

THE Freethinker

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PRICE TWOPENCE

*Why should we shrink from what we cannot shun?
Each hath his pang, but feeble sufferers groan
With brain-born dreams of evil all their own.*

—BYRON.

The Philosophy of Lying.

THE only ultimate principle of morality is human welfare. All other principles are derivative. They are not to be the less observed and revered on that account. But occasions will arise when they cease to apply; or, rather, when the ultimate principle itself steps forth and assumes direct authority. A type of such occasions is the one instanced by Dr. Johnson and Cardinal Newman. Veracity is a fundamental virtue; the man who speaks the truth has the root of nearly all moral excellence, while the liar has the root of nearly all the contrary. Nevertheless there are situations in which even veracity becomes an ethical blunder. If you met a murderous ruffian, with knife or revolver in hand, and he asked you which way his intended victim had fled; what would you do if no help were near and you were unable to stop him? If you knew the road his intended victim had taken, you would tell him the opposite. That is how you would act if you possessed sound instincts. And if anyone called you a liar you would simply smile.

A good deal of wire-drawn casuistry has been expended on this easy problem. It has been argued, for instance, that the ruffian had no right to ask you such a question, and therefore no right to a truthful answer. But the point at issue is, not what was right for him, but what was wise for you. Not one man in a million would ever trouble his head about metaphysics in such a situation. He would just help to save life instead of helping to destroy it. In other words, he would follow the law of human welfare along the line of least resistance.

A sound heart and a sound head will always recognise these occasions when they arise. They are exceptional, and even pathological, and can never furnish precedents for the ordinary affairs of life. You might stun a madman if necessary, but you would know very well that this did not justify you in knocking sane people on the head at your pleasure. In the same way, what is commonly called a lie may be necessary in special circumstances; but each case, of course, has to be decided on its own merits; and it is absurd to suppose there can be such a thing as a philosophy of lying.

This does not seem, however, to be the opinion of Mr. C. W. Saleeby, a contributor of scientific articles to the *Academy*. In an article headed "The Function of Science," he writes as follows:—

"If your science—which you love for its own sake—is going to prove that there is no heaven—a question before which science, knowing its own limitations, should be silent—then away with it. What says Stevenson: 'We had needs invent heaven if it had not been revealed to us; there are some things that fall so bitterly ill on this side time.' Better an invented heaven than none—for the majority of temperaments. In other words, if a good-going lie will brighten anyone's burden it has my knee; to Mars or the dogs with so-called truth in such a case. If you have ever stood beside a mother while she watched a baby die, and it

has been possible to comfort her with a lie, you did not hesitate to palter with truth to serve the hour, and were glad of the chance. This is immoral, some say; can they prove it so?"

Certainly this is immoral—and even detestable. It reduces lying to a policy. Not now and then, in very exceptional cases, but always and for everybody, Mr. Saleeby recommends falsehood with regard to a future life. Nor does he see that he begs a great question in assuming that the belief in heaven is so pleasant that we should all turn liars to help each other to keep it. Moreover he does not see the absurdity of supposing that make-believe has the same value as a real conviction. Can he actually think it possible that the hope of heaven may rest on universal "kidding"?

It is nothing to the purpose to quote Stevenson. He was not a systematic moralist. Further, he was a man of moods; and an opposite sentiment might probably be quoted from his writings, if we had them by us at the moment. A far greater writer had said before him that if there were no God it would be necessary to invent one. Voltaire, in that mood, which was not common to him, regarded belief in God as the guarantee of morality; not for philosophers like himself, of course, but for common people with strong appetites and weak heads. Stevenson, in a mood which, it is to be hoped, was not common to him either, seems to have regarded the belief in heaven as a necessary support to the same multitude. We believe they were both mistaken. When an honest man performs a good action, he does not think of referring it to God. That is merely a trick of the theologians. And when a loving husband mourns over his dead wife, and talks the conventional language about meeting her in heaven, you will soon find, if you take him under the rose, that what he really wishes is to have her back on earth.

Mr. Saleeby, like most men, finds it easy to talk nonsense about women. He takes the case of a mother watching her baby die; and, for the rest, assumes that women must hear lies and men must tell them. It does not occur to him that women may have the strength to be purely human. There are Freethinking mothers, who love their children devotedly, and would do all that is possible to shield them from death, who would yet scorn the consolation of a lie in the grief of their bereavement. They have other sources of consolation, if Mr. Saleeby does not understand them; consolation of love and service to the still living, and perhaps that other consolation alluded to in one of George Meredith's earliest poems:

Bury thy sorrows, and they shall rise
Like stars in the ever holy skies.

Mr. Saleeby is mistaken in thinking that a pleasant lie is useful. Men make the same mistake about all sorts of indulgence. Truth is the only thing that avails in the long run. It may be bitter at first, but it is tonic in the end. What braces us is healthy, not what relaxes. This reliance on heaven in a future life has been one of the greatest curses of this life. It has relegated Paradise to the land of dreams. It has robbed the world of the good results of incalculable thought and effort. It has lured men with shadows and cheated them of the substance of happiness.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Master of French Comedy.

THE theatre laughs, the Christian pulpit cannot laugh. The Church will give a certificate of sainthood to a missionary or even a soldier, but never to a comedy-writer like Molière. Yet Molière was certainly a distinguished moral teacher. If I had the arranging of the hierarchy of the world's moralists, I should have no pope, since I can think of no man sufficiently superior to his fellows; but I should have a large college of cardinals. Plato, Montaigne, and Tolstoy should be three of my cardinals; and a place in the college would be found for Molière.

Molière was born in Paris in 1622, his real name being Jean Baptiste Poquelin. His father was an upholsterer in the service of the Court of the French King. The father made furniture for the house, the son made furniture for the mind. At school Poquelin was a bright scholar; at Orleans University he studied civil law. If he had become a lawyer his father would have rejoiced that Jean Baptiste had maintained the respectability of the family. But, at the age of twenty-one, Poquelin became an actor, and perhaps the good upholsterer was glad that the disgrace should be hidden under the stage-name of Molière. At that time, a group of young men and women were carrying on a company known as the Illustrious Theatre. Illustrious they may have been in wit and talent; in paying their tradesmen's debts they were less excellent. At last they resolved to go on tour, and they set out with Molière as a member. The tour lasted twelve years, and was chiefly spent in the south of France, sometimes in noisy towns, sometimes in the castles of aristocratic lovers of the stage. The little company—four women, seven men—returned to Paris, were patronised by King Louis XIV., and, for fifteen years, Molière worked, with incessant energy, as dramatist, actor, stage manager, and court official. Some of the superfine personages about the Court snubbed the dramatist, wishing him to feel his misfortune in being the son of an upholsterer. The King delivered a counter-stroke by inviting Molière to supper. Louis has sins to answer for—extravagance, Imperialism, and all the rest—but in this instance one must admire the superb courtesy of a King. In social circles, Molière spoke little. On the stage, he charmed all the world and his wife. In matters of business Molière was prompt and punctual, thus proving that there is no natural connection between the slipshod and the brilliant.

