is that it is a state of feeling which attracts us, while pain is a state of feeling which repels us. To say that happiness is our aim is really a kind of tautology. Happiness *is* what we aim at—namely, the satisfaction of our likings and wishes.

Many people think they follow "higher" motives or ideals independently of pleasure or pain, or reward or punishment. These disinterested lovers of virtue forget that there is pleasure in satisfying "good" impulses as well as in obeying "bad" ones, and they also ignore the fact that in regarding certain impulses as "higher," "nobler," etc., they are praising and thereby rewarding themselves and others who follow the good or honored ideals rather than such as are despised. Most of us fail to observe to how great an extent "the mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." The mind, indeed, is capable of such strange freaks that it may reverse all reasonable rules. Like Satan saying "Evil, be thou my good," it may say "Pain, be thou my pleasure." It may take delight in torturing itself. It may find its most coveted enjoyment in the form of "spiritual" exaltation, or quieted remorse, or what not, based on an agony of physical pain, just as it may pride itself in the highest degree on subjecting itself to the deepest humiliation. Wisely employed, this capacity for deriving pleasure from following ideal courses of conduct is of the greatest use or value for the joint advancement of the happiness of the individual and of mankind.

Those who preach unadulterated altruism preach the impossible. There can be no such thing as pure unselfishness. We cannot perform what we call "unselfish" actions except by gratifying some impulse or emotion which gives us pleasure. Our use of such words as "disinterested," "unselfish," "self-sacrifice," etc., is therefore misleading. We merely mean disinterested from a pecuniary or *purely* egoistic point of view, and we ignore the important interests and feelings which override the lower motives and give us greater pleasure. We forget, for instance, that when Pitt while still poor gave away a large pension which he was expected to bestow on himself, he gratified his own lofty pride, and ministered to his own happiness or satisfaction, far more than if he had pocketed what to him was by comparison mere dross. We forget that the philanthropist finds his greatest pleasure in relieving the pains of others. He is a Sybarite whose delicacies or luxuries are of a far more satisfactory and lasting character than those that minister to the appetites and aid the pursuit of sensual pleasures. In our anxiety to support and glorify the "good" man, we enlarge upon the sacrifices he makes, rather than upon the still greater reward or payment which he receives. And in order to strengthen our own claims to goodness and reputation, we like to believe, and we like other people to believe, that we give up various pleasures without counterbalancing rewards or inducements. We seem to suppose that pleasure cancels moral merit, and in our debtor and creditor account we treat the higher and rightly more honored pleasures as if they were pains or sacrifices for which recompense is due. For my own part, I am pleased to think that virtue is not so unrewarded as some of its defenders assume. In no sarcastic or cynical spirit we may affirm that virtue is its own reward, for it exists only by the happiness it gives or the pain it avoids.

W. P. BALL.

(To be continued.)

The Bible Creation Story.—VII.

ONE superiority which the Hebrew Creation story is said to possess above every other cosmogony is the ascription in that story of the origination of the universe and all the matter composing it to the Deity worshipped. And this fact, assuming such to be the case, seems to be considered by certain Christian advocates a subject for congratulation. Thus, Mr. W. W. Howard, in the pretentious work from which I have twice quoted, says (p. 208):—

"The absolute origination of world-stuff is so hard to realise in thought, and the evidences for it so difficult to grasp, that no cosmogony except the Genesis has dared to assume the position.....We find no cosmogony in either Turanian, Aryan, or Semitic languages, the Hebrews alone excepted, of the antique world, that is not instinct with the presuppositions of pre-existent matter, and does not show that creation was conceived simply as formative and not origination. We look in vain also through the literature of Egypt, China, and India for a single hint of a substance-producing operation. Oriental archæology has furnished us, from the brick, clay, and stone archives of the past, with no less than three distinct accounts of creation—Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian—but in each one there is the full assumption of matter already in being. The cosmogonies of Greece and Rome possess the same characteristic.....Gods and a God were believed in, in Greece and Rome, but no one ascribed to them creative power."

