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Yes, religion bred the first fratricide, and since then it has borne on its forehead the sign of blood.—HEINE.

The Emerson Centenary.—III.

EMERSON began as a Christian, if Unitarianism is Christianity, and ended as a Pantheist. A denial of this is chiefly a quarrel over definitions. He did not expressly reject the personality of the Supreme Being, but his language rarely implies it; and while he speaks of God with awe and reverence, it cannot be said that he does so with any of the affection which the Theist usually mingles with his adoration. Now and then one might easily imagine that Emerson's deity was only a poetical flourish, and his Pantheism but a rhetorical artifice to produce a more impressive effect upon his auditors. Not that we would accuse him of the slightest insincerity. A man is sometimes as much a mystery to himself as to others. Emerson may not have defined his position. Perhaps he thought it did not admit of defining. It is possible that he was led by his temperament towards the Pantheism of the East rather than the Theism of the West. But it must be placed to his credit that he never let it overwhelm or overlay his intellect. He kept a shrewd Yankee head on his shoulders, even while theosophising with Plato or the still more subtle Hindus. In one of his lucidest moments he saw and stated a principle like the Monism of Clifford or Haeckel.

"All the universe over, there is but one thing, this old Two-Face, creator-creature, mind-matter, right-wrong, of which any proposition may be affirmed or denied."

The truth is that nothing can be predicated of infinitude except infinity. Spinoza, the Pantheist, might just as well be called a Monist. He did not say, as is often ignorantly alleged, that the Deity is a being of infinite attributes, but that the Deity is an absolutely infinite being, consisting of an infinity of attributes; which is a very different thing if you take the trouble to think it out. With the exception of infinity, every attribute may be affirmed of the All, and, as Emerson said, may be also denied. Here then we come to an *impasse*, and Emerson did not hesitate to say so. "No power of genius," he declared, "has ever yet had the smallest success in explaining existence. The perfect enigma remains." No less clear and bold was his thought when he said that "Man can paint, or make, or think nothing but that." This discounts all the creeds that were ever invented.

Emerson's belief in the soul was quite consistent with a doubt of its immortality, if we use this word in its common significance. He was assured that there could be no destruction of substance and force, but he had no certitude that the activities which made up his personality would be reassembled in a similar personality. This should be borne in mind; otherwise it will be easy to misunderstand him. Take an instance from the fine essay on Montaigne. "I do not press," he says, "the scepticism of the materialist. I know the quadruped opinion will not prevail." A hasty or superficial reader might take this as a sneer at a certain philosophy which is rather unfortunately called Materialism. But it is

no such thing. What is really meant is that the animal is not to question the lordship of intellect and conscience. Emerson's intention was purely ethical.

The last word brings us once more to Emerson's chief characteristic. Whatever metaphysics he held, or did not hold, his philosophy of life was entirely practical. Listen to the following:—

"Ethics and religion differ herein; that the one is the system of human duties commencing from man; the other, from God. Religion includes the personality of God; Ethics does not."

This is plain and decisive enough. Those who have read Emerson with insight and sincerity know that his real and essential religion was the religion of humanity. "Philosophy," he said, "extirpates bugbears, yet it supplies the natural check of vice, and polarity to the soul." He despised the Christian idea of the noblest virtues of heathen manhood being nothing but splendid sins; or, worse still, filthy rags of self-righteousness. He ventured to look forward to the triumph of the very opposite conception. The day would come when Churches built on supernatural dogmas would be superseded.

"There will be a new church founded on moral science, at first cold and naked, a babe in a manger again, the algebra and mathematics of ethical law, the church of men to come, without shawms, or psaltery, or sackbut; but it will have heaven and earth for its beams and rafters; science for symbol and illustration; it will fast enough gather beauty, music, picture, poetry."

A church founded on moral science! How the superstitious will laugh! They talk of "mere morality." Emerson looked at them with a serene smile, and told them it was like saying "Poor God—with nobody to help him."

Scattered over Emerson's writings are a multitude of illustrations of the principles that must guide the new departure. We can only take a few. Long before Ruskin declared that the veins of wealth were not in rock but in flesh, Emerson taught that "The best political economy is care and culture of men." Long before the great outburst of sociological and moral study which followed in the wake of Darwinism, Emerson had written: "I look for the new Teacher that.....shall see the identity of the law of gravitation with purity of heart; and shall show that the Ought, that Duty, is one thing with Science, with Beauty, and with Joy." Emerson's appeal to the law of love was not based on hysterical piety or mere sentimentalism, but on reason and psychology. The element of truth of the following has yet to be realised:—

"The money we spend for courts and prisons is very ill laid out. We make, by distrust, the thief and burglar and incendiary, and by our court and jail we keep him so. An acceptance of the sentiment of love throughout Christendom for a season, would bring the felon and the outcast to our side in tears, with the devotion of his faculties to our service."

It is a singular corroboration of this theory that in revolutionary times there is generally a striking decrease of ordinary crime; the anti-social tendencies of many being apparently held in check by the sentiment of public welfare.

Emerson would have the law of love applied absolutely to children. The following passage is very fine and true:—

"In my dealing with my child, my Latin and Greek, my accomplishments and my money, stead me nothing;

but as much soul as I have avails. If I am wilful, he sets his will against mine, one for one, and leaves me, if I please, the degradation of beating him by my superiority of strength. But if I renounce my will, and act for the soul, setting that up as umpire between us two, out of his young eyes looks the same soul; he reveres and loves me."

Note the supreme characteristic of the Emersonian ethics. It is personal, individual—some would say egoistic. But how sure and sound! Your influence on others is always debateable; the effect of your actions upon yourself is never open to doubt. Emerson does not dwell upon the outrage to the child in beating him, but upon the degradation of the parent. And he is right; for there is no serious virtue without self-respect; and the famous lines of Polonius are none the less true because they come from the mouth of a tortuous old courtier, whose moral intuitions had been obscured, but not destroyed, by eavesdropping, false suggestion, and other arts of "diplomacy."

This sunny trust in the higher laws has earned for Emerson the name of an optimist. But such designations are misleading. He was not insensible to the dark side of nature. He did not clap his hands when a brave explorer fell a prey to some wild beast. He did not hail with joy the spring of the tiger, the dart of the serpent, or the bite of the shark. He only thought that the dark side of nature was passing into the light. He held this to be true also in the case of mankind.

"Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute: it is like cold, which is the privation of heat. All evil is so much death or nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real."

There is a sense in which this is obviously true. The balance must be to the credit of benevolence, for what do we mean by it but the essential conditions of our own existence? and if these are regularly contravened we simply disappear. But in any other sense Emerson's doctrine is open to grave discussion. It is beyond our province, however, to discuss it here. Our object is to indicate Emerson's thought, and to guard against the deception of more or less arbitrary labels.

What is too facily called Emerson's optimism is in one respect very bracing. He is the apostle of effort and hope. He faces the future instead of reposing on the past. He dreams of vaster accomplishments and nobler victories than man has yet witnessed. "We think our civilisation near its meridian," he exclaims, "but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning star." Do the servants of reason and humanity falter at the thought that they make no visible impression on the stupidity and barbarity around them? Let them take fresh heart. "Every thought," as Emerson says, "which genius and piety throw into the world, alters the world." Each alteration is infinitesimal, but the sum is vast over great periods of time.

So much for Emerson's teaching; and now a few words on his leading qualities. He is a quintessential writer. He does not dilate rhetorically, like Carlyle; he concentrates, and gives us the cream of his thought. He looks over vast spaces because of the altitude at which he stands. He sees vividly—though with some curious limitations, as in the case of Shelley's poetry. He is epigrammatic. He is sometimes dazzling. "Life," he once said, "is a series of surprises, and would not be worth taking or keeping, if it were not." A good deal of this character pertains to his writings, and this is one of the reasons why they are so stimulating. It was thought paradoxical when Matthew Arnold said that while Emerson was not a great writer of prose his *Essays* were the most important work done in prose in the nineteenth century. But the truth is that Emerson was not a great prose writer in the sense that (say) Sir Thomas Browne was. He has few sustained passages, and these are hardly ever wrought with the flawless skill of a great master of style. He has one splendid passage on Napoleon, and more than one on Shakespeare—of whom he wrote better than anyone after Lamb and Coleridge. It must be said that his

English, while occasionally a little careless, was scholarly, fluent, and beautiful. We imagine he wrote with ease and pleasure. Scarcely any other prose, of the highest order, has such an air of improvisation. There is something oracular about him; and a collection of brilliant, suggestive, and inspiring sentences might be made from him that few, if any, moderns could hope to rival.

The final thing to be said is perhaps the best of all. Emerson lived his own philosophy. He was no charlatan, no poser, no weaver of sentences for bread or applause. He was sincere from head to foot. The beauty of his teaching shone in his character. He was the best beloved of American writers. Whittier, Longfellow, Lowell, and the rest of them, all regarded him with deep affection. There is a perennial fascination in his gracious personality. He is the sweetest memory of his land and century.

G. W. FOOTE.

Dr. Dallinger on Miracles.

RECENT events have gone far to establish the truth that the opinions of leaders of science, outside their own particular branch of inquiry, are of no more value than those of the man in the street. First came the two articles of Sir Oliver Lodge in the *Hilbert Journal*, the last one of which deserves to be used in public schools as a mine of loose reasoning, for students to exercise their wits upon. Then came the declaration by Lord Kelvin that Evolution involved the belief in creation, a statement as damning to any man's reputation as a thinker as could be made. That Evolution deals with the development of a universe already existing in substance is not a statement open to debate at all, but a plain statement of fact, and the man must be strangely obtuse who fails to see it. One may, of course, continue to propound conundrums as to "Where did this substance come from?" but to say that this question is involved in, or necessary to, or even suggested by, the doctrine of Evolution, is wildly inaccurate. A scientific man is not prohibited from speculating outside his province, and there is nothing to save him from the fate that overtakes lesser men when he does so, but it is hardly justifiable for leading scientists to use the scientific platform for the purpose of propagating old-fashioned religious absurdities.

Now, following Sir Oliver Lodge and Lord Kelvin comes Dr. Dallinger on "The Relations between Modern Science and the Miracles of the Gospels," and roundly affirming that there is nothing in the former to discredit the latter. This assertion from the mouth of an ordinary preacher might be allowed to pass without comment; from one well known in the scientific as well as in the religious world it deserves notice, and, if possible, correction.

One advantage Dr. Dallinger's scientific training has given him—it has enabled him to see the futility of basing a defence of religious beliefs on our present ignorance of the way in which special phenomena are produced. He does not believe that there exists any phenomena the mode of production of which may not be ultimately ascertained. Mystery, he rightly says, is a factor that modern science and current philosophy warmly resent. "The careful study of nature has shown that, to the patient inquirer, she is absolutely frank. In her activities she is undoubtedly profound, but not inaccessible. Her methods are deep; to understand them there must be much patience and research; but she is never mysterious, and always unfolds herself at last."