In these truthful days, when they who love Carlyle's philosophy love still more to talk about his disagreements with Mrs. Carlyle, it will be thought quite proper to reveal Molière's follies. Those people, therefore, who enjoy accounts of Carlyle's failure in marriage, will be gratified to hear that Molière had a mistress. This was Madeleine Béjart, the principal actress of the company. The relationship continued for sixteen years. She was a woman of violent temper, and Molière gave her cause, so she deemed, for exercising this temper and keeping it in a first-class state of efficiency. Eleven years before the dramatist's death, he married the actress, Armande Béjart, a girl of seventeen. It is said she was sister—some say daughter—to the previous lady. The marriage was made the occasion of much scandal, which got to the ears of the King. Louis replied (he was smart at effective replies) by standing god-father to Molière's first child. Jean Baptiste was not happily married. His young wife (attend, O ye Carlyleans!) was giddy and Bohemian. Once they separated, then they resumed cohabitation, and so on. Molière's comedies delighted Paris, and were preparing him a place among the world's classic writers. As an actor, he—with his fine figure, serious expression, large mouth, thick lips, self-assertive nose, strong eyebrows—set the theatre in a roar. But at home there was heart-burning, dispute, darkness of the soul. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, no wonder he

wore out. For years he was worried with a hacking cough. After a dangerous illness, he adopted a regular dietary. But neither dieting, nor the good-nature of the King, nor the applause of Paris, could stay the appointed meeting of Molière and Death. His last play was being performed. It was called *The Imaginary Invalid*, the chief part being taken by Molière himself. There was no pretence in his own case. His friends begged him to desist, but he said: "How can I leave these poor people [his fellow-actors] without their day's salary?"

I know not how it may strike the pure minds of the Carlyleans, but it seems to me that this dying whisper of Molière's was heroic.

He spat blood on the boards, the curtain was lowered; break-up of audience, rustling of silk, sedan-chairs, link-boys, hubbub. They carried Molière home. No priest would come to see the damned heretic. He died aged fifty-one (year, 1673). The Archbishop of Paris refused "Christian burial," and the King had to issue an order for the funeral. Molière was buried at dead of night; a hundred friends, each bearing a torch, lighting him in silence to the grave.

The biographers remark that very little is known of Molière's twelve-years' tour. Perhaps, in one sense, not. But, if you look at his plays, you will read ample evidence of what went on. With a vision clear as crystal, Molière had accumulated a treasury of observations on the infinite moods of human nature. A bright, buzzing, miscellaneous swarm are the children of his fancy—courtiers, ladies of fashion, philosophers; prigs, jesters, bigots, mark-uses and tradesmen; and every man with a proper amount of blood loves his full-breasted, saucy, honest servant-girls. And did you ever see four more vivid types than these?—The paltry and scraggy nature of the miser Harpagon; the old fool of a shop-keeper (whom yet we like), M. Jourdain, who is overjoyed at finding he can talk prose, and who aspires to marry his daughter to the son of the Grand Turk; the snug and pink-cheeked and pious sneak, Tartuffe; and the noble-hearted, soured, and misanthropic Alceste.

The modern spirit did not simply cast a ray on Molière's brow; it flooded him with its free glow. His criticisms of society are as easy and spontaneous as the agility of a child at play. He never twangs the harp of Zion, or prates the maxims of the Philistine. But as we laugh with him we become wiser. We pass out from the theatre into the cool night, and, while recounting his quips, find a moral idea lodged solidly in our memories. Molière illustrates the moral power of fun, and his comedies rival the prophets. He is entirely humanist, as he is entirely sane. What he thought of orthodoxy—Roman or Calvinist—is plainly enough indicated in his *Feast of the Statue*. Sganarelle is arguing with Don Juan:—

Sgan.:This world which we see has not shot up in a night, like a mushroom. I should like to ask you who made these trees, these rocks, this earth, and this sky which we see so high above our heads, and whether all this has sprung up of itself? Here, for instance, are you: did you make yourself alone? Must not your father have known your mother for you to come into the world? Can you see all the combinations with which the machine of man is composed, without admiring how one part hangs upon another? These nerves, these bones, these veins, these arteries, this.....these lungs, this heart, this liver, and all the other ingredients which are to be found there, and which.....Oh! I say, do stop me; do interrupt me; I can't argue unless I am interrupted. You are silent on purpose, and leave me to speak out of mischief.

Ju.: I am waiting for your reasoning to be over.

Sgan.: My reasoning, whatever you may say, is that there is something wonderful in man which all your learned people cannot explain. Is it not marvellous that I am here, and that I have in my head something which thinks ever so many different things in one moment, and does all it likes with my body? I want to strike my hands, to lift up my arm, to raise my eyes towards heaven, to bend down my head, to move my feet, to go to the right, to the left, forwards, backwards, to turn.....

(Falls down while turning round)

Ju.: Ah, good! There is your argument on the ground, with a broken nose.

Sgan.: Upon my word, I am very foolish to think of reasoning with you. Believe what you like; what do I care whether you are damned or not!

But it is high time to close; for, on looking over this brief sketch of the Master of French Comedy, I find I have written the word *damned* twice!

F. J. GOULD,

The Church Census.

It has been said that there are three stages in the history of a controversy between a new scientific discovery and religion. First of all the defenders of religious beliefs denounce the new teaching as contrary to religion. Then they accept it as agreeing with religion. Finally, they assert they knew it, and believed it, all the time. Something of the same may be said of the recently-concluded Church census conducted by the *Daily News*. Prior to the census religious preachers asserted that the people of London were deeply religious at heart. When the figures appeared and it was seen that only about one out of ten of the people attended Church on Sunday, there were many expressions of dismay. Now that the census is finished, and these same preachers have had a chance of recovery, we are told that things are even better than they expected; all things considered, the proportion is a large one, and although they would like to see it larger, yet they are content, even cheered with the result.