Mr. Howard's opening statements in the above paragraph are undoubtedly true. "The absolute origination of world-stuff" is hard to realise in thought, and "the evidences for it" are "difficult to grasp," more especially since no such evidences are known. If we only had evidence to prove that the smallest particle of non-existent matter could be called into being, or even that a small portion of existing matter could be completely destroyed, then the origination of world-stuffs would not be absolutely inconceivable, as, in the absence of such evidence, it most certainly is, notwithstanding all the illogical assertions made by unreasoning Christian advocates to the contrary. Upon this subject I do not hesitate to say, with the late Professor Huxley,

that "Omnipotence itself can surely no more make something 'out of' nothing than it can make a triangular circle." Hence, if the universe was caused to come into existence, the materials for its formation must have previously existed in some shape or form. It is only in the abstract that origination or creation is realisable; in the concrete the material is always conceived as pre-existent. One may "create" an impression, or "create" a disturbance; but no one can create a table or a planet. In the latter case the only process conceivable is that of altering, combining, shaping, or fashioning existing material. And this re-formation, we shall presently find, is all that the Hebrew writer represented the Creator as doing.

Now, in the first place, the very fact that no other ancient people ascribed to its deity such incredible power as "the absolute origination of world-stuff" suggests the probability that the Hebrew writer of Genesis may not have done so either. There is, at any rate, sufficient reason for a closer examination of the Bible story. And, in commencing this inquiry, the first point to be settled is the respective meanings of our old friends, the three Hebrew verbs, *bara* (created), *asah* (made), and *yatsar* (formed).

To determine this point I turn to Davies' revised Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon, where I find the various meanings of each of these words given as follows:—

Bara: "Properly, to cut or carve; hence to form, to create, especially of God's making or creating the world," etc.

Asah: "Properly, to feel or press; to handle; to work or labor; to make; to form or construct; used of God, to form or create; to produce or yield," etc.

Yatsar: "Properly, to cut; hence to form or fashion, as a wood carver; of God, to create; to produce or arrange; to devise or design."

Here, it will be seen, the primary significations of *bara* and *yatsar* are the same—viz., to cut or carve some hard material, and so shape or fashion it into a new form; while the primary meaning of *asah* is to mould or shape with the hands some soft material, and so produce a new figure. In all three cases the words signify only the refashioning of existing material; not one of them means to "create" or call into being something not in existence before. The latter meaning is merely read into them (more especially in the case of *bara*) when "used of God" in connection with the "making or creating the world." That is to say, there is no word in the Hebrew language which signifies the making of something out of nothing; for that is really what "create" is interpreted to mean in the first chapter of Genesis. And this being the case, it is simply impossible that *bara* can have such meaning in the Bible Creation story.

In the next place, there are two facts to be noted in connection with that story—facts which Christian commentators and Bible reconcilers have systematically misrepresented—which undoubtedly favor the latter view. These are: (1) that the words *bara*, *asah*, and *yatsar* are employed throughout the Old Testament as interchangeable and synonymous terms; (2) that the first sentence of the narrative—"In the beginning Elohim created the heaven and the earth"—is merely an introductory statement referring to the detailed account of the six days' work that follows. In this sentence the writer says, in effect: "I am going to give you a full, true, and particular account of the creation of the heaven and the earth by Elohim." These two points have been fully proved. It follows, then, that the Bible story of the Creation commences with verse 2:—

"The earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and the wind [or 'the spirit of God'] moved upon the face of the waters."

The earth, therefore, was not called into existence—that is to say, "created"—by the Hebrew deity. It was there, ready to his hand, but in a "waste and desolate" state, without vegetation, without inhabitants, and in total darkness. A vision of a similar condition of the globe—evidently that of the earth before the "creation"—is stated to have been seen by the prophet Jeremiah, who says: "I beheld the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and the heavens, and they had no light.....I beheld, and lo, there was no man.....I beheld, and lo, the fruitful field was a wilderness," etc.