And again:—

"Nothing is clearer than the fact that all the activities of nature are a chain of demonstrable sequence. One broken link, one cessation of logical action would involve the shattering of the universe."

So far, good; but Dr. Dallinger believes that "a miracle must involve and carry with it mystery," and it is therefore necessary to not only find a mystery, but one that shall be irremovable, if the

defence of the miraculous is to be of permanent value. This indestructible mystery he believes we have in the question of the *origin* of the universe. "The universe does contain a miracle—its origin, its beginning"; which I venture to say is not a mystery at all, but only a meaningless proposition. A little explanation will make this clear. If an uneducated person were to say that the formation of clouds and the falling of rain were to him mysteries, he would be making a perfectly intelligible statement. The fact of the cloud forming and of the rain falling are undeniable, and one can understand what is the nature of the explanation required. Similarly with any phenomenon that may be related. But, in the case of the example selected by Dr. Dallinger, the proposition is anything but intelligible; it is, in fact, quite meaningless. If one sets oneself seriously to work to find out what is meant by the question, "How did the universe come into being?" it will be found that the very terms of the question are inconceivable. All that the intellect can do, at its best, is to conceive a change in some materials already existing. The phrase, "begin to be," is perfectly intelligible when applied to the production of any *special* phenomenon, but it is quite meaningless when applied to existence *per se*, which is necessarily assumed in every mental operation.

So utterly unintelligible is Dr. Dallinger's question, that when he comes to discuss the scientific possibility, or probability, of a miracle, his crucial example is dropped altogether, and he falls back upon special phenomena, which he has already declared contain no mystery, but only puzzles bound to be solved sooner or later, and which are therefore, on his own showing, not miracles at all. To put the matter in a nutshell. Dr. Dallinger says, to have a miracle you must have a mystery; but as natural phenomena do not contain any mysteries, the only miracle we can find is the miracle of origin; and then, seeking for proof of his statement, he falls back, for illustrations of the miraculous, upon the very phenomena which he says do not present real mystery, and are therefore lacking in the essential quality of the miraculous. A clearer proof of the unintelligibility of his position could hardly be supplied.

Now let us come to Dr. Dallinger's instances of the reasonableness of the belief in miracles. Scientific authorities, he tells us, are in a very different position to what they were a hundred years ago. In proof of this he cites Huxley, who writes in his criticism of Hume that "A miracle, in the sense of a sudden and complete change in the customary order of nature, is intelligible, can be distinctly conceived, implies no contradiction, and therefore, according to Hume's own showing, cannot be proved false by any demonstrable argument." It is astonishing how authoritative the opinions of a scientific man become when his statements lend support to the orthodox case; but I am of opinion that, if Huxley had fully realised the full implications of the language employed, such a sentence would never have been written. For my part, I venture to say that, given an adequate knowledge of the meaning of that chain of "logical action" of which Dr. Dallinger speaks, "a sudden and complete change in the customary order of nature" is wholly inconceivable.

Let us take an illustration—the simpler the better, although the principle involved would be the same in every case. It is part of the customary order of nature that an unsupported stone shall fall to the ground. No one denies that in its passage towards the ground some other force may be brought into operation, and send it skyward again; but no one will call this a sudden and complete change in the customary order of nature. One would simply point out that this, too, is part of the "customary order," and that the first statement is only true in the absence of opposing conditions. Now, I think I might safely challenge Professor Huxley, if he were alive, or Dr. Dallinger in his place, to ever conceive that an unsupported stone shall not fall to the ground *without suppressing all that he knows* concerning the meaning of gravitation.

Or take the Gospel miracle of Jesus walking on the water. It is part of the order of nature that a solid body placed in a medium of lesser density than itself will sink. No one denies that the interposition of another body—wood or cork—between the first two may not prevent the heavier one sinking, but I can again challenge anyone to conceive the unsupported heavier body floating, without suppressing all their scientific knowledge in this direction. One can no more do this than he could think of two and two making five, without changing the quality of one of the factors. If this is correct, Professor Huxley's dictum, adopted by Dr. Dallinger, is simply worthless. A sudden and complete change in the customary order of nature is neither intelligible nor conceivable. If every phenomenon is the *necessary* product of all that has gone before, any sudden and complete alteration is an impossibility. Once "the chain of demonstrable sequence" is realised the result becomes a necessity. Dr. Dallinger's own statements show it; and I defy him to conceive any complete change occurring without suppressing his knowledge of the sequence up to that particular point.

Dr. Dallinger next takes the case of Christ turning water into wine, and says that "because our uniform experience is against such an event," it has been described as a violation of natural law and is impossible, and asserts that no "philosopher or man of science dare say that, unless he can affirm that he knows all the forces of nature, and all that is possible of their action in every conceivable condition throughout the universe." I really do not wish to appear disrespectful to Dr. Dallinger, but it does strike one that the last sentence is merely a pompous platitude dragged in to distract attention from the weakness of the case championed. Certainly no man is warranted in saying *all* that is impossible, but just as certainly anyone is warranted in saying that some things are impossible. I am warranted in saying that it is impossible for anyone to make a balloon filled with brickbats instead of gas rise in the air, although I am not warranted in saying that a balloon may not be floated by means other than gas or warm air. Whether we are justified in saying that a theory is impossible or not really depends upon what knowledge we possess on the subject. Impossibility is as much a statement of certainty or knowledge as possibility is of doubt or ignorance.

But Dr. Dallinger's statement of the objection against this particular miracle is hardly adequate. It is true that uniform experience is against the conversion of water into wine; but this is not the whole of the objection, nor is it the strongest. A stronger objection is that water and wine are not two substances differing in atomic grouping, as a diamond and a piece of carbon differ, but two compounds differing in the nature of their constituents. The constituents of water are oxygen and hydrogen; wine is made up of these two, and *others*. The objection to the miracle is therefore that, if these other elements were introduced, the water was *not* changed into wine; but their introduction reduces the matter to a species of sleight-of-hand performance. And if they were *not* introduced, then it is scientifically impossible that H₂O could form wine as we know it. This is the simple scientific aspect of the matter, and all the talk about possibility and impossibility is so much fine phrasing, introduced to darken counsel rather than to give wisdom.

Continuing, Dr. Dallinger proceeds—consciously or unconsciously—to knock the bottom out of the miraculous altogether by reducing *all* miracles to the exercise of superior knowledge in guiding and controlling natural forces. "Man himself works miracles," he says, in the use of the telegraph, steam-engine, etc. One may really believe that he has struck the bed-rock this time. Our scientific works are miracles to savages; the Greeks would have thought our sending wireless messages a miracle; and so belief in a miracle becomes, after all, only another name for—ignorance. This is the historical truth of the matter, I have no doubt, only one wonders what is the value of the preliminary

reasoning in the light of the conclusion. Only one saving clause does Dr. Dallinger insert. The difference between a miracle performed by man and a miracle performed by God is, "one is wrought laboriously and the other instantly." Again I must say, with as little disrespect as possible, that our Methodist scientist is talking scientific nonsense. You cannot eliminate the time element from natural operations. Light waves, or any other force, will move at the same rate, whether set in motion by man or "God," and one suspects that this qualification is only introduced in order to find room for the "Let there be" of the Bible.

Finally, Dr. Dallinger has this astounding summary: "And so the divinity of the action of Christ consisted in his supreme knowledge of nature; a knowledge not acquired, but inherited. And if man in the process of centuries discovers some or all the laws obedient to Christ's bidding, nevertheless the priority of His act will leave His miracle divine." Of course Dr. Dallinger was bound to find some reason for placing Jesus in a distinct category; but surely one might have been discovered the absurdity of which was less apparent. The divinity of Christ consisted in his supreme knowledge! Does Dr. Dallinger mean, seriously mean, that the acquisition of knowledge divests man of his manhood? Let us suppose that men have probed all profundities of nature, which Dr. Dallinger believes will one day be as clear as day to them. Will they then cease to be men and become divinities? If not, what in the name of all that is reasonable is meant by saying that the divinity of Jesus lay in his knowledge?

But it was not only the knowledge of Jesus, but the priority of his discoveries. Well, if priority of discovery made Jesus divine, it must be equally true of all the scientific discoverers that have ever lived. It must be true of Pythagoras, of Galileo, of Newton, of Darwin, and of the discoverer of the Röntgen Rays and Radium. It would perhaps be too cruel to ask Dr. Dallinger for some instance of Christ's superior knowledge, but one almost feels inclined to do so all the same. As a matter of fact Dr. Dallinger might easily satisfy himself that all the miracles recorded of Christ were quite everyday performances with his contemporary thaumaturgists, and a little attention to this fact would be really more helpful to the discussion of the gospel miracles than all the fine-spun theories invented to prop up a belief which all the unscientific theorising of scientific men cannot save from destruction.

C. COHEN.

Dante.

1265-1321.

"King who hast reigned six hundred years or more."—TENNYSON.

And, standing up,
Shall claim the wreath
Due to the poet's temples.

—*Purg.* (xxv.).

At this moment the name of Dante fills the air of London to a greater degree even than at the time when, according to the old Latin chronicler, he visited the City and lived in what was the thirteenth century precursor of Cheapside.

Yet it may safely be asserted that comparatively few people know the writings of the greatest Italian poet. More than seven thousand books on Dante and the "Divine Comedy" have increased to such a point the difficulty of studying his works that, to the bewildered reader, tossed on the perilous waters of contradictory commentary and of subjective criticism, nothing is left but to take shelter in the safe haven of conventional admiration.

What wonderful changes have taken place in Europe since Dante's time. Poets have rushed, comet-like, across the literary horizon, illumined the darkness for a moment, then as rapidly departed. We have forgotten their songs, their message, even their names. Dramatists have provided fun for the million, and tragedy for those rarer folk to whom

poetry is the elixir of life. Most of their names are lost to memory. Even their plays cease to attract. Time is merciless, and strews the poppy of oblivion over all but the worthiest. But Dante has had but one superior during the six centuries since his death, and that is William Shakespeare, the greatest name in all literature.

Of Dante's life but little is known. Even before his death he had come to be the subject of many flourishing legends. It is well nigh impossible to make out exactly what he did. So deep is this obscurity, that his stature gains from the uncertainty a fabulous proportion like a giant's in a mist. Through the pettiness of merely irrelevant detail, there are faintly discernible certain of the bolder features of the man and the author.

Dante Alighieri, the greatest poet of Italy, "the voice of ten silent centuries," was born in Florence in 1265. He was of noble birth, and showed early a passion for learning. He learned all that the schools and universities of the time could teach him "better than most," fought as a soldier, did service as a citizen, and at thirty-five filled the office of chief magistrate of Florence.