Following upon the publication of the figures week by week, the *Daily News* invited opinions from a number of representative clergymen as to what conclusions they drew from the statistics furnished. Of course no Freethinker was asked for his opinion. It was a family party, and as the members of the family knew they were writing for the general public, we may rest assured that the answers were framed with an eye to this end. Had a Freethinker been asked for his opinion the harmony of the meeting would have been spoiled. He might have pointed to some of the causes that were not only keeping people from church or chapel, but were also taking them from religion, and of which non-attendance at church or chapel is, after all, only a symptom. For, say what they may, church attendance is a measure of the religious strength of the community, even though it may be a rough and ready one. And all of the writers of the opinions published in the *Daily News* were careful to avoid admitting, except incidentally, what is perfectly plain to all—that it is not merely the fact that a mere ten per cent. only of the people attend church that the religious world has to face, but the much graver fact that people are steadily drifting away from the Christian faith.

But even as it is the admissions and excuses put forward in this symposium are instructive—to an outsider, and it is well that these should not pass without some kind of comment.

First of all, the Nonconformist leaders are rejoiced that they have in London nearly as many worshippers as the Established Church. These, be it remembered, are the people who are just now shrieking themselves hoarse concerning their hatred of sectarianism; and yet, when they are faced with a problem that affects all Christians, their chief thought is, "Well, we're all right, proportionately." Dr. Horton is pleased that neither Roman Catholics nor Episcopalians are as strong as he thought they were, and Dr. Clifford is "thankful" that the Baptists are strong. If either of these men could lift themselves out of the atmosphere of little Bethel for a moment, they would see that, as their own sects do not keep pace with the growth of the population, and that any converts they get come from other Christian bodies, their strength does not add to the strength of Christianity as a whole. That is still falling behind.

The same may be said of the opinion of the Rev. Stopford Brooke, and one or two others, that Church attendance is a matter of getting a good man in the

pulpit. Probably. But do these successful preachers make any impression on the non-Christian population? Not a bit of it. A preacher like Mr. Campbell, of the City Temple, or like Mr. Brooke himself—a much superior man to Mr. Campbell, by the way—fills his church at the expense of other places of worship. Their large audiences are built up by people who, but for their attraction, would be listening to some lesser light. And suppose that each one of the churches and chapels in the metropolis had the kind of man that "draws" a good congregation; what would be the result? Unquestionably a sharing out of this same ten per cent. In other words, the Churches have only this ten per cent. to deal with; they may use it up in a few large churches, or share it among a number of small ones, but they cannot increase it. The columns of the *Christian World* have more than once voiced the complaints of preachers who have been robbed of their congregations by the "booming" of a few shining lights. The real question for the Churches is, can they increase the percentage of church-goers?

A pretty general explanation adopted is that people are no longer under the same compulsion to attend as they once were, and those who do attend are there because their religious feelings urge them to attend. Well, it is true that people are no longer searched for on Sunday, and punished for non-attendance, as they were when Dr. Clifford's liberty-loving Puritans had their way, but it is not true that it is conviction alone that brings people to church. "Society" may encourage "up the river" on Sunday, but it also encourages a due attendance at church, and these ministers must surely have moved about but very little, or be strangely unobservant, if they do not know that in the case of traders, particularly the smaller class, an interest in chapel is looked upon as not by any means a bad method of pushing business. And surely it is the height of absurdity to assert that the people who attend church and chapel, and who may be overheard discussing their business and their neighbours' on the way there and back, are at a place of worship to satisfy their "soul hunger."

The Vice-President of the Baptist Union is pleased that there are so many worshippers "after most determined efforts on the part of many to keep people away." This is neat, but not very effective. There have been for a few years determined efforts to keep people away; true, but there have been determined efforts for over fifteen centuries to get them there. And if, with this long start, and aided by custom and power and wealth, it is so easy to keep people away, what is the value of the talk about "unconquerable thirst for religion," etc. etc.? One of the Russian emperors tried to stimulate his Jewish subjects' thirst for Christianity by feeding them on salt fish and denying them water until they were converted. It would seem as though man's "thirst" for religion needs the same kind of artificial stimulation. Fifty thousand parsons are at work to keep the people religious. Their efforts are aided by the early training of the people, by their general environment, and yet a representative parson is pleased to see ten people out of every hundred attending church, because some other people, without wealth, or power, or social influence, are making "determined efforts" to keep them away. What rubbish this talk about man's religious nature is in the light of facts!

The Rev. John Hunter, Presbyterian, furnishes the usual religious impertinence in the shape of a suggestion that the decline of religious worship is due to a decline in character. "Serious and devout people have always been in a minority," he says, and he fears "we are losing as a people our capacity of responding to the highest and greatest things in life and religion, the power of thinking deeply and feeling deeply." In the light of only one such instance as that of Herbert Spencer, who stands outside all religions, it is a piece of downright insolence for a preacher to attribute the decline of interest in religion to inability to think or feel deeply. It almost

takes one breath away to find the ordinary church or chapel attendant, who does respond quickly to religious stimuli characterised, by inference, as one who thinks deeply. I venture to say that, right or wrong, the average unbeliever puts more thinking into his unbelief than any dozen average religionists put into their belief.

The same speaker has also grave fears as to the effect of this loss of religion on morals. Those who have recently given up religion may not be much the worse. "But what about their children growing up in a secular atmosphere, and untrained in worshipful ways? Their lives can hardly be so faithful and fine. It is only in theory that religion and morality are independent. Worship is intimately related to moral health and power." This passage is worth quoting if only as an evidence of the power of thinking deeply possessed by the writer or by the religious public by whom such statements are swallowed. The plainest facts in history are that people brought up in a religious atmosphere have been capable of, and have committed, the vilest of crimes; that prison records bear indisputable testimony to the fact that an overwhelming proportion of wrong-doers have received the "benefits" of a religious atmosphere; that persons like John Stuart Mill, who have been trained without religion, frequently set the world an example of nobility of character; and yet men, presumably educated, can be found to repeat this nauseous twaddle about the inseparable connection of religion and morals. Added to which it is evident that Dr. Hunter's power of deep thinking does not enable him to see that his fear amounts to the belief that religious influences have done so little to develop the social sense of believers that they can find no reason for decent behavior apart from the rewards and penalties of a future life.