(iv. 23-26). This was the condition of the earth when the "Creator" set to work to fashion it into its present form, and to furnish it with flora and fauna. Both land and water were there, but the water covered the whole face of the earth, as in the time of the Deluge. And here it may be noted that the first chapter of Genesis was written *after* the time of Jeremiah.

The Babylonian account of the Creation presents a similar state of things. This commences:—

"At that time the heaven above had not yet announced, nor the earth beneath recorded, a name. The unopened Deep was their generator; the Chaos of the sea was the mother of them all. Their waters were embosomed as one, and the cornfield was unharvested; the pasture was ungrown."

This language forcibly reminds us of the commencement of the second Bible Creation story (Gen. ii. 5), which reads:—

"And no plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up.....there was not a man to till the ground."

In the first Bible Creation story, also, we find, as in the Babylonian, that before the re-formation of the earth no name had been "announced" or "recorded"; for this was only done after the making or fashioning. The land then was called "earth," the waters "seas," the firmament "heaven," etc.

The first thing the Hebrew God is said to have done in his work of arranging, re-fashioning, and reducing to order was the production of "light"—where it came from, or of what material it was made, the writer does not say—after which, to use the words of the Psalmist:—

"He founded the earth upon her *bases* that it *should not be moved* for ever.....The waters stood above the mountains; at thy rebuke they fled.....unto the place which thou hast founded for them. Thou hast *set a bound* that they may not pass over, that they turn not *again* to cover the earth" (civ. 5-9).

Some light is thrown upon this creative work in the Book of Job, in which the Almighty asks that much-persecuted patriarch:—

"Where wast thou when I laid the *foundations* of the earth?.....Whereupon were the *foundations* [Heb., *sockets*] thereof fastened? or who laid the *corner-stone* thereof? Who shut up the sea *with doors* when it broke forth, and issued as out of the womb?" (xxxviii. 4, 6, 8).

The answer to these questions is, of course, "The Lord strong and mighty" (Ps. xxiv. 8). In the song of thanksgiving put in the mouth of the mother of Samuel we find the same ideas respecting the earth as in the Psalms and Book of Job. There we read: "For the *pillars* of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world *upon them*" (I Sam. ii. 8). Moreover, the great prophet Enoch, the most eminent of the ancient Hebrew seers, says:—

"To the east of these beasts I perceived the *extremities* of the earth, where heaven ceased.....I surveyed the *stone* which supports the *corners* of the earth. I also beheld the four winds which bear up the earth and the firmament of heaven" (xxxii., xviii.).

It will, no doubt, be remembered that the inspiration of this prophet is fully guaranteed by the Apostle Jude.

Returning to the Creation story, there can be no doubt that the author of the first chapter of Genesis shared the opinions of the other Old Testament writers (including Enoch). All were equally inspired, and all are in agreement as regards the matters they mention. According to these sacred scribes, the earth was flat, and stood upon immovable pillars; the firmament or heavens was a short distance above the earth's surface, stretched out like an immense curtain, having beneath one of its floors a strong, solid crystalline roof, upon which were stored large reservoirs of water, besides inexhaustible supplies of snow, hail, fire, brimstone, thunder, lightning, manna, and other necessities; light and darkness were kept in separate places somewhere near "the extremities of the earth," and were sent forth alternately upon the globe; the seas, being unaffected by gravitation, were kept in their places by bounds or invisible doors, which prevented them from overflowing the land, as in "the beginning"; the sun and moon were hollow transparent bodies filled with light, which were placed in the firmament where they were borne by winds from east to west, the first-named body supplementing the ordinary light of day,

the other faintly illuminating the darkness of night; all the varieties of the vegetable kingdom, and all the inhabitants of the air and the land, were formed out of the dust of the ground; all the fishes and other marine animals were produced from the water.