While but a boy of ten he met Beatrice Portinari, a beautiful girl of his own age and rank. He grew up in partial sight of her, in some distant intercourse with her, who became to him the ideal of all that was pure, noble, and good. She made a great figure in his life and a greater in his immortal poem. She died in 1290. He married another, "not happily." In some Guelf-Ghibelline strife he was expelled the city. From this time he ate the bitter bread of banishment. Without a home, he turned to the world of the imagination and wrote the *Divine Comedy*, one of the most remarkable of all books. He died after finishing it, not old, at the age of fifty-six.

Dante's immortal poem, *The Divine Comedy*, consisting of three parts—Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise—forms an epitome of the Christianity of the Middle Ages. It was written in an Age of Faith. Dante was a firm believer. His uncompromising realism brings vividly before us the full extent of the credulity of those far-off days. However strange, however grotesque, may be the appearance which Dante undertakes to describe, he never shrinks from describing it. His similes are the illustrations of a traveller. Dante introduces the illustrious Virgil as his guide to the infernal regions. He compares the precipice which led from the sixth to the seventh circle of Hell to the rock which fell into the Adige on the south of Trent. The place where the heretics were confined in burning tombs resembled the cemetery of Arles. He puts Francesca of Rimini, whom he had nursed as a child, among the damned,

imprisoned in the viewless winds
And blown about the pendant world.

Count Ugolini is introduced among other sufferers. His own beloved Beatrice, the load-star of his shadowed life, continuously appears and reappears throughout the poem. The description of the gigantic spectre of Nimrod is wonderful in its realism. His face seemed to Dante as long and as broad as the ball of St. Peter's at Rome, and his other limbs in proportion. Dante was all imagination, but he wrote like Euclid.

His solicitude to define everything sometimes borders on the grotesque. But the power of his genius carries everything before it. Such transcendent originality of conception is alone paralleled by Homer and Shakespeare. For his having adopted the popular superstition in all its extravagances we have no more right to blame Dante than we have to criticise Homer because he uses the heathen deities, or Shakespeare on account of his witches and fairies.

The contemporary of Thomas Aquinas, it is not to be wondered if Dante has saturated his poem with the scholastic theology. Apart from its purely literary aspect, the *Divine Comedy* is a mirror in which we may view mediæval Christianity. There is an air of infinite grief and the sound of lamentation all over

this lurid conception of life. A veritable devil sits in the seat of deity and rules a terror-stricken world. Dante shows us hell after hell, each more abominable than the last, round every species of petty offenders. He pictures the torments of the lascivious, the unbaptised, the gluttons, the avaricious. Some are tossed about in furious winds, some are lying in filth under a continuous hailstorm, others are punished in burning tombs, whilst numbers are tormented in a river of blood. Except in the writings of the Fathers and Christian theologians, nobody ever had such ideas of filth and corruption. The human emotions of the man are strangled by this hideous theology. The gloom of the Infernal Regions tinges even the flowers of Paradise and the glories of Heaven. The Christian superstition, of which Dante sings with so much power, is now on its death-bed. But it matters little to the *Divine Comedy*. The daring imagination, the delicacy of verbal vesture of the Father of Tuscan literature, can never stale. One cannot read many lines of the *Divine Comedy* without coming upon one of those superb felicities of utterance which seem to tingle the very blood:—

As when some great thought strikes along the brain
And flushes all the cheek.

The essence of Dante's greatness lies as much in the splendor of his language as in the grandeur of his imagination. By the general suffrage of the civilised world his place has been assigned amongst the three greatest masters of his art. And intellectual greatness is the highest and the most lasting. Empires, kingdoms, and commonwealths pass. Nations degenerate. Cities become desolate. Battles are fought and forgotten. Great soldiers and statesmen become mere names. But the supreme beauty of a great intellect survives the centuries, and clothes an illustrious name with immortal glory, which grows in lustre with the overlapping ages. Transcendent genius has rendered the name of Dante ever illustrious, and his greatness is secured for all time.

MIMNERMUS.

Moses and the Pentateuch.—V.

BEFORE proceeding further it may, perhaps, be necessary to devote a few words to the question as to what portion of the Old Testament "history" can reasonably be considered historical. There can, I think, be little doubt that the greater part of the book of Judges and of the two books of Samuel fairly represents the earliest history of the Hebrew tribes in Canaan, and that most of the events narrated in the two books of Kings are likewise historical.

We know from some of the cuneiform inscriptions of Assyria and Babylonia that many of the kings of Israel and Judah lived and reigned about the time stated, as well as in the order given, in the books of Kings. We may, then, I think, take the majority of the persons and events named in the books mentioned as being in the main historical—the fictitious portions being chiefly additions to the earlier narratives by the compilers of the present books, more especially the dragging in of the name of "the Lord" upon every possible occasion, and fraudulently representing any misfortunes or reverses which came upon some of the kings who served other gods as punishments inflicted by Yahveh. Some of the writings of the Prophets also—Micah, Hosea, Amos, and portions of Isaiah and Jeremiah—may be taken as correctly representing sundry events and circumstances of Jewish life in the time of the later kings.

Having thus premised, we have to see whether there be any evidence that the Hebrew prophets, priests, or kings, from the earliest to the latest periods, had any knowledge of the laws and commands supposed to have been given to the nation by Moses before entering Canaan. Of course, if the laws contained in the Pentateuch had been given, as represented, at such an early date, the priests and elders, if not the whole nation, would have been well acquainted with them; for they were commanded to

be read to "all Israel" every seventh year, if not oftener, at the feast of Tabernacles (Deut. xxxi. 10-13).

1. In the book of Judges (iii. 5-6) we read:—

"And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites; the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite: and they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods."

This I take to be the most ancient record of the early history of the Hebrew nation that now exists. It is, perhaps, somewhat surprising that the compiler of the book of Judges—who lived after the Exile (Judg. xviii. 30)—allowed the paragraph to stand. The Israelites were themselves of the same race and language as those whom the compiler calls "Canaanites." This fact even Professor Sayce, who is often cited as a Bible reconciler, admits. All the inhabitants of Canaan came originally, though at different periods in history, from countries in the neighborhood of Babylon, and carried with them the gods of the districts they had left. The Jewish tribes were probably some of the latest arrivals, and settled, in the first place, on the borders of Canaan. After a generation or so, when their numbers had augmented and they felt themselves sufficiently strong, a coalition of the tribes crossed the Jordan into Palestine proper, and took forcible possession of a large portion of the country; whence they received from the older inhabitants the name of "Hebrews"—men who had come from "the other side."

The Bible stories of the Israelites having been bondmen in Egypt, of being led out of that country by Moses, of miraculously crossing the Red Sea, of wandering about for forty years in the wilderness of Sinai, of being fed by heaven-sent manna, and of slaughtering and exterminating the original inhabitants of Canaan, are all pure fiction. The Israelites were themselves Canaanites, and, as stated in the paragraph in Judges, lived, in the earliest times, in friendly relations with the other Canaanitish tribes, "and they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave them their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods."

Now, if we believe the statements in the "books of Moses," these primitive Jews had at this very time copies of all the laws now found in the Pentateuch; they had also a grand tabernacle standing in their midst sacred to the worship of the god Yahveh, and—what is not less surprising—they had an army of priests and Levites, who expounded these laws to the people, and who sacrificed daily to the same deity. Yet, strange to say, none of these ancient Israelites, priests and Levites included, appear ever to have heard of the following commands which are stated to have been given to them by Moses:—

"When Yahveh thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and shall cast out many nations before thee, the Hittite, and the Girgashite, and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite.....thou shalt utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them; neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For he will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods; so will the anger of Yahveh be kindled against you, and he will destroy thee quickly" (Deut. vii. 1-4).

One naturally asks, Where were the priests and Levites? and how came they to allow the people to act in direct opposition to the Lord's express commands? The answer is simple: in those early times there were no priests and Levites, such as described in the Pentateuch, and no grand tabernacle. The Hebrews of those days had no fear of the anger of Yahveh. They had never heard of the wonders afterwards alleged to have been wrought on their behalf by that deity in Egypt and in the wilderness; neither had they ever heard of the commands respecting the Canaanites in the book of Deuteronomy. The reason, of course, is plain; the so-called "books of Moses" had not then been written.

2. In the first book of Samuel (chap. viii.) we are

told that "all the elders of Israel" came to Samuel, and said: "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways; now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." This reasonable request, it is said, "displeased Samuel," who thereupon asked counsel of God. "And the Lord said unto Samuel. Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should be king over them." The Lord then selected Saul as the first king—and repented having done so later on.

Not long afterwards (chap. xii.) Samuel summoned the people together and addressed them as follows: "I will call unto the Lord, that he may send thunder and rain; and ye shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king." When the thunder and rain came "all the people greatly feared," and they said to Samuel, "Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king" (17-19).

Setting aside the story that Samuel had asked the Lord to send thunder and rain, it is quite clear that neither that prophet nor any one else in his day, nor even "the Lord" himself, had seen the following passage in Deuteronomy in which special instructions are given to the Israelites for choosing a king after they were settled in Canaan:—

"When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell within; and shalt say, I will set a king over meone from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee, which is not thy brother" (Deut. xvii. 14-15).

In this passage no sin against God is either expressed or implied in the desire of the nation to have a king, provided only the sovereign chosen was an Israelite. Had Samuel been acquainted with this command he could not have told the people that their "wickedness was great" in asking for a king. Moreover, many of the elders, who at stated periods are said to have heard the books of the law read to them, would remember that in one of those books provision was made for the selection of a king on one simple condition—which condition had not been violated. These men, when accused of rebellion against God, would certainly not have admitted the truth of the accusation, neither would they have implored Samuel to "pray for thy servants *that we die not.*" Where, again, were all the priests and Levites? They, at least, must have known of the instructions respecting the choosing a king given in Deuteronomy. But no—not a single person in the time of Samuel—neither priest, Levite, nor elder, nor the writer Samuel, nor even the Lord himself, had ever seen or heard this very plain and easily-remembered command. The reason is, of course, obvious: the book of Deuteronomy was then unwritten.

3. In the same chapter of Deuteronomy "the Lord," after directing that no king of Israel should be chosen from any non-Jewish nation, adds the following prohibitory commands with regard to the doings of the Hebrew kings:—

"He shall not multiply horses to himself.....Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites.....and he shall read therein all the days of his life.....that he turn not aside from the commandment to the right hand or the left" (Deut. xvii. 16-20).

We are asked to believe that a copy of the book of Deuteronomy was in the hands of "the priests the Levites" from the times of Moses downwards, and that all the kings who reigned over Israel—or at least all who "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord"—had copies, which they consulted when in doubt as to the Lord's commands on any particular subject.

Let us see, then, how Solomon, the third king of

Israel, regarded (or disregarded) the foregoing commands respecting horses, wives, and shekels. The following is the Bible statement respecting some of the acts of this wise king: "And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen; and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen.....And they brought horses for Solomon out of Egypt, and out of all lands" (1 Kings x. 26). "Now king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites.....And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart" (1 Kings xi. 1-3). "Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and threescore and six talents of gold; besides that which the chapmen and merchants brought: and all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon" (2 Chron. ix. 13-14).