The Rev. Watts-Ditchfield, who does not believe that there is any decline in religious belief—that is, he says he does not believe it—writes that "From a long and intimate acquaintance with the working-classes, I unhesitatingly say that the great absence of working-men is not due to the prevalence of infidelity, which, since the death of Mr. Bradlaugh, has been at a low ebb, but is owing largely to sheer downright indifference," I venture to question Mr. Ditchfield's "intimate acquaintance" with the working-classes. That he goes among them, I do not doubt; but there is no greater delusion than that of the clergyman who imagines that his visits to that section of the working-class who welcomes him, generally for interested purposes, places him on a footing of intimacy. Usually he is expected, and prepared for; and one can hardly expect those anxious for Church charities to be profuse in their expressions of unbelief.

Moreover, I am of opinion that Mr. Watts-Ditchfield's "working-classes" includes only the lower strata, and of these Bradlaugh's Freethought followers never were composed. Nor is the Freethought following drawn from that class to-day. It is the better class working-men—those in receipt of a fair income, and with whom the parson is not on a footing of intimacy—that supplies Freethought with its recruits; and I expect that it can hardly be said, in the face of the greatly increased output of heretical literature, that "infidelity" is at a low ebb here.

Mr. Ditchfield does blunder near the truth when he says it is indifference that keeps people from church. But he gets away from it again in the unexpressed assumption that indifference to religious services means indifference to everything else. If he searches just a little deeper he will in all probability discover that people are indifferent to religion because they have ceased to believe in it. And this is the all-important fact that all the clergy have got to face. The age is drifting away from religion. The more thoughtful among the working classes have found out that the questions that primarily concern the churches, are not the questions that are of vital importance to them. The settlement of the land question can never be brought about by the Churches, because

they are all more or less tied up with the landed interest. The question of housing, of municipal development, of the organisation of industry, can never be settled by the Churches, because they are all financially interested in the preservation of just those interests which the settlement of these questions threaten. Shifty theological politicians of the type of Dr. Clifford may talk glibly about the development of civic life, the rights of citizenship, but let any serious question—one that threatens the vested interests of the country—come to the front, and then see their attitude. The landowner, the slum landowner, the shady company promoter, none of these have any serious objection to the vague generalities uttered in church or chapel by a Scott Holland or a Clifford. They know these mean nothing so long as they are associated with texts and prayer-meetings. It is the social reform divorced from a prayer-meeting they dread, for they know that *that* means business.

Fundamentally, I repeat, it is the decline of religious belief that is the cause of non-attendance at church. The statistics are too general in their character to admit of any other interpretation. In London and out of London, whether one sect or another predominates in a particular district, the proportion of church attendants is the same. This is not a phenomenon that can be explained by want of attractive preachers. In a district where there happens to be one or two attractive preachers, the proportion for that district is no greater than in any other. The religious people are attracted from one church to another; Baptist gains at the cost of Methodist, or Episcopalian at the cost of both; but the proportion remains unchanged. Even among the Jews there is the same deadly ten per cent. of attendants at synagogue service.

There is only one explanation that covers the field; and that is the weakening of religion as a whole. It is suggested that if the services were made more attractive, more people would attend. Doubtless. If George Robey were engaged to sing one or two songs during the service, or Penley to give a scene from the *Private Secretary*, much larger congregations could be obtained. There are infinite possibilities for development in this direction; and judiciously varied with boxing contests and clog dances, the attraction would be unailing. But if people believed in Christianity these devices would be unnecessary. It is only a jaded palate that needs strong condiments. When people believed, they went to church because it was the church. They do not go to church now, because the best thought is outside; the widest life is outside; and a religious service is fast becoming a ceremonial engineered by knaves and supported by fools.

Meanwhile, these figures are not without their significance for Freethinkers. Ninety per cent. of the people do not attend church, and it is fair to assume that a large proportion of that number do not believe in the religion taught. Is there not some chance of our enlisting some of that number into the ranks of avowed Freethought? Unbelief is abroad now as it never was before. What is needed is its organisation. Let us keep our eyes on that ninety per cent. and set to work.

C. COHEN.

A PARABLE.

The trodden path was sunny smooth,
And many thousands journeyed there.
He asked them why, and they, good sooth,
With curling lip, or stony stare,
Transfixed with scorn the hapless youth—
Had not their fathers worn it bare?

And when he tried—the erring wight—
To turn him from the ways of men,
To cut his rough way to the height
(Be his the toil and theirs the gain),
Perchance his way might prove the right—
Why then—? Oh! then—they stoned him then.

—Caroline Smith, in the "Cosmopolitan,"

From Christian Pulpit to Secular Platform.

BY RICHARD TREVOR.

IV.—AT THE DIVINITY HALL.

SOON after my enrolment as a ministerial candidate I entered the University, at which I was privileged to spend four laborious years. At the conclusion of this purely academic course, I was admitted to the Divinity Hall; wherein three interesting and revealing years were passed. A Divinity Hall, or Theological Seminary, is one of the most wonderful and unique institutions on earth. The curriculum includes the Hebrew Language, Biblical Exegesis, Homiletics, Ecclesiastical History, and Systematic Theology. In my youthful estimation, the Professors were demi-gods. How delightfully omniscient and authoritative they were! They knew everything, could answer every question, solve every problem, penetrate every mystery, and annihilate every difficulty. They talked about God with as much familiarity as if they had stood behind his back and peeped over his shoulders while he was framing his Eternal Decrees. They could supply us with all sorts of exact information about Election, the Incarnation, and the Unseen World. They were all more or less rigid Calvinists, and each lecture they delivered stated a doctrine, presented irrefutable proofs of its truth, and triumphantly demolished all objections to it. All who held different views from those expressed by them were denounced as dangerous heresiarchs. Indeed, our Professors were to be regarded, not as vendors of mere views or opinions, but as divinely-appointed proclaimers of sovereign truths revealed in the Bible. Arminians were hopelessly, if not judicially, blind, because they deliberately refused to use their spiritual eyes. All "isms," other than Augustinism or Calvinism, were of the Devil, and destined to pass away. Charles Hodge, of Princeton, America, one of the most illustrious champions of the Old School Calvinism, was said to have refused to shake hands with William Ellery Channing, the renowned Unitarian, because he verily believed that Unitarianism had not a single Scriptural leg on which to stand, and that Unitarians could not be recognised as genuine members of the household of God.