Furthermore, all the New Testament writers, so far as can be ascertained, had the same beliefs. The Apostle Jude, we know, firmly believed all the absurdities of the Book of Enoch. Matthew tells us that Jesus beheld "all the kingdoms of the world" from "an exceeding high mountain" (iv. 8), which Luke renders "all the kingdoms of the inhabited earth" (iv. 5). The writer of the Book of Revelation states that "the stars of the heaven fell *unto the earth*, as a fig tree casteth her unripe figs, when she is shaken of a great wind" (vi. 13). Though this is represented as seen only in a vision, it is clear that the writer imagined the earth to be an immense plain upon which it was quite possible that all the visible astral bodies might fall without taking up very much space. Jesus himself is also represented as predicting that "the stars *shall fall* from heaven" (Matt. xxiv. 29)—the words "to the earth" being, of course, implied. It is thus plain, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that all the Biblical writers, the author of Genesis included, had the same erroneous ideas respecting natural phenomena. Their inspiration gave them no knowledge of what was unknown in their days.

ABRACADABRA.

Animism.—II.

It is easy to see how the idea of the transmigration of souls arose. Animals were observed to be no less instinct with life than men.* Soul and life in early thought were identified with breath, and when life passed from one person it was supposed to be ready to enter some other. Some new form or habitation must be provided for the spirits of the dead, and this was usually the form first seen; so that "the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird." "In North-West America we find some Indians believing the spirits of their dead to enter into bears, and travellers have heard of a tribe begging the life of a wrinkle-faced old she grizzly bear as the recipient of the soul of some particular grandam, whom they fancied the creature to resemble" (P. C., ii., 7). Many North American tribes, when little children died, buried them by the wayside, that their souls might enter mothers passing by, and so be born again. In Mexico the Tlascalans thought that after death the souls of nobles would inhabit beautiful singing birds, while plebeians passed into weasels and beetles, and suchlike vile creatures. Among the Tacullis the medicine-man effects re-incarnation by putting his hands on the breast of the dying. Then, holding them over the head of a relative, he blows through them. The next child born to the recipient of the departed soul is supposed to be animated by it, and takes the name and rank of the dead person. Our bishops, who, at the laying on of hands, at ordination, say "Receive the Holy Ghost," perpetuate the superstition. "The medicine-men of the Concomes pretend to receive the spirit of the dead in their hands, and are able to transfer it to anyone, who then takes the name of the dead person" (Dorman, 45). The idea of breath being the life may be seen in the story of Jahveh Elohim breathing into man's nostrils the breath of life (Genesis ii. 7). Among the Zulu Kaffirs it is thought that men turn into many kinds of animals, though the greater number assume the form of snakes. "When a man dies among black men," says Umpengula Mbanda, "the grave is covered over with branches. The person to whom the dead man belongs watches the grave continually. If a son has died the father watches the branches continually, that when they see that the branches are rotten they may be satisfied, knowing that nothing can now disturb the remains, for they are rotten. And if

* The Dyaks of Borneo ascribe a soul even to plants. "They regard unhealthiness in a plant as a temporary absence of its invisible *ego*, and when the rice perishes its soul is said to have flown away" (Oscar Peschel, *Races of Man*, 245). Motion is the universal sign of life, and, in the philosophy of the savage, all that moves and grows lives. In many languages the only division of things is into animate and inanimate.

he observe a snake on the grave, the man who went to look at the grave says, on his return: 'Oh, I have seen him to-day, basking in the sun, on the top of the grave'" (*Religious System of the Amazula*, p. 142).

The notion that black people when dead get re-incarnated in white form has been found in Africa, Asia, and Australia. "Black fellow tumble down, jump up White fellow." A native who was hanged years ago at Melbourne expressed in his last moments the hopeful belief that he would jump up White fellow and have lots of sixpences. Mr. Tylor shows that the mere continuance theory of an after-life is prior to that of its being a compensation or retribution. Belief in future rewards and punishments comes later than belief in mere continuance, and indicates a beginning of ethical notions. The prevalent idea of savages is that the present life is continued with little change. Modern spiritist philosophers have come round to the same opinion, and their ghosts, even when talking pure savagery, have the decency to appear in clothes. The shade of the Algonkin hunts the spirits of beavers and elk with the spirits of bows and arrows walking on the spirits of his snow shoes over the spirit of the snow.