Solomon was the king who built the first permanent dwelling-place for Yahveh, and was also one of the kings who "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord." In his old age, it is true, "his wives turned away his heart after other gods," and persuaded him to build altars and to offer sacrifices to the various deities they worshipped; but this was long after he had "multiplied" to himself horses, wives and gold. We have to ask, then, would this king, knowingly, have acted in direct opposition to the Lord's express commands in Deuteronomy? The answer must, of course, be in the negative. We thus reach the same conclusion as in the last example. The prohibitory laws in Deuteronomy were unknown to Solomon, and for the very obvious reason—that book was unwritten in his days. Furthermore, it is quite clear that the author of Deuteronomy, when writing these commands, had the acts of Solomon before his eyes, and, disapproving of them, named them as acts forbidden by the Lord, in order, probably, to deter future kings from acting in like manner.

ABRACADABRA.

The Temptations of Abimelech.

A STUDY IN HEREDITY.

PRELUDE.

WHATEVER opinions we may hold concerning the intelligence of the authors of Genesis and the morals of the personages whose lives are therein mentioned, we must never forget that those said personages had no Decalogue to steer by, and that man was not as yet forbidden to marry his grandmother; that, indeed, the authors by strange derangement of good taste made incest a *sine qua non* of the increase of the human race by starting it with but *one* pair of mankind, and by so doing necessitating its propagation by intercourse between brothers and sisters. I do not know how this awkward, and to our minds, repellant, necessity struck the minds of the writers of Genesis, but as they are said to have adopted the method a second time, and so have resorted again to incest, after the flood, to repopulate the earth. Shem and his wife, I believe, are understood by theologians—who best understand this savory matter, I suppose—to be the couple from whose progeny the white people sprang; Japhet and his wife, the couple from whom the brown people arose; and Ham and his wife supplied the black folks of the earth; the descendants of each couple breeding in and in, it may be assumed that our authors had high Ptolemaic notions as to keeping the breed pure by never marrying outside the family. Even to this day the Ten Commandments say nothing of the Table of Affinities—the sexual *Index Prohibitorum* of the Church of England as by Law Established, are alleged on a widely accepted authority not to run "East of Suez," and it was not far from Suez that the incidents I have to review are alleged to have taken place, *anno mundi* (say) 2100.

Now, just as when Adam and Eve were the only

created people on earth (excepting later on, when Adam and Eve were 160 years old, and there were added to the world-population of two, Cain and Abel) there seems to have been a race of *self-made* men (and women) living in "the land of Nod"; so, after all living things had been destroyed by the flood excepting the eight human and the innumerable other occupants of the ark, there seems to have been at least several powerful and numerous peoples who, notwithstanding their participation in the universal doom of mankind—barring, of course, the crew of the ark—yet were cheerfully living in a high state of civilisation, ignorant alike of the deluge and of their own or their ancestors' drowning experiences—their own, were possibly as "self-made" as the good folks of Nod, and are probably an early instance of that spontaneous generation which some scientists, I have been told, are far from denying, and have, indeed, diligently sought to discover proof of. Of two of these peoples, Pharaoh was king of one, and Abimelech of the other.

Now at this time Abraham, who, from his intercourse with Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japhet, was fully aware of the fact that there were no living people on earth but the descendants of Noah's boys, nevertheless went down into Egypt to visit the Egyptians and call on Pharaoh without so much as a word of astonishment at the existence of a people who were in no way related either to himself or to his old and living relations, the Noahs. On this journey he took his wife Sarah, for private reasons of his own, he being then about sixty years of age, and Sarah some nine years younger, and "fair to look upon." On their way Abraham proposed to his wife Sarah that, when they reached Egypt, she should pretend to be his sister, lest, owing to her beauty, the Egyptians might "desire her," and kill him, were he known as her husband, in order to possess her entirely. To this arrangement Sarah consented; and on their arrival "in Egypt" was introduced to Pharaoh as "Miss" Abraham, and became his concubine or something equivalent or thereabouts. Later on Pharaoh seems to have suspected the relationship between Sarah and Abraham, and charged Abraham with lying to him, roundly asserting that it was against his (Pharaoh's) principles to have a married woman as a concubine. After confessing his lie, Abraham was, for reasons not given, but which must be assumed to have seemed good to Pharaoh, loaded with presents by Pharaoh, and departed from Egypt with his wife Sarah and the proceeds of her immoral life with Pharaoh. Although a poor benighted heathen, Abraham proves to have been a first-class business man. Conclusive proof of which we shall now proceed to offer.

SIRIUS.

(To be continued.)

Acid Drops.

The religious bodies of Lowestoft are up in arms against the running of the electric trams on Sunday. The Non-conformists, of course, are particularly active. The Wesleyans and Primitive Methodists have passed strong resolutions against the scheme. At the Baptist chapel the pastor took the bold step (some would call it impudent) of inviting all the congregation who were against Sunday trams to rise from their seats. Only one person remained seated—and he deserves a medal for his courage. There might have been a larger minority if the vote had been taken by ballot.

Humanitarianism had to trust chiefly to religious heretics at one time, but the case is somewhat altered now, and we are glad to see more orthodox people crowding into the movement. But why on earth do they carry their religious *blague* with them? Can't they leave off talking shop in non-business hours? At the recent annual meeting of the London Anti-Vivisection Society, a letter was read from the Countess of Munster with "Christians" and "the Bible" all over it. Mr. Jerome K. Jerome's letter spoke of "the duty of every God-fearing man." Mrs. Ormiston Chant wrote "God bless the meeting." And so the Christians, Bibliolators, and Godites blew their little pious trumpets to the

end of the chapter. It is this perpetual intrusion of their personal specialities by religious people that makes it so difficult for Freethinkers to have any sort of co-operation with them. How would *they* like it if a Freethinker got up and said that he attacked vivisection in the name of Atheism, and that he hoped every unbeliever in God would oppose it with all his might? Would they not think it was shocking bad taste? Would not many of them get up in disgust and leave the platform and the meeting?

Lady Henry Somerset as a well-intentioned reformer has our respect. Lady Henry Somerset as a theologian excites our laughter. In her farewell address to the British Women's Temperance Association, which we are sorry to hear she has to leave on account of broken health, she said that "In the long run the Temperance cause was bound to win, because it was God's cause, but it was an illusion to say that the position of Temperance ranked as forward as ten years ago." There is something very comical about this. God's cause—the cause of Omnipotence guided by Omniscience—making no progress, but steadily declining! Besides, if the Almighty can't push the Temperance cause along, what chance have Lady Henry Somerset and her friends?

One reason why the Temperance cause doesn't go forward, but rather backward, is the folly of its friends. When they were fewer they had to trust to mental and moral persuasion, and they made rapid headway. When they became numerous they grew arrogant and took to hectoring. They conceived the idea of driving their fellow citizens instead of leading them. They dropped mental and moral persuasion and tried social and political coercion. Had they not better turn back again to persuasion? They would do so at once if they understood human nature; and, instead of fanatics, they would become reformers.

Mr. A. G. Hales, the Australian war correspondent, did "Epsom on Derby Day" for the *Daily News*. He was terribly disenchanted. Apparently he expected to find something better in a Christian country, but that only shows the verdant side of his intelligence. His concluding remarks are as follows:—"And after the racing what a sight is that 'twixt the Downs and London. All along the line of march men—and women, too—drunken, foul-mouthed, inane! If that be sport, my masters, then let us have done with it. We are always sending missionaries out to far off lands to convert the heathen and improve the moral tone of others, but God help us if this is a sample of our higher civilisation, for to my mind it turned the fairness of the summer foul. All the way back men shouted curses, aye, and things worse than curses; women shrieked filthy sayings at one another, girls made evil gestures, lads who ought to have been upon a training ship putrified the air with blackguardisms; and it was a mercy when the mantle of the night hid their drunken faces from view. And such is a Derby Day!"

The Rev. George Martin, the market porters' parson—the same gentleman, we believe, as the one who contemplated blowing up some church stands on Coronation Day—got into trouble again on Epsom Downs for attempting to abolish a bookmaker's stand. It was not betting that made him wild, but "a Maltese cross" over the stand, which he tried to pull down, as it was "an insult to the Divine Master." According to the constable, the Maltese cross was simply a Union Jack; and the clerical Don Quixote was ordered to be kept in custody—for his own safety—until Epsom week was over.

The *Daily Telegraph*, in a review of Mr. W. S. Lilly's *Christianity and Modern Civilisation*, confesses that "Persecution was not limited to Catholics. Every Church that ever wielded or controlled secular power has persecuted." It also admits that "the principle of toleration is essentially modern, and to some extent the outcome of religious scepticism and indifference." With regard to Mr. Lilly's apology for the misdeeds of the Catholic Church, our contemporary is of opinion that "to a crowd of Socialists, sceptics, agnostics, and atheists, he has provided an armory of weapons with which to assail Christianity." This is scarcely true, however; for every weapon in Mr. Lilly's armory is well known outside it. The hideous persecutions in the name of Christ are the commonplaces of mediæval and modern history.

Peculiar People are being prosecuted again in East London for trusting to prayer in cases of sickness, as the New Testament directs. The Bishop of Stepney, on the other hand, unveils a memorial window in St. Benet's Church, Mile-end, to the Rev. Thomas Richardson, the founder of the Bible and Prayer Reading Union, whose object was to "make the study of the Bible effective on the lives of the people." What a land of hypocrisy this is, to be sure!

The late Rev. Hugh Price Hughes travelled abroad in search of health and tried to live as long as he could. Yet in his will he said that to a Christian "to die is gain." He desired that his tombstone should be inscribed with the words, "Thou, O Christ, art all I want." Which looks very much like making a virtue of necessity.

"The poverty of the people of India is attributed in a large measure by Mr. Holloway, of the Church Missionary Society, who is stationed in the Central Provinces, to the Brahmin priest. 'In the villages and towns,' he says, 'among those people who are the backbone and sinews of India, i.e., the industrious tradesmen and farmers, they teach that offerings must be given to the village priest to insure blessing and salvation; and he must be paid for every verse of their religious books that he reads or recites to them, the meaning of which he never explains. From Benares, Allahabad, Puri—cities famous for some notable shrine—agents are sent by the priests to every town and larger village in India to induce the people, by deceit and lies, to go on pilgrimage. When they have gathered a few pilgrims together, they take them by train to their master, who, under cover of religion, fleeces them of all their hard-earned savings of years. Sometimes they do not leave them enough to pay their train fare home, and many, trying to reach their homes on foot, die on the roadside. In this way hundreds of families are made paupers. We have known a young man to rob his parents of all their savings of years and leave them penniless in their old age, in order to go on pilgrimage to Puri to worship the idol Jagganath. So deluded are others, that they borrow money for offerings, the interest of which soon absorbs house, land, and cattle.'"—*St. James's Gazette*.