At our Hall, a cold and narrow literalism reigned with sublime dignity. The fable of the Fall in Genesis, with its Adam and Eve, garden, apple, and serpent, was treated as a unique historical fact. The doctrine of the Trinity was explained in the most painfully mechanical style. The Professor of Dogmatic Theology assured us, with calm confidence, that it was the simplest as well as most important doctrine contained in the Word of God. He told us what distinctions and resemblances there were between the three persons, in what exact relations they stood to one another, and what distinctive work each of them did. The fact of the incarnation of God in Christ, according to him, involved the Immaculate and Miraculous Conception. He explained to us that it was just as easy for Omnipotence to create the body and soul of Christ in Mary's womb as it had been to form the first man out of the dust of the ground, and the first woman out of a male rib. Christ was Humiliated Deity—Deity punishing himself for the sins of man. The incarnation was, therefore, the Supreme Miracle. I smile as I think of it all now; but then I solemnly believed it. Today I regard it as a puerile superstition; but then it impressed me as a truth revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. All other dogmas were dealt with in precisely the same way; but space does not allow me to give any further examples.

Occasionally the Professors were targets at which thoughtful and sceptically-inclined young men fired awkward and staggering questions; but not one of the shots ever proved fatal. The theological skin was so thick and hard that nothing could have penetrated it. Here are a few samples of the type of question asked and answer given;—

Student: "Professor, what real sin was there in Adam's act of eating the forbidden fruit?"

Professor: "No sin at all, except in the sense that it was a violation of a Divine commandment. The commandment was a positive, not a moral one; and surely the Supreme Being has a perfect right to impose what commandments he pleases on the creatures of his hand."

Student: "Was it right of God to elect some to eternal life, and leave all others to their doom?"

Professor: "Yes, certainly, because the exercise of mercy is purely optional with the Deity. It was an act of stupendous condescension, on his part, to choose a certain number to be saved through the atoning death of his only begotten Son. Justice demanded that the whole human family should be consigned to endless torment in hell-fire. The damned are only inheriting what they richly deserve, and cannot fairly blame the Judge. But salvation is of grace alone."

Student: "Is it right to punish a person for ever after death for a limited number of sins committed during a limited number of years on earth?"

Professor: "Yes, because every sin, however small it may appear, is yet infinite, and deserves infinite and endless punishment."

Student: "How do we know that Christ rose from the grave on the third day, and ultimately ascended to heaven?"

Professor: "Simply because the Bible says so. Whatever the Bible says is of necessity true, because it is the utterance of God himself. One miracle demands another. You must always bear in mind that the miraculous birth necessitated the miraculous uprise from the tomb."

I cannot tell whether the young men who asked such questions were satisfied with the dogmatic answers given or not; but I can give my word of honor that I was more than satisfied. To me the appeal to Holy Writ was absolutely conclusive, and to question it would have been a sign of incorrigible depravity. Of course, etiquette did not permit students to argue with their Professors, who were more infallible than the Pope of Rome. My conviction was that the Bible was the final court of appeal, the verdict of which should settle all disputes. Some people stumbled at miracles, for example, and irreverently asked: "In the name of common sense, how can you believe that the whale swallowed Jonah, and flung him out again unharmed?" Vehemently I answered: "Common sense has nothing whatever to do with the matter. Had the Bible affirmed that Jonah swallowed the whale, I would have believed it quite as readily." To me, then, the Bible was the Word of the living God, and could not err. The doctrines of the Christian Religion, as interpreted by our Professors, was clearly revealed in the Scriptures, and he was doubly blind and an unmitigated fool who was impertinent enough, either to doubt them, or to accept the Arminian interpretation of them.

That was the way in which I was trained and equipped for my profession. My ancestors, my child, life at home, the church in which I was brought up, and the Professors at the Seminary, all contributed to the development within me of an astonishingly firm adhesion to what was called genuine orthodoxy. I left the hall a gigantic believer. The supernatural was far more real to me than the natural. Everything between the two covers of the Old Book was God's revealed truth. If people told me that miracles were violations of natural laws, I frankly admitted it, well knowing that in order to facilitate the fulfilment of the noble purposes of heaven, a higher law had a perfect right to make inroads upon and subjugate a lower. If some weak-minded friends experienced great difficulty in believing in a special Divine Revelation, I could astonish them with the bold assertion that my only difficulty would have been not to believe in it. My appetite for believing knew no bounds, and was never entirely satisfied. And this infinite appetite and capacity for blindly believing constituted my stock in trade when I stood on the threshold of the active ministry. Ah me, the pity and the misery of it all! It lies on my memory like a horrid nightmare.

On the Occasion of a Week of International Prayer.

THE god Jehovah of the Jews
This mortal week has got the blues:
The saints are paying off old dues;
They're fuddling him with prayer.

Where e'er his creatures whine or shriek,
Up from the populous earth the reek
Of heavy breath comes. It's a week
Of international prayer.

Jehovah thus his heart discloses
To favored Two of the blob noses:
"When Levi's sons wore cloth, oh, Moses,
I had other things than prayer.

"Cuts from the rump of fatted ox,
Firstlings, the juiciest of the flocks,
And pigeon roast, my ancient Cocks,
Was rather better fare.

"Ah! Abraham, my chosen Dad,
Your Jew-ruled Jacks are all gone mad:
'Tis sad to see them; very sad;
But rather worse to hear them."

Here, Jahveh hung his head in shame;
Moses and Abraham did the same;
While from the plagues of earth-born name
The prayers rolled up in volumes.

Cried one believing lunatic,
"Lord, do thou damn the heretic!"
Jehovah here look'd green and sick,
And Moses held his hat out.

Next, one whose wealth could not be told
Groan'd: "Lord, I have lent thy Church much gold,
But have not reap'd my hundred-fold."
The eyes of Moses sparkled.

Then one who had not that vice of age,
Bursting with youth, and all arage
With words hot from the Holy Page,
Saluted the Jehovah.

"Thou who didst try old Abraham,
And in the bush didst snare the ram,
Thee I would serve, thou great I AM."
Jove laughed, "Go, find a wife, boy!"

Another thus: "Thou, at whose nod
Waters stood up from Moses' rod,
Increase our faith!" Replied the God,
"Thy swallow shall grow wider."

Then one who bore a maiden name,
But who had smirched her maiden fame,
And knew that light lips would spit shame,
Bow'd head, and told her trouble.

"Oh, God! the arrow in my side!
Oh! by the dear Christ crucified,
Father, deliver me!" she cried.
But the old god was powerless.