Among tribes in which government has led to distinctions we find these perpetuated. Brazilian tribes think the spirits of their chiefs and sorcerers enter a world of enjoyment, while others wander about the graves. Thlinkets will say, when speaking of a well-to-do family: "When I die I should like to be born into that family." Natives of Tonga believed that only the upper classes had souls capable of going to Bolotoo, the land of ghosts and gods, after death. When Mariner told them of eternal hell-fire, they said it was a bad look out for foreigners. These unprepared heathens had never dreamt of such a punishment for themselves. Among the Ahts a lofty birth or a glorious death gives the right of entering a goodly land, where there are no storms or frost, but sunshine and warmth. The common people had to roam the earth in the form of some person or animal. "The New England tribes consigned their enemies to a place of misery, but they themselves had a very good time in the next world" (Dorman, 34). Everywhere we find the idea that the kingdom of heaven was for the strong, and could be taken with violence. Following on this comes the idea of punishment for cowardice or breach of duty to the tribe. To reconcile opposing beliefs, we find a theory of multiplicity of souls, as with Dacotahs, who thought each body had four. After death one wanders about the earth, the second watches the body, the third hovers over the village, whilst the fourth goes to the land of spirits. Egyptians also believed in four souls. The Dyaks of Borneo anticipated the modern Theosophists in making the number seven. Huxley has told how he and a friend were treated with great consideration by a savage who took his friend for the ghost, or rather re-incarnation, of a relative.

That the superstition of re-incarnation existed at the beginning of the Christian era is evident from it being related of Herod the Tetrarch, that when he heard of the fame of Jesus he said: This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead (Matt. xiv. 2). Jesus countenanced the doctrine, declaring that John the Baptist was Elias (Matt. xi. 14), though John himself denied the imputation (John i. 21). Christ declared of himself, "Before Abraham was I am" (John viii. 58). He taught "ye must be born again" (John iii. 7), and said the angels cannot die any more (Luke xx. 36), which may imply that they had previously lived and died over and over again. The superstition of the resurrection of the body is an offshoot of the belief in the re-incarnation of the spirit, which needs some tabernacle wherein to manifest itself.

Belief in re-incarnation is not confined to Theosophists. "In county Mayo it is believed that the souls of virgins remarkable for the purity of their lives were after death enshrined in the form of swans. In Devonshire there is the well-known case of the Oxenham family, whose souls at death are supposed to enter into a bird (their crest?); while in Cornwall it is believed that King Arthur is still living in the form of a raven. In Nidderdale the country people say that the souls of unbaptised infants are embodied in the night jar. The most conspicuous example of souls taking the form of animals is that of Cornish fisher folk,

who believe that they can sometimes see their drowning comrades take that shape. In the Hebrides, when a man is slowly lingering away in consumption, the fairies are said to be on the watch to steal his soul, that they may therewith give life to some other body." The old wives cut the nails of the sufferer, tie up the parings in a piece of rag, and wave this precious charm thrice round his head deisul. Here we have an undoubted offering of a part of the body in place of the whole, which is so frequently met in primitive worship (G. L. Gomme, E. in F.).

Fairyland merges into Ghostland, and both are provinces of Dreamland.

In dreams the savage fights his battles o'er again, or roams on expeditions in which the most surprising and magical adventures occur. His squaw tells him he has never left her side, and so he concludes he has another life, a spirit which can leave his body and act as he has dreamt, and that other animals have spirits which travel and encounter his own, even while their bodies sleep.

(THE LATE) J. M. WHEELER.

(To be continued.)

Correspondence.

THE PUZZLE OF THE INFINITE

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The explanation which "Gorgias" asks has already been indicated. "Mathematicus" especially has pointed out that the neglect of the element of time is a source of fallacy or difficulty. The infinitely numerous "heats" between Achilles and the tortoise take place with increasing rapidity, so that the series is finished within a short space of time—the illimitable divisibility of time corresponding with the illimitable divisibility of space, as in the solution of the problem of motion.