You may be quite right, Mr. Holloway. We dare say the priests are charlatans and bloodsuckers in India. But are they different anywhere else? We have myriads of the fraternity here, living on the fat of the land, and absorbing every year some twenty millions of the people's earnings. Why trouble so much about India? Why not begin the reformation here?

What is a rationalist? Some of the people who use the word should define it. The *Daily News* actually calls Jonathan Edwards a rationalist. The first American divine had great natural powers of mind, but he was a Calvinist, who tried to prove that God's eternal love was quite consistent with the everlasting torture of his creatures. He seems to have contemplated without blenching the pious picture of children and babes burning in hell. Yet he is now called a rationalist! Surely if the term can be applied to Jonathan Edwards, the self-called Rationalists should hasten to abandon it.

Lions have carried off dozens of employees on the Uganda Railway. What a picture of the wisdom and goodness of "Providence" is a lion dining off a man! Such economy! Such adjustment of means to ends! And such tender beneficence to human creatures!

"Providence" has been active in Kansas and Missouri. Hundreds of people, perhaps thousands, have perished by the floods. Many persons gathered in a Baptist church at North Topeka, and stood on the pews to keep their heads above water. Several fell exhausted during the night and were drowned. The fact of their being in one of God's houses added nothing to their chance of surviving.

"Providence" has also been active in Asia Minor, where 860 people have been killed by an earthquake. "He doeth all things well."

When the young curate in the old story was told by his vicar that he would have to take the seven in the morning service, he replied that he was afraid he would not be able to sit up so long. He could manage three or four o'clock, but seven o'clock was really too much for him. Canon Allen Edwards, vicar of All Saints', South Lambeth, takes an earlier service than that. It is at 5.30, but it only comes once a week—on Thursdays. We understand it is for the benefit of such workmen as feel they have souls to be saved.

"Anon." writes to the *Manchester City News* concerning the last days, or last hours, of George Julian Harney, the "last of the Chartist leaders." An editorial statement is appended to "Anon.'s" letter: "It is perhaps necessary to say that the writer of the above Note is a clergyman." There is no "perhaps" about it. The necessity was quite certain. For this clergyman half suggests that he converted Harney on his death-bed. He says he heard the dying Freethinker—for such Harney was—muttering something at the

very last, and he caught the words "pray, pray." Whereupon he, the nurse, and Mrs. Harney knelt down and complied with the dying man's wishes. For our part, however, we are bound to say that we do not believe a word of the story. We have heard so many similar ones, and all lies, that we have our doubts about fresh specimens. We will try to inquire into this story, though it may be difficult to get at the actual facts after the lapse of several years.

We have received a copy of a monthly paper called *Streams of Gladness*, which is religious and not very jovial. We see that it calls Voltaire a "miserable wretch" and the late John Kensit "the first martyr of the twentieth century." It also states, we know not on what authority, that "there will be lots of higher critics in hell." Curiously, however, it calls M. Combes, the French Premier, a "true patriot" and a "noble man." Evidently it does not know that M. Combes is a Voltairian.

Frederick James Carter, of Ilford, who has just been ordered to pay £200 damages for the seduction of Eva Tooth, aged sixteen, was a man of religious profession and connected with the local Congregational chapel. He taught her to play on the piano and the chapel organ. He also undertook her tuition in other matters. The result was an undesirable increase in the local population.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has been discussing an overture from Dr. Story, to the effect that the famous Confession of Faith be no longer regarded as "an infallible creed imposed upon the conscience of men, but as a system of doctrine valid only in so far as it accords with Holy Scripture, interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." The last qualification is a very canny one; it provides for all contingencies, by reserving to the Church of Scotland the same right that is claimed for the Pope—namely, of deciding what is, and what is not, the Holy Spirit's interpretation of the Holy Scripture. Short of giving up that mystic but valuable right, it is evident that something must be done, even in Scotland. Dr. Story sees that young men of any capacity shrink from subscribing the old Confession of Faith; and, as they must be caught somehow, unless the Church pulpits are to be filled with idiots, it is necessary to slacken the terms of subscription, so that the Confession of Faith may be understood in a Pickwickian sense. Some opposition was offered, of course, and Dr. Scott moved a long and subtle amendment, which was accepted by Dr. Story as better than his own overture, since it would achieve the same object in a more circumlocutory manner. We daresay the augurs smiled at each other at the end of the meeting.

The *Daily Telegraph* reports that the Trappist Fathers, from Cherbourg, have bought an estate of some 600 acres at the village of Martin, near Fordingbridge, Wiltshire, on which a large monastery is to be erected, in which about forty monks will reside. This report was immediately followed by an advertisement of "Pepsalia" as "a powerful means of aiding digestion." The juxtaposition was, we dare say, undesigned; nevertheless, it is commonly believed that a lot of monks need "Pepsalia." They boast many good trenchermen in their ranks.

Mr. Balfour let the cat out of the bag with a vengeance in his recent speech at the Grosvenor House meeting in furtherance of the Bishop of London's scheme for the provision of churches in "London over the Border." "Our unfortunate divisions," he said, "and they alone, make it impossible that out of public funds of any kind you should erect churches or chapels connected with denominational religion." According to Mr. Balfour's principles, therefore, it would be perfectly right to take the money of Jews and Freethinkers and use it for building Christian places of worship—if only the Christians could agree as to how the money should be allotted. We thank Mr. Balfour for this lesson. It enables us to understand him.

The Secretary of the Freethought Publishing Company is summoned for 1s. 11d. due for tithe to the parish parson, and 2s. for the cost of intimating that the said 1s. 11d. will have to be paid. This good old plan of Church thieving is the one that Mr. Balfour would make universal—only there are certain difficulties in the way.

Miss Vance will, of course, object on behalf of the Freethought Publishing Company to the payment of that 1s. 11d. towards maintaining the religion which the Company wishes to destroy. We do not know what the magistrates will say, but we know what we should say to the parson if we had him face to face.

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

(All Engagements suspended for the present.)

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.
- W. MANN.—Lea's *Superstition and Force* deals largely with Ordeals. We believe it is not published outside America, but second-hand copies can be obtained occasionally. Our own copy was obtained in that way. The book is certainly worth possessing.
- N. DEXBURY.—Too late for this number, owing to the holidays. Shall appear in our next.
- T. RICH.—We hope so too.
- J. LLOYD.—Thanks for your subscription to the Cohen Fund. The Conference, as you surmise, meant a good deal of work for the President, who took the precaution of preparing for it as far as possible by spending most of Saturday in the open air.
- F. S. EDWARDS.—See "Acid Drops."
- F. J. H. sends cheque and best wishes for the success of the Cohen Fund.
- J. STOCKS.—Glad to hear that "the plucky stand made by the *Freethinker* against religion and savagery" compels your admiration.
- F. S.—Many thanks for the cutting. See paragraph. We will try to inquire into the matter.
- FRANK ROSS.—See paragraph. Always glad to receive useful cuttings.
- A. T. WARBIS.—Will try to find room for your letter next week.
- HACKNEY SAINT.—Not without merit, but hardly up to our standard in point of composition.
- W. P. BALL.—Always pleased to receive your well-selected, useful cuttings.
- THE COHEN PRESENTATION.—Acknowledgments (second list): E. M. Vance 10s., James Neate £1, Mrs. Neate £1, A. Button 2s. 6d., Frederick D. 10s., John D. 5s., J. Pizer 3s., C. Pizer 3s., H. Silverstein 5s., W. H. Morrish £1 1s., G. W. Harvey 1s., J. Stocks 2s. 6d., F. J. H. £1, John Lloyd 10s., J. W. G., 2s. 6d., F. Rich 2s. 6d., C. J. Blackburn 4s., R. H. Side, 10s., E. Painter, £2 2s., W. P. Ball £1, G. Newman 5s. *Per V. Roger* (treasurer): J. A. Fallows, M.A. 10s., W. J. Gott 2s. 6d., John Bland 5s., A Friend 2s. 6d., Mr. and Mrs. Crozier 5s., E. Wharrier, 2s. 6d., J. Richardson, 5s., T. H. Elstob 2s. 6d., W. Kay 2s. 6d., F. A. Davies, 5s. Total to date £28 0s. 6d.
- W. H. MORRISH writes:—"I am very pleased to see there is to be a Presentation to Mr. Cohen. I think most of your readers must have been pleased with his clever, interesting, and scholarly articles, and his hard work for the cause is fully deserving of recognition." Our veteran friend also hopes our own health is improving.
- T. ROBERTSON.—We hope the Glasgow "saints" will have a good day at Greenock and the neighborhood.
- G. DIXON.—Very sorry to hear you were too unwell, after all, to attend the Conference. You will be pleased to read that the gathering was a success. Thanks for your personal inquiries. The improved weather is helping us generally, but the insomnia still lingers, and is sometimes very distressing. We shall try to get away from London as soon as possible. Unlimited fresh air is our best medicine.
- JAMES NEATE writes:—"Herewith I enclose the first list of the Bethnal Green Branch towards the Cohen Presentation (£3 8s. 6d.). We sincerely hope there will be a good response to your appeal. During the past eleven years Mr. Cohen has proved himself an able and willing defender of the Secular cause, much to the discomfort of his opponents. I have had the honor of fighting side by side with him in many stormy battles, and I do not hesitate to say that many men would have given way, but Mr. Cohen proved he was made of better stuff. I have been in almost daily touch with him during those eleven years, and have had special opportunities of learning his sterling worth."
- G. NEWMAN.—See acknowledgment. Poor subscribers often wish they could give more. The wish is creditable to them, anyhow.
- THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., where all letters should be addressed to Miss Vance.
- THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
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Sugar Plums.

Owing to the demand made upon Mr. Foote's time and energies by the National Secular Society's Annual Conference, which took place on Sunday at South Shields, the editorial department of this week's *Freethinker* has naturally suffered. It is felt, however, that the readers' indulgence may be counted upon in such circumstances.

Mr. Foote's letter to the *Daily News* on the Education Struggle, referred to in our last issue as having been excluded, was inserted on the following Thursday morning, the day after we went to press. By that time the Hyde Park demonstration had been held, and the London Education Bill had passed through committee in the House of Commons. Mr. Foote addressed the following (second) letter to the *Daily News* on its scandalous treatment of his first:—

May 28, 1903.

To the Editor of the "Daily News."

SIR,—I send you herewith a marked copy of the *Freethinker*, dated for next Sunday, but published yesterday afternoon, and in general distribution this morning.

You will see that I have reflected on the non-insertion of the letter I sent you (by hand) on May 22.

You have inserted my letter this morning, but what I have written and printed on the matter shall stand. A glance at the dates of the letters you have inserted (all on one side) during the past week, and at the date of mine, is sufficient to show an intentional delay which is either wretchedly mean or deliberately insulting.

For the sake of fairness and accuracy I will print *this* letter in the next issue of my journal.—Yours, etc., G. W. FOOTE.