Now, Sir Saint-Joseph, one all froth,
Who wore the Church of England cloth,
And said his prayers to earn his broth,
Out-talk'd all competition.

Through all the Prayers, from end to end,
His glib, untiring tongue did wend:
And some, so uniform his trend,
The parrot said twice over.

Moses' majestic head sunk deep;
Abraham's eyelids played bo-peep;
And, last, Jehovah fell asleep;
I left the old god snoring.

CONTRE L'IDOLE.

His MISTAKE.—She was a demure little woman with a baby. As the open car was crowded, she did not put the little one, who was old enough to sit up, on the seat beside her. She carried it on her lap and made room for a pompous, clerical-looking man with a newspaper. The child kicked its tiny legs in delight at the strange things it saw while riding along the Bowery, and its shoes rubbed against the clergyman's trousers. "Perhaps, madam," he exclaimed, "you imagine that this conveyance is your private carriage?" "Oh, no, I don't," was the prompt reply. "If it was you wouldn't be riding in it." He shut up.

Acid Drops.

The funeral of the late Mr. W. E. Henley was attended by a number of well-known writers, some of whom must have been a little sick of the religious service read by the Brookwood Cemetery chaplain. Was there no man of brains and heart amongst the dead man's friends to pay a last tribute at his funeral? Or was no one permitted to do so? The body was cremated, as Mr. Henley had desired. So much, at least, was well done. Most of the rest was mummery. The shibboleths of a dead creed, intellectually speaking, should not have been uttered over the coffin of one of its disbelievers. Never did he implore mercy of Jesus Christ, nor apparently of any other god in the Pantheon. His own brave word was—

I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

The impudence of orthodoxy is boundless. It is also capable of being positively indecent. Christian words were spoken over the grave of George Eliot; Darwin, the great Agnostic, was buried with the customary rites in Westminster Abbey; and Huxley, the fighting Freethinker, was buried in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection! It is really enough to make an honest man vomit.

Mr. Frederic Harrison, in his "In Memoriam" on James Cotter Morison—another pronounced Freethinker—refers to the burial his corpse underwent as being right and proper because it was consonant to the feelings of the living. But this is nonsense, and pestilent nonsense too. Burying a man as a Christian, when he is known to have repudiated Christianity, is an outrage. What he was he was, and hypocritical words over his coffin will not alter the facts. Surely the relatives are playing their "feelings" for more than they are worth in this contemptible game; and it seems to us that Freethinkers should take precautions against their funerals being turned into a farce.

According to "Jadi," who does "The Man in the Pulpit" for the *Morning Leader*, Mr. J. M. Robertson was lately announced to speak at South Place Chapel as "the Rev. John M. Robertson." Some wag of a printer may have cracked that joke. It was not a bad one.

"Jadi" called Mr. Robertson "a living incarnation of reason minus sentiment." But one of this sort—supposing the description to be true—may be tolerable in a world so full of living incarnations of sentiment minus reason.

Dr. Parker's wonderful successor at the City Temple is touring in America. Mr. Campbell is reported to have said there that he would gladly have participated in the terrible lynching (burning and mutilation) of a negro at Wilmington. We hope for the sake of common decency that the report is false.

Samuel Herbert Dougal was duly hung at Chelmsford Gaol. He tried his best to escape the death penalty. A plea of insanity was pressed on the Home Secretary, and then a bogus confession in which the death of Miss Holland was declared to have been accidental. The fact is that Dougal was a gay, callous, born adventurer, without a spark of conscience in his whole composition. He nerved himself to go through his last ordeal, and died what is called "game." The chaplain, at the very last moment, implored him to say whether he was guilty or not guilty, and it is said that he answered "Guilty." But the cap was then over his face, and he was standing over his death-pit, and may hardly have known what he was saying. Indeed, he may have echoed the chaplain's last word "Guilty" quite mechanically. But the man of God seems to have thought it was all right, and he commended Dougal's soul to Jesus Christ. We suppose the sequel will not be known till the day of judgment. Dougal, perhaps, went to Christ; perhaps he didn't. The problem is not one of overwhelming importance.

What if Dougal had replied "Not Guilty" to the chaplain's dramatic interrogation? Would it have been a proof of his innocence? If not, what sense is there in putting such a question at all?

Good old free press! How it plays up to the gallery! The *Daily Telegraph*, for instance—or, rather, its Rome correspondent—referred to the crowd peering at the Vatican windows for sign-tidings of "the awful drama progressing within." The "awful drama" was simply the last hours of a very old man—one of the fifteen hundred millions of human beings on this planet, who will all have to die, most of them a great deal younger, and nearly all of them in less comfortable circumstances.

Pope Leo's personal fortune was a very large one. He had no sort of belief in laying not up for yourself treasures on earth where moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. He took precautions against moth and rust. Now and then a thief of a secretary or treasurer went off with a lot of plunder, but there was always a big balance left, and the good old Pope rubbed his hands over a flourishing exchequer. Besides the funds he carefully invested, the old gentleman had a perfect pile of costly presents from east, west, north, and south; including 28 tiaras ornamented with precious stones, 319 gold crosses, 1,200 gold and silver cups, 81 rings (one from the Sultan worth 100,000 francs), 16 pastorals in gold and precious stones, 884 gold and silver stands for the Host, 7 gold and silver statues, and about 1,000 various works of art. What a curious collection in the hands of the "servant of the servants of God," the head representative of the lowly Carpenter of Nazareth! But it was always the same. Priests have ever grasped at wealth. It is the primary article of their faith—as may be read in the Grand Old Book. When the Jews thought they had lost Moses and Jehovah too, they besought Aaron to be their leader and make them a new God. He consented. And the first thing he said to them was, "Bring your gold." That is always the first word of priestcraft; yes, and the last word, too.

Jane Laithwaite, arrested at Leeds for being a wandering lunatic, solemnly informed the constable that she was "an angel." We do not dispute it. Christians expect to be angels hereafter. This lady simply went one better, and made a start here.

There is a common characteristic in literary "finds," especially when they in any way bear on Christianity—and that is their oppositeness; they never come except in the nick of time. Now the world is agitated by the "Higher Criticism." Even the Church of Rome is about to re-edit the Vulgate. Immediately on the announcement of the fact comes the news that there has been discovered a fragment of a Greek papyrus giving a version of Genesis which is stated to be probably a century older than any of the extant vellum manuscripts. It will not be published for a year, however; and "financial support" is necessary for its production. The last "find" was a volume of "sayings" of Jesus that were not novel—but with it were some variations of Homer that were. Now what can be more reasonable than to anticipate, this time, some new renderings—or striking omissions—or even additional texts in Genesis, especially if the financial support should not flow in quickly?