"Head Master" would demolish or prohibit my geometrical series of diminishing fractions on the alleged ground that "the introduction of a never-ending decimal series to a finite quantity is improper and unnecessary." If the series were in some sense or other "improper and unnecessary" (which I do not admit), they might still be accurately representative of facts, and might be employed with absolute confidence, just as "improper fractions" may be "improper," and yet may legitimately and confidently be used even in cases where they are not necessary.

"Head Master" says that "the tortoise no more covers the series represented by '9 than the cow jumps over the moon." But the fractional series represented by '999 etc. of a yard is certainly not greater than one yard, and "Head Master" says that it is less than a yard. Therefore, on "Head Master's" own conditions, the tortoise, in running the yard, must have passed over *all* portions or fractions of a yard, and therefore *must* have traversed $\frac{1}{9}$ plus $\frac{1}{90}$ plus $\frac{1}{900}$ etc. of a yard. Whether this fact, or my assertion of it, is "enough to fetch Professor De Morgan and Dr. Aveling back from the dead" is a consideration which ought to have no weight whatever in mathematical reasonings.

As to the suggestion that we should ask any mathematician of note whether the limit or goal of '999 etc. is ever reached, I imagine the answer would depend on the way our inquiry was shaped. If asked whether the sum or limit of a geometrical progression is reached in cases of successful pursuit like that of Achilles and the tortoise, any mathematician, who does not shrink from criticism, must plainly answer Yes. And if then asked whether the diminishing series of distances I gave is a geometrical progression correctly represented by '999 etc., he would also, I believe, be compelled to answer Yes. Such affirmations or admissions would be a verdict in my favor.

It is amusing to see "Head Master" appealing to authority in his own revolt against authority. He scouts the verdict of the arithmetical text-books, which are so generally on my side that he only names one such work as against me. Is the voice of authority perfectly trustworthy when it supports *his* views, and "arrant nonsense" when it supports mine?

I pointed out that the alleged difference between decimal nine recurring and one was nothing, because it was less than any quantity, however minute, since the nines were repeated illimitably. It can easily be shown that the apparent difference between decimal nine recurring and one is a fraction whose denominator is an infinite number of tens multiplied together. The alleged difference therefore = 1 divided by infinity. This fraction = nothing (Tate's *Calculus*, pp. 23, 24).

W. P. BALL.

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, C. Cohen, "Mr. G. H. Wells and the Discovery of the Future."

NORTH CAMBERWELL HALL (61 New Church-road): 7, Conversazione.

EAST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Stanley Temperance Bar, 7 High-street, Stepney, E.): 6.30, Monthly members' meeting; 7, J. F. Haines, "The Outbreak of Small-pox and the Vaccination Craze."

EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Bromley Vestry Hall, Bow-road): 7, G. Spiller, "God and the Ethical Movement."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Surrey Masonic Hall): 7, J. M. Robertson, "Stevenson's Opinions."

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, ante-room, first floor): 11.15, Sir W. Wedderburn, "Starving India."

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 2.30, Debate between Messrs. Coutts and Nash on "Christianity."

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

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner—3, "The Prosperity of India"; 7, "Freethought in the Old Century and the New." Tea at 4.30.

BRADFORD (Bradlaugh Club and Institute, 17 Little Horton-lane): 7, S. H. Pollard and G. O. Newsome, Humorous and Dramatic Recitals. March 3, Debate between H. Percy Ward and C. A. Glyde on "Was Christ a Wise and Moral Teacher?"

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school; S. O'Callaghan, "The Key to Health and Happiness"—Lantern lecture.

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): 12, Discussion Class; 6.30, J. F. Turnbull, Readings from Ingersoll.

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

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, W. T. Haydon, "The Cell and Evolution." Illustrated by lime-light.

MANCHESTER (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road): 6.30, W. Simpson, "How we Promote Poverty and Punish its Victims."

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): Joseph McCabe—3, "Real Religion and Mythology"; 7, "Christianity and the Fall of Rome." Tea at 5.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Capt. Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, Business meeting.

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