The *Yarmouth Mercury* prints a long and excellent letter from the pen of Mr. J. W. de Caux on "From What do I need to be Saved?" Such a bright and incisive piece of writing, in a newspaper circulated amongst all classes of society and persons of all varieties of opinion, must be of great service to the Freethought cause.

The Bethnal Green Branch starts its Sunday evening meetings in Victoria Park to-day (June 7). Mr. Cohen will occupy the platform on this occasion as well as in the afternoon.

The Glasgow Branch holds its Annual Picnic to-day (June 7). The party goes to Greenock by the train leaving St. Enoch's Station at 9.15. Tickets can be had from Mr. E. Baxter, 126 Trongate, or from members of the committee at the station. Friends must bring their own provisions, as tea only will be provided.

The Secular Society, Limited, will shortly receive two bequests from recently deceased Freethinkers, that should amount together to more than £1,000. Full particulars will be published in due course.

Last year's N. S. S. Conference, held in London, was absolutely boycotted by the metropolitan press. Fortunately there is a little more liberality in most provincial towns. Moderate and fair reports of the Shields Conference appeared in the *Newcastle Journal*, *Chronicle*, and *Leader*, the last being, perhaps naturally, the most generous. A still larger and more sympathetic report appeared in the *Shields Daily Gazette*. The President's announcement with respect to recent legacies to the Secular Society, Limited, was included in all the reports, although the name of the recipient Society was not given correctly.

At University College, London, large audiences of accomplished people assemble week by week to consider the elementary evidences of the Christian religion. At the meeting on Thursday evening, those who spoke from the point of view of the Agnostic or of the Materialist met with a volume of support from no small portion of the students present. One of their number, indeed, declared that his conviction is that the majority of the students of University College are Agnostics. Thursday night's lecture was delivered by the Rev. G. T. Manloy, a former Senior Wrangler, and now an agent of the Church Missionary Society in the North-West Province of India. The chairman was Mr. Augustine Birrell. A lady student made an elegant speech from the Agnostic side, and won very loud applause from her fellow-students.—*The Mail* (Dublin).

Light on the Old Testament.

"That which we read in the first chapters of *Genesis* is not an account dictated by God Himself, the possession of which was the exclusive privilege of the chosen people. It is a tradition whose origin is lost in the night of the remotest ages, and which all the greatest nations of Western Asia possessed in common, with some variations. The very form given it in the Bible is so closely related to that which has been lately discovered in Babylon and Chaldea, it follows so exactly the same course, that it is quite impossible for me to doubt any longer that it has the same origin."—PROFESSOR FRANCOIS LENORMANT, *Beginnings of History*, Preface, p. xv.

".....the prophetic schools.....adopted a number of elements from the native religion, and brought them into harmony with its spirit and requirements. This appears especially in the cosmogony, the narratives of Paradise, of the Deluge, and others, the myth of Samson, the legend of the patriarch Jacob-Israel—particularly in that of his quarrel with his brother Esau, who plays a similar part in Phenician mythology, and is also named in the Assyrian inscriptions—and more of the same kind."—PROFESSOR C. P. TIELE, *Outlines of the History of Religion*, p. 87.

THE Holy Book fares no better under the apologetic hands of Mr. Theophilus G. Pinches than at those of Professor Sayce, although he ignores or glosses over most of the difficulties of his subject.

At the very commencement he gives up the whole case for the inspiration of the Bible by saying that "we are not bound to accept the opinion so generally held by theologians, that the days of creation referred to in *Genesis* i. probably indicate that each act of creation—each day—was revealed in seven successive dreams, in order, to the inspired writer of the book. The opinion held by other theologians, that 'inspiration' simply means that the writer was moved by the Spirit of God to choose from documents already existing such portions as would serve for our enlightenment and instruction, adding, at the same time, such additions of his own as he was led to think to be needful, may be held to be a satisfactory definition of the term in question. Without, therefore, binding ourselves down to any hard and fast line as to date, we may regard, for the purposes of this inquiry, the Hebrew account of the Creation as one of the traditions handed down in the thought of many minds extending over many centuries, and as having been chosen and elaborated by the inspired writer of *Genesis* for the purpose of his narrative, the object of which was to set forth the origin of man and the Hebrew nation, to which he belonged, and whose history he was about to narrate in detail."

Which, in plain English, means that God Almighty inspired somebody unknown—for it will be noticed that Mr. Pinches ignores Moses altogether in this matter—to choose from mythological and unscientific heathen traditions, to which he added "at the same time such additions of his own as he was led to think needful"—the needful in this case being, among other things, the glorification of the Hebrew nation above all others.

To the unsophisticated intelligence it would appear that any ordinary uninspired man could have managed the affair equally well, especially as the inspired account is in flat contradiction with demonstrated scientific facts. In the words of Professor Huxley:—

"It is sometimes said that, had the statements contained in the first chapter of *Genesis* been scientifically true, they would have been unintelligible to ignorant people; but how is the matter mended if, being scientifically untrue, they must needs be rejected by instructed people."†

Of the "Babylonian Creation-story" and the account in *Genesis* Dr. Pinches says: "The parallelism is sufficiently close to be noteworthy, and to show beyond a doubt that the Babylonians had the same accounts of the Creation and descriptions of the circumstances concerning it as the Hebrews, though told in a different way and in a different connection" (p. 73). In another inscription we learn "There is hardly any doubt, then, that we have here

the long-sought parallel to the Biblical 'tree of knowledge'" (p. 77). Of the temptation of Adam and Eve, we are told: "The possibility that the Babylonians had an account of the Fall similar to that of the Hebrews is not only suggested by the legends treated of above, but also by the cylinder-seal in the British Museum, with what seems to be the representation of the Temptation engraved upon it" (p. 79).

The account of the building of Babel and the confusion of tongues is abandoned as hopelessly past defence. Our apologist regrets that—

"With the best will in the world, therefore, there seems to be no escape from regarding both the story of the Tower of Babel and the reference to Nimrod and Asshur in the foregoing chapter as interpolations, giving statements from ancient and possibly fairly well-known records, recording what was commonly believed in the ancient East in those early ages. It is also noteworthy that both extracts, referring as they do to Babylonia, are probably on that account from a Babylonian source. May it not be possible that they have been inserted in the sacred narrative as statements of what was the common opinion among the more well-informed inhabitants of Western Asia at the time, without any claim to an inspired authority being either stated or implied?In any case, there is great improbability that the statement that the whole earth was of one language and of one speech was ever believed by thinking men at the time as an actual historical fact" (pp. 132-3).

This is the very best that Dr. Pinches can do for his clients, and we can imagine them asking, "Call you this backing up your friends? The least that the S. P. C. K. could have expected from him, would have been to bring out the venerable old argument which has covered the retreat on so many similar occasions—viz., the mysteriousness of the working of Providence, and that God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. And that, if the Bible had only contained ordinary common sense and decency, it would not be God's book.

Dr. Pinches has a chapter dealing with the Exodus, in which occurs the following amazing passage:—

"As the historical nature of the Exodus has not as yet been absolutely disproved, it is here taken to be a matter of history; and, this being the case, it is necessary to try to identify, or rather to state, what are the most probable opinions as to the rulers of Egypt at the time of the Oppression and the Exodus" (p. 269).

In other words, he means: "The fable of the Exodus is nearly played out. I cannot identify the Pharaoh of the Oppression, but I know a man who pretends he can—you can believe him if you like—for my own part, I am not going to commit myself in the matter." The learned Doctor has, of course, good reason for his caution; if we had never doubted the Exodus from Egypt before reading this chapter, we should feel irresistibly convinced that it is a romance after reading it.

Dr. Pinches—we will not say adopts—presents to his readers the theory of Dr. Mahler, who calculates that the exodus took place on *Thursday, 27th of March, 1335, B.C.*, which reminds one of the famous and equally valuable discovery of Dr. John Lightfoot, as the result of a most profound and exhaustive study of the Scriptures, that "heaven and earth, centre and circumference, were created all together, in the same instant, and, clouds full of water," and that "this work took place and man was created by the Trinity on October 23, 4004 B.C., at nine o'clock in the morning."

It is admitted by all Egyptologist that no record has been discovered among all the thousands of inscriptions deciphered from the monuments of Egypt, recording the bondage and escape of the Israelites. In fact, no mention of Israel could be found until in 1896 Petrie found a monolith describing the conquest of Canaan. The concluding lines of which run:—

"Kheta (the land of the Hittites) is in peace, captive is Canaan and full of misery, Askalon is carried away, Grezer is taken, Yennuamma is non-existent, Israel is lost, his seed is not, Syria is like the widows of Egypt. The totality of all the lands is at peace, for whoever rebelled was chastened by King Menepthah."

* *The Old Testament in the Light of the Historical Records of Assyria and Babylonia*. By T. G. Pinches. pp. 10, 11. S.P.C.K. 1902.

† *Science and Hebrew Tradition*, p. 132. Macmillan. 1901.

* *White, Warfare of Science*, vol. i., p. 9. 1896.

Dr. Pinches says that Naville—as we have noticed, the Doctor never advances his own opinion in the matter—holds that “Israel is lost” refers to the Israelites having left Egypt and, wandering, lost in the desert. But, on turning to the translation made by Mr. Petrie, a surprise awaits us; for, instead of reading Israel “is lost,” we read, Israel “is spoiled,” and we cannot avoid the suspicion that Naville has manipulated the translation to meet the case. In any case, Dr. Pinches should have told his readers that the discoverer of the inscription translated it differently, and given his readers both versions. However, Naville’s theory is quite worthless, for, as Mr. Petrie pointed out, the placing of Israel between the other conquered places, and the conclusion that Syria is widowed, “strongly shows that the Israel here referred to were already in Syria, and it would be hardly possible that, after reciting the Syrian towns, he should turn to a Syrian people in captivity in Egypt, and then conclude with naming Syria as a whole.”*

Naville’s theory, while professing to solve the difficulty, only creates a greater one. For, according to the Bible, when the Israelites escaped from Egypt into the desert, they left Pharaoh and the Egyptian army lying comfortably at the bottom of the Red Sea; but, according to this inscription, we find them very much alive again, and in fine fettle, carrying everything before them, and occupying the very country to which the Israelites are stated to have fled!

Perhaps, however, they were like the Egyptian cattle destroyed by the plagues of Moses, which, after being *all* destroyed three times, appeared to be none the worse, for the Egyptian army found plenty of horses to pursue the Israelites with.

The most amusing part, however, remains to be told. For Dr. Pinches gravely tells us that “Dr. Mahler clinches the matter by making the plague of Darkness to have been a solar eclipse.” We take down our well worn “Holy Bible, book divine,” and turning to the tenth chapter of Exodus, we find that this plague of darkness was not of the common or garden kind; it was a “darkness which may be felt,” and “there was a darkness in all the land of Egypt three days,” and, to crown all, “the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.” This eclipse beats all records. It was a tangible material darkness. Like old port, it had a body in it. It was distributed in patches, and Egypt must have had the appearance of a draught-board while it lasted; or it might be described as a study in black and white. To “clinch” the matter, the earth and the moon must have stood still for three days to have caused this mighty eclipse. Dr. Mahler has indeed clinched the matter.