Miss Marianne Farningham, an elderly lady writer well-known to readers of the *Christian World*, was one of the speakers at a recent Sunday School Union meeting in London. She referred to young women who looked forward to being wives and mothers, though from the very nature of the case it was impossible for this to be realised for all of them. Some of them had to live alone in a greyer life, and the Sunday School provided such with what they wanted. Nothing of the sort, dear lady; nothing of the sort. You mean well, but you are mistaken. The girls who miss being wives and mothers generally know very well that they have missed the very one thing they seem born for, and nothing you can ever offer them in the name of religion is more than a feeble consolation for their loss. That is all it could possibly be. It is never a compensation. "Safe in the arms of Jesus" is a hymn designed for ladies who have failed to find partners on earth. It isn't the real thing, of course; only a pious make-believe, and thin and shadowy at that.

The dear *Daily News* asks "will it be believed" that some important Conservative papers took not the slightest notice of the great Nonconformist demonstration at the Albert Hall? We really like this look of astonishment on the face of our contemporary. It betrays such simple innocence. What on earth did the dear *Daily News* expect? Having burked pretty nearly everything connected with Secular Education, it ought not to be surprised at finding that other newspapers can play the very same game with the Dissenters.

The Albert Hall demonstration was not a "citizens' protest" against the Education Act. It was a chapel-goers' protest. The meeting was religious from beginning to end. Pastor Spurgeon, of the Tabernacle, opened it with prayer, asking the Almighty to bestir himself and take up the Nonconformist grievance. Hymns were sung at various stages of the proceedings, and the doxology was sung at the close. Surely it is an abuse of language to call this a "citizens' meeting"—unless the prayer-and-hymn fashion has been adopted by Nonconformists for their future political gatherings.

Now that the Religious Census for London is over, the *Daily News* publishes what it calls a "Symposium" on the subject. A number of leading representatives of various Christian Churches give their view of the statistics. Canon Scott Holland refers to "those dismal figures," but takes heart of grace from the fact that "It is always the few who will insist on the world being saved." The Rev. J. E. Watts-Ditchfield, of St. James-the-Less, Bethnal Green, writes a long letter with next to nothing in it. Towards the end he warms up a little and denounces the heretics within the Church "who have practically torn their Bibles into shreds." "The Church," he exclaims, "must be united in her creed and in her belief in the Book which alone contains her creed." But he seems to feel that this desirable consummation is a terribly long way off; so he advises the Church, meanwhile, to put herself at the head of a movement "for sweeping away insanitary dwellings, for lessening overcrowding, for limiting the hours of toil, for raising the standard of wages, for the control of the liquor traffic, for the removal of the disgrace of Piccadilly, for the suppression of the betting craze." Fancy the Church doing all this! When we find her doing it we may say with Hamlet, "Then is doomsday near."

Dr. John Clifford's contribution to this "Symposium" is characterised by his usual candor and modesty. He and a handful of other Christians belong to the "holy remnant." They are the "salt" of Israel and the "light" of the world. What does it matter, then, if the church-goers are in such a minority? Look at the quality of them! Hallelujah!

The Rev. John Wilson, vice-president of the Baptist Union, does not share Dr. Clifford's jubilation. Only a million worshippers in London! Four millions of people outside all our places of worship! "It is enough," the reverend gentleman says, "to give us pause." Nevertheless he sees a ray of hope. "We believe the lowest point has been reached. We have touched the bottom." But how does he know that? Has he the gift of prophecy? We believe he is simply mistaken. The causes that have brought about the present state of things seems likely to continue. Every fresh religious census is worse than its predecessor, and thus it will probably go on until nobody will think it worth while to take a religious census again.

Dr. R. F. Horton wants to see all the religious people join their forces. "For my part," he says, "I would willingly embrace the Jews and the Ethical Societies." That is, if they are willing to be embraced. And really, as far as some of the Ethicists are concerned, it is not inconceivable. Dr. Stanton Coit, for instance, lectures on how he found God and why he prays; and a friend of ours, who heard him for the first time the other Sunday evening at the Queen's Hall, told us there was nothing in what he said which could lead any stranger to imagine he was not orthodox. It must be admitted, however, that the Jews will be a tougher object in the embrace of the Christian boa-constrictor. Never yet has Christianity made any impression on the Jews, and some of us believe it never will. And how on earth can Christians and Jews co-operate with each other in regard to religion? Christians declare that Christ was God, and that he said so himself. Jews declare that he was not God, and that if he said so himself he was a blasphemous madman or a disgusting impostor. Surely, if Christians and Jews ever sit down peacefully together as *religionists*, it must be when both sides have lost all vital faith in what they profess.

The Rev. John Hunter, of King's Weigh House Church, is not dismayed by the London statistics. "Serious and devout people," he says, "have always been in a minority." He is not even prepared to admit that the Churches have "touched bottom." Even in Scotland there is a rapid religious decline. The Jewish Sabbath is gone, except, perhaps, in the Highlands; and (Dr. Hunter says) it is not the Christian, but the Pagan, Sunday that is taking its place.

It will be seen that this "Symposium" does not amount to much. At the end of it we are told that General Booth could not "see his way" to participate in the function. We should think not. Booth is a man of business. He does not make the running for newspapers; he lets newspapers make the running for him.