The Higher Critics have always assured us that the books of Moses stand far above the ancient records in their morality and piety; but Dr. Pinches carefully destroys this idea. He says:—

“To judge from the inscriptions of the Babylonians and Assyrians, one would say that there were not upon the earth more pious nations than they. They went constantly in fear of their gods, and rendered to them the glory for everything that they succeeded in bringing to a successful conclusion. Prayer, supplication, and self-debasement before their gods seem to have been their delight..... Many a penitential psalm and hymn of praise exists to testify to the piety of the ancient nations of Assyria and Babylonia. Moreover, this piety was, to all appearance, practical, calling forth not only self-denying offerings and sacrifices, but also, as we shall see farther on, lofty ideas and expressions of the highest religious feeling” (pp. 50-51.)

Dr. Pinches translates some of these inscriptions; one of which, he points out, “almost re-echoes the words of the psalmist” (pp. 52-3).

We hope that the S. P. C. K. will publish some more apologies for the Bible; they will carry rationalism into quarters inaccessible to secular propaganda.

W. MANN.

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference.

THE Annual Conference of the National Secular Society took place on Sunday (May 31) at South Shields. The local Branch of the Society made the arrangements so thoroughly beforehand that everything passed off without a single hitch. Special credit is due to Mr. S. M. Peacock, the Branch president, to E. Chapman, the secretary, and to R. Chapman, his brother, who only recently retired from that post after filling it for many years.

The large and handsome Royal Assembly Hall had been secured for the Conference meetings. There was a reception room on the ground floor; a fine minor hall upstairs, capable of seating some two hundred persons, in which the Conference itself was held; and the grand principal hall, capable of seating some two thousand persons, in which the usual public meeting was held in the evening.

Some delegates and visitors from a distance arrived at South Shields on Friday. Members of the local committee met all trains on Saturday, and took delegates and visitors to suitable hotels or lodgings. By the end of the day there was a good muster from various parts of Great Britain.

Precisely at half-past ten on Sunday morning, the President, Mr. G. W. Foote, took the chair, and called the Conference to business by knocking the table with the historical hammer which Charles Bradlaugh had wielded before him, and which had been wielded before that, in the stormier old days, by Watson and Carlile—the last of whom spent no less than nine years and seven months in English gaols for defying the laws against the free publication of opinion on matters of religion.

The following Branches were represented:—South Shields—S. M. Peacock, John Hannan; Camberwell—F. A. Davies, F. Cottrell; Bradford—W. Kay, J. W. Gott; East London—C. Cohen; Manchester—C. Pegg, M. E. Pegg; Birmingham—C. Mason—R. B. Ensell; Glasgow—John A. Allan; Bethnal Green—C. Cohen; Finsbury—T. Thurlow; Edinburgh—John F. Dewar, W. D. Macgregor; West Ham—Henry Spence; Newcastle—J. G. Bartram, T. H. Elstob. Several Branches were unable to send delegates owing to their financial position being affected by the long unfavorable period consequent on the South African war and the general state of reaction accompanying and following it. Next year will doubtless see a great improvement in this respect.

In addition to some members of the South Shields Branch, there were many members and friends of the N. S. S. (not delegates) who attended the Conference. The following are some of the better-known names:—Mr. Greeves Fisher (Leeds), John Sanderson (Jarrow), G. Thwaites (Stockton-on-Tees), John Hume (Willington), W. Gillespie (Newcastle), R. H. Warriar (Bedlington), Victor Roger (London), R. Robinson (Chester-le-Street), Martin Weatherburn (Cramlington), Dr. R. T. Nichols (Ilford), Mr. and Mrs. Johnston (Tanfield Lea), A. and J. W. White (West Stanley), Miss Mary Black (Glasgow), Mrs. Cohen (London), J. G. Crozier (Sunderland), Malfew Secklew (Nottingham), H. Percy Ward (Liverpool), M. Christopher (Wolverhampton), R. W. Dowding (Leyton), Thomas Robertson (Glasgow), W. Robson (Cramlington), Mr. and Mrs. Howson (Newcastle), J. Richardson (Blaydon), J. Stitt (Spennymoor), Mr. MacLean (Dundee). Last, but not least, there was the N. S. S. secretary, Miss Edith M. Vance.

The minutes of the last Conference having been taken as read, the President introduced the Annual Report, which ran as follows:—

THE ANNUAL REPORT.

THE Executive’s annual report will not be a long one on this occasion. The past year has not been filled with striking events; partly owing to the lull in all advanced movements in consequence of the South African War, partly to the reaction from which the whole country has been suffering, and partly to the absorption of the public mind in the great Education struggle, in which the Anglican and Non-conformist Churches are contesting the mastery of the minds of the children of England. Nevertheless, the work of the Society has been carried on quietly, and not without a considerable measure of success.

It must be remembered that the work included in the Executive’s report does not at any time include the whole work of the Society in Great Britain. The various Branches up and down the country are strictly autonomous; having their own constitutions, doing their own local work, raising and expending their own local funds, and issuing their own balance sheets. The work, and the income and expenditure, of the Executive only represent a certain collective activity. At one time, indeed, an effort was made to present a general view of the Society’s operations and finances; but this was found so difficult as to be practically impossible, and the idea was entirely dropped.

* *Contemporary Review*, May, 1896.

It may be noticed that the balance-sheet shows an increase in members' subscriptions. Few Branches, however, have made the collection required by the Society's rules on behalf of the General Fund. Manchester, as usual, is easily first in the list. The most important item remaining on the credit side is the £40 8s. 6d. raised for the Society by the editor of the *Freethinker*. Another sum of over £50 was raised through the same medium for the assistance of the Camberwell Branch, which was in temporary financial difficulty for the first time in nearly twenty years. This item does not, of course, appear in the Executive's balance-sheet, but it should be mentioned in the annual report.

The Almanack account shows a deficit almost similar to last year's. The case would probably have been worse if this publication had not been changed in character and raised in price. There is reason to believe that, on the new lines, it will be more successful; but next year's number of what is now the *Secular Annual* will afford grounds for a more certain judgment.

The sum mentioned in the balance-sheet as a donation to the International Federation of Freethinkers represents a vote on account of the expenses of the International Congress at Geneva, at which the Society was represented by Mr. W. Heaford. The Congress appears to have been a striking success, and another Congress is to be held in 1904 at Rome. M. Léon Furnémont, the Brussels editor of *La Raison*, and a member of the Belgian parliament, has recently been in London with a view to starting an English Committee, similar to those forming in other countries, so that a general effort may be made to render next year's Congress supremely successful. Your President and Mr. Cohen have already joined this English Committee, and the Executive has appointed additional representatives, who will probably be admitted in due course. But it is felt that this is not sufficient. The National Secular Society, as the historic national organisation of Freethought in this country, while co-operating as far as may be with others, should not sink its identity in any Committee, but arrange for an independent representation of itself at the forthcoming International Congress.

The balance-sheet also shows an expense incurred in connection with the Annual Dinner, which was held in January at the Holborn Restaurant, and was numerously attended. It is possible that provincial members may imagine that this matter does not concern them. But this is a parish view of affairs. London is not merely an English city; it is also a great cosmopolitan centre, and some events in it are of more than local importance. There would be no difficulty in proving the value of this annual dinner, and if this were the time and place it would be easy to show what financial advantage has accrued from it indirectly. It might be added that the religious bodies all see the wisdom of special expenditure in London, and Secularists need not be ashamed to profit by the experience of their adversaries.

No expenditure is shown in this year's balance-sheet on the open-air propaganda in London. Owing to a temporary want of funds, the Executive was unable to repeat the previous year's experiment in centralisation. Still, the outdoor work was carried on throughout the summer by the London Branches on their own responsibility. Some stations, of course, had to suffer; but in other cases the Branches are strong enough to undertake the burden themselves.

The West-London Branch has been reorganised, in order to purge it of some undesirable elements. A new Branch has been formed at Kingsland. Application was made last summer for leave to form a Branch at Bradford, but the Executive hesitated to give it, as it appeared that the Branch would carry on its work at a Club, and experience is dead against the association of our movement with such institutions. Since then, however, the danger alluded to has disappeared, and leave has been given for the formation of a new Bradford Branch, which it is hoped will do good work in the town and district.

On the general subject of Branches and revenue, the Executive points to the Conference Agenda, where the adopted proposals of its sub-committee will be found. Those proposals will be discussed by the Conference, and there is no desire to anticipate the result. What is certain is that something will have to be done. The old Branch system lost sight of the fact that this is a purely voluntary Society. Nothing can be exacted from members, for there are no benefits to be withheld. The Executive is therefore of opinion that the voluntary principle should not be obscured, but brought into greater prominence; and this is involved in the proposals on the Agenda.

During the past year the Society has lost a valued vice-president in Mr. G. J. Warren. Mr. Warren has long been very busy in local politics and social affairs, and the respect and confidence of his fellow-citizens have made him busier than ever. Several times he had sent in his resignation to the Executive, on the ground that he could so rarely attend its meetings. Each time he was induced to reconsider the matter. But he now finds it quite impossible to give any

attention to the Society's business, and as he hates being a dummy member of a business committee he has determined to retire. The Executive had no alternative but to accept his resignation with profound regret and sincere thanks for his past services.

Unfortunately the Society has suffered a sadder loss in the death of Mr. Donald Black, a member of the active, enterprising, and prosperous Glasgow Branch. Mr. Black had been one of the Society's vice-presidents for only a few years, but he was one of those sincere, warm-hearted men who soon seem old acquaintances. Secularism never had a more earnest supporter. His loss will, of course, be felt most by his wife and family, to whom he was devotedly attached, and who were devotedly attached to him; but all who knew him with any intimacy will long feel the void caused by the absence of one so kind, so loyal, and so winningly impulsive.

There has also been a certain sifting during the past year, and in the process the Society has parted with some very doubtful friends. It will probably be found that this is by no means a cause for lamentation. Harmony and mutual confidence are absolutely necessary to successful co-operation. A smaller force working with these will be more effective than a larger force without them. Moreover, it will be recollected that the President has again and again warned the Society that attempts to break it up would be renewed. There are special reasons for hating a militant body like the National Secular Society and wishing it out of the way. But without expatiating upon this unpleasant topic, it should be said that the danger has largely passed away for the present, and that the friends of the Society may look forward to a happier prospect in the immediate future.

One of the younger vice-presidents has been winning golden opinions as a Freethought advocate, and respect by his steady loyalty to the Society. It was doubtless for this reason that one of the Branches started the project of a testimonial to Mr. C. Cohen. That project is now in the hands of the Executive, and it is hoped that the appeal already made to the Secular party will elicit a prompt and generous response.

Reference has been made already to the great struggle over national Education. The Church and Chapel parties have so filled the arena, and made such a tremendous noise, that it has been very difficult for the party of Secular Education to be seen or heard. The Executive resolved to issue a Manifesto on the question. This was drawn up by Mr. Cohen, with a little assistance from the President, and printed and circulated to the extent of 12,000 copies. It puts the case for Secular Education very clearly against the claims of the rival religious parties, and it is supplemented by some valuable quotations from the speeches of Lord Rosebery, Mr. Chamberlain, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Mr. Thomas Burt, and Mr. G. W. E. Russell; as well as an important extract from a letter by the Rev. John Watson, D.D., better known in the literary world as "Ian Maclaren." In addition to the circulation of this Manifesto, the Executive convened a public meeting in favor of Secular Education at the Holborn Town Hall; and, although it was almost absolutely boycotted by the press, some seven hundred people came through the pelting rain to attend it. One of the speakers was the Rev. Stewart D. Headlam, who has always been in favor of Secular Education, although he had to accept the "Compromise" ticket of the London School Board. Mr. Quelch, the editor of *Justice*, was another speaker; and your President and Messrs. Cohen and Davies filled up the rest of the breach. Many supposed friends of Secular Education were unable or unwilling to attend. The truth is the cause was under a cloud, and only its devoted friends rallied to its support.

Unfortunately the press boycott of Secular Education has been almost universal. Even a paper like the *Daily News* has burked many letters, some of them extremely well-written, on the unpopular side. Quite recently it kept a purposely brief letter of your President's back for a week, and then inserted it, as if sarcastically, after the Hyde Park demonstration had taken place, and the London Education Bill had passed through committee in the House of Commons.

History and experience prove, however, that no boycott can be permanently successful. Even the boycott of the great Catholic Church—called excommunication—has been defied and broken down; and minor boycotts need not fill us with despair. We shall make ourselves heard bye-and-bye; and in the meantime it is to be foreseen that the Non-conformists will have to change their tactics, and fall back upon the principle of Secular Education as the only one that will really stand them in their fight against the Church of England. When that day arrives, and it may not be so far distant, England will hear enough of Secular Education; and when the fire is burning throughout the land we shall have our reward for cherishing the sacred flame.

It is usual in closing this report to cast a glance abroad. Regret must be expressed that Mr. Joseph Symes has still a

very uphill struggle at Melbourne; yet it is good to know that, amidst all difficulties and dangers, he keeps the flag of the *Liberator* proudly flying; also that he is again lecturing in the Hall of Science which was filched from him by treacherous trustees. No special news is to hand respecting Mr. W. W. Collins, who is a member of the New Zealand parliament, or of Mr. Wallace Nelson, who has long been working with the Labor party. Freethought organisation is not too strong in America, but there are many Freethought journals in the Eastern and Middle States, some of them apparently with considerable circulation; and *Secular Thought* still subsists at Toronto. Freethought holds its own in Germany in spite of the Kaiser. There are probably millions of Freethinkers in the land of Büchner and Haackel. Freethought in France is at present in power, and is waging through Republican forms a successful war against the sinister power of the Church. Before long the question of abolishing the Concordat—that is, of disestablishing religion altogether—will come decisively to the front. It is already on the way. The leading statesmen in France are Freethinkers, just as the leading Reactionists are Catholics. It is also inspiring to know that M. Victor Charbonnel, an ex-priest, a bold and eloquent advocate of Freethought, and one of the vice-presidents of our own Society, has lately started a daily Freethought paper in Paris, and that it already enjoys a circulation of eighty thousand. There is widespread Freethought in Italy, and Freethought is progressing rapidly with the revolt against the Catholic Church in Spain. Altogether the outlook is reassuring. The friends of Freethought in Great Britain, where it has to meet special difficulties, have only to keep themselves in touch with the rest of the civilised world to feel that the cause of reason and humanity is steadily triumphing over the cause of superstition and barbarity.

A few minor questions were asked, and the Annual Report was then adopted. Miss Vance, the General Secretary, then read the Financial Report, which was also adopted. A fuller report of these and most of the Conference proceedings will appear in next week's *Freethinker*; it being practically impossible to include everything this week.

The election of President for next year was then taken. Mr. Foote being nominated for re-election, vacated the chair in favor of Mr. S. M. Peacock, the president of the local branch. His re-election was proposed by Mr. T. Thurlow, on behalf of the Finsbury Branch, and seconded by Mr. C. Pegg, on behalf of the Manchester Branch. It was carried unanimously, and the President was warmly applauded on resuming the chair.

In acknowledging his re-election, the President said that, while reference had been made to him as a fighting leader, he believed he would be remembered most (if at all) by his bit of constructive work known as the Secular Society, Limited. He had succeeded, in spite of all difficulties and all hostile prophecies, in forming an Incorporation which entirely defeated the disabling effect of the Blasphemy Laws, and afforded complete legal security for receiving, holding, and expending money for Secular purposes. It had cost him much thought and trouble, and some expense; but it was there at last to speak for itself. Of course it could easily be imitated after it was once brought into the light of day. All could grow the flower (as Tennyson said) for all had got the seed. But there was no desire to patent it, even if that were possible. It was intended for the benefit of all advanced causes. There was no longer any question as to its utility and safety. Not a whisper had been heard against any bequest on the part of executors or others. Two members of the Society, recently deceased, had made bequests to it in their wills, and something over £1,000 should be realised. (Loud applause.) This would be indirectly a great advantage to the National Secular Society, to whose welfare the Directors of the Secular Society, Limited, were all favorable. He was proud to know that he had contributed so much to make such a state of things possible. (Cheers.)

Next came the election of Vice-Presidents. The Executive's list of re-elections being accepted, the following were added:—W. Leat (London), F. A. Davies (London), R. Chapman (South Shields), J. G. Bartram (Newcastle-on-Tyne), R. G. Fathers (Birmingham), R. Middleton (North Shields), Dr. R. T. Nichols (Ilford).

The rest of the Conference report stands over till next week.

THE FESTIVITIES.

Between the morning and afternoon sittings of the Conference a first-rate luncheon was provided at the Royal Hotel, and about sixty delegates and visitors from a distance sat down to it. A still larger company sat down to tea at 5 o'clock. It may be added here, though out of chronological order, that excursion parties were organised to Tynemouth and to Marsden Rock on the Monday. We hear that those who went thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

THE EVENING MEETING.

A grand public meeting was held in the evening in the Royal Assembly Hall. Loud cheering broke forth as the President took the chair with speakers on his right and left, and the audience settled down for "a good time," which expectation was apparently not disappointed. Unfortunately the veteran Mr. Martin Weatherburn was not well enough to take his share in the program. Mr. S. M. Peacock, the first speaker, who was afraid he might break down, and told the audience so, delivered a capital address—brief, pointed, and thoroughly effective. Mr. F. A. Davies followed with a capital speech, dealing with the admissions of the Higher Criticism, and was warmly applauded. The President then directed the religious part of the proceedings to be taken in hand, and the result was a good collection. Mr. Cohen followed with an eloquent address, which was listened to with close attention, and cheered enthusiastically at the finish. The "good time" ended with a speech from the President, which kept the big meeting alive from beginning to end, and was freely punctuated with laughter as well as applause. A most successful day closed amidst handshakings and congratulations. All regarded it as a good augury for the Society's new year.

Gaieties.

"In designing his tombstone," said the widow of the late Wall-street broker, "I was thinking of this inscription: 'He did well by his friends.'" "Ah," remarked the man who knew him, "I would suggest, 'He did his friends well.'" —*Philadelphia Press*.

Willis B. Dowd, attorney, tells of a negro preacher he heard in North Carolina, who prefaced the passing of the collection-plate with the statement: "Salvation's free, brethren, salvation's free! It don't cost nothin'! But we have to pay the freight on it. We will now pass aroun' the hat an' collect the freight charges."

PHONETIC.—An uneducated evangelical minister held night services in a chapel formerly used by the Anglican Church. In the hymnal he found a hymn suitable for his sermon, but the number cxix. confused him. He read the stanzas through, still confused, and then reread the first stanza, which did not seem to aid him in helping the congregation. He straightened himself up, and in a stentorian voice exclaimed: "Brethren, let us sing the Skee-six hymn."

INCONSISTENT.—Alfred Henry Lewis tells of a Texan who objected to the presence of a local exhorter who wished to offer prayer when the Vigilants were preparing to hang a horse-thief. "Your prayer may be all right merely as a supplication," said the critical one. "I have no fault to find with the prayer as a prayer. But it is plumb inconsistent to pray at this time and place." "Why so?" inquired the preacher. "This man is about to go into eternity, and he should be comforted and his soul saved, if possible." "Saved nothing!" said the other. "You want to send up a petition to get this felon into heaven, when we are hanging him because he isn't fit to live in Texas."

A correspondent of the *Field* has been telling of the lively times that golfers in Umtali are having. Their course is visited by "the king of beasts" by night, and by the fowls of the air by day. At night the course is the favorite haunt of the lion and other visitors quite unfamiliar to the home golfer, and crows with a white band round the neck—known as "Free Kirk ministers"—frequent the course by day. The secretary and a friend were having a round one Sunday morning not long ago when one of these Free Kirk ministers swooped down and flew off with the gutta. "It is the first time," writes the secretary, "that I have heard of a Free Kirk minister playing golf on the Sabbath." And, no doubt, Free Kirk ministers at home will reply—a knowing bird, that!

A NATURAL INQUIRY.—A clergyman undertook to preach to the inmates of an asylum for the feeble-minded. Trying to interest them he told of the Hebrew women who threw their babies into the Ganges in order to appease the wrath of the Gods. One of the lunatics, a bulldog-like chap, glared at the speaker so intently that the latter wondered if he really had succeeded in creating some interest. When he had finished he approached the man who glared and, taking him by the hand, politely asked if the talk had been entertaining, adding: "I noticed you regarded me very intently when I told of the mothers throwing their infants into the river and wondered what was in your thoughts at the time." "I was wondering," replied the feeble-minded one, "why your mother didn't throw you in."

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

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

LONDON.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, H. Snell, "Shylock."

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, High-street): 11.15, Dr. Stanton Coit, Miss McMillan, and Mr. Quilter, "Moral Instruction."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the fountain): 3.15 and 6.15, C. Cohen.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N.S.S.: Station-road, 11.30, W. J. Ramsey; Brockwell Park, 3.15, W. J. Ramsey; 6.30, E. B. Rose.

FINSBURY BRANCH N.S.S. (Clerkenwell-green): 11.30, A Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (corner of Ridley-road, Dalston): G. S. Parsons, "Why We Fight Christianity."

STRATFORD GROVE: F. A. Davies, "Secularism and Christianity."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park, near Marble Arch): 11.30, R. P. Edwards; Hammersmith Broadway, 7.30, R. P. Edwards.

COUNTRY.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Willie Dyson, "The Causes of Evolution" (Spencer's *First Principles*).

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