A Catholic asked Dr. Clifford a very plain and pertinent question in the *Daily News*. Did he think it in accordance with the principles of religious equality that Catholics should be made to pay for State schools, and also for special schools in which their own children might be taught, because the religious instruction given in State schools was such that Catholics held it in abhorrence? Dr. Clifford did not deign to reply. Whenever an awkward question is put to him he pursues a policy of silence. He has done this from the

beginning, and will probably do it to the end. Yet a lot of Nonconformists call him brave and honest. Some of them call him a hero. No doubt he is an honorable man; so are they all, all honorable men. —

In view of the loud talking of Messrs. Clifford & Co., concerning how much English freedom owes to Puritanism, the following, dealing with seventeenth century America, from Professor W. Wilson's just issued *History of the American People* is instructive: "In Massachusetts men were fined, whipped, sentenced to have their ears cut off, or banished the colony altogether, for speaking scandalously of either the Church or the Government. Several who had come to the Bay before the Massachusetts Company was formed were so put upon and sought out for persecution by their new masters, the magistrates of the Company, for their refusal to conform to the new practices in matters of worship, that they finally resisted to the length of bringing sentences of banishment upon themselves, or voluntarily took themselves off to escape the searching tyranny. It was a very vigorous government, under which only those could live and be at ease who professed and proved themselves Puritans, and common men suffered more than gentlemen, after the manner of the age, so that it seemed an aristocratic as well as an ecclesiastical government." —

With the above may well go the following, from the new volume of the *Cambridge Modern History*, still dealing with America: "The treatment of Mrs. Hutchinson and Roger Williams effectively disposes of the grotesque delusion that New England was, or wished to be thought, a home of spiritual freedom.....In 1656 two Quaker women landed at Boston. They were at once arrested and carefully isolated; their books were burnt; they were themselves charged with witchcraft, and in consequence brutally handled, and after five weeks' imprisonment sent off to Barbadoes.....In all the New England colonies Acts were passed excluding or punishing the Quakers. [In Massachusetts] three Quakers, two men and a woman, were hanged. Certain of the Boston clergy took a leading part in demanding the stringent enforcement of severe measures, and in defending the policy of intolerance." We commend these excerpts to Dr. Clifford and the *Daily News*, who are so sedulously fostering the "grotesque delusion" that it is to these same bigots that Englishmen owe their freedom. —

Mr. Fordham, the North London magistrate, fined a man named Charles Freer twenty shillings and costs for annoying a Jew in a railway train. Incidentally his worship observed that "a Jew is as good as a Christian, and a Christian as good as a Jew." If this be true, as we dare say the first part of it is, will Mr. Fordham kindly explain what Jesus Christ was born for? Why should he come on earth except to make men *better*? which he did not do if the Christians are no improvement on the Jews. —

Down at Winkworth, in Derbyshire, one of the magistrates said to a Passive Resister, the Rev. B. Noble, a Baptist minister, "Don't you understand that if all the damned fools in the place refuse to pay there will be no rates and taxes?" Whereupon the man of God answered haughtily, "I cannot reply to such language as that." But why not? Both "damned" and "fool" are good Bible words. Jesus Christ used them both. Why is the Rev. B. Noble more fastidious than his Master? —

Having made a pile in defiance of Jesus Christ's plain teaching, the Venerable Archdeacon Francis Drinkall Pitt, of North Queensland, has left his residuary personal estate—probably about £15,000—to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, to be used in manufacturing fresh hypocrites. The money is to be devoted to the training of clergy in a Colonial or missionary diocese. —

We called attention some time ago to "the promised Messiah" who lives at Quadian, Punjab, India, and bears the name of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. This gentleman claims to be the Messiah foretold in the Bible. He declares that he has already a following of over a hundred thousand, and that all the world will by-and-by be brought over to his side. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary, was not a divine being, but a great prophet; simply that, and nothing more. Certainly he was not the Messiah. That honor belongs exclusively to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. —

Over at Chicago there is a Scotch-American gentleman called John Alexander Dowie, who claims to be the reincarnation of the Prophet Elijah; and, as far as *hairiness* is concerned, he plays the part very successfully. Now the Prophet Elijah, according to Jewish tradition, is to reappear on earth as the forerunner of the Messiah. It follows, therefore, that

Old Dowie is the herald of the second coming of the Christian Messiah. He believes so himself, or says he does; he has also persuaded a considerable number of people to share the belief; and, with their aid, he is building up a Church of Zion, of which all the property belongs absolutely to himself, until Jesus Christ comes along and requires it—which a good many people think is nearly as good as a freehold. —

The Jews, of course, declare that the Prophet of Nazareth was the wrong one, and cannot possibly be the right one if he comes again twenty times over. The gentleman over in India says the very same thing. He tells Old Dowie plainly that he is a rank impostor, and challenges him to a duel to decide the matter between them. It is not a question of pistols and coffee for two. Oh dear no! Mirza Ghulam Ahmad means business. It is to be a duel to the death. Old Dowie is invited to step out and face the Hindoo Messiah; both of them are then to implore the divine arbitrament; they are to "pray to God that of us two whoever is the liar may perish first." This is fair and square, anyhow. The Hindoo Messiah is ready, if the Yankee Elijah is willing. —

While the Yankee Elijah is making up his mind for death or victory, we may note that the Hindoo Messiah scores a point against him in the preliminary fencing. Old Dowie offers as proof of his pretensions the fact that he has healed hundreds of sick men. "But why," asks the Hindoo Messiah, "did his healing-power fail in the case of his own beloved daughter, where it should have been exercised in the highest degree?" A hit, a hit, a palpable hit! If a faith-healer cannot save his own child, what is the use of his affecting to be able to save other persons? —

"The Work of Christ among Men" was the title of an address by the Rev. W. E. Moll, vicar of St. Philip's, Newcastle. It was one of seven discourses on "Christ and Modern Unbelief." To reply to it would require a great deal of space, it is so full of rhapsodical statements without a single scrap of evidence. But we may take a couple of points. Mr. Moll says that Christianity "created the hospital." Now this is absolutely false. A glance at the article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*—not to mention more recondite sources—is sufficient to show what a foolish lie it is. Mr. Moll also says that "Christianity" broke down the walls of national jealousy and hatred." But he does not say when and where. The Roman Empire broke down national divisions, and brought about a certain cosmopolitanism; otherwise Christianity would never have stood a chance. But after the fall of the Roman Empire national divisions grew up again, and they are as strong to-day as they ever were in the world's history. Christianity does nothing at all to destroy them. Christian countries have to form Alliances to keep other Christian countries from falling upon them, and robbing and murdering them. Christian countries are more and more erecting tariff barriers against each other's commerce. Christian nations spend hundreds of millions of years on armies and navies, to menace and frighten each other. Yet this Newcastle parson talks about the Christian "brotherhood of man." Brotherhood! Yes, the brotherhood of Cain and Abel. —

"Providence" has been giving New York intense heat after the late heavy rains. Fifty-four persons died of it in three days. Bad enough, no doubt. But nothing to what "Providence" has in store for most of us in the world to come. —

Down in South America the plague has been sent along by that same "Providence." It has spread to nearly all Chilean ports, and the postal service is so disorganised in consequence that no American mails have been received for nine weeks. —

Turning to Europe, we note that serious floods have been granted by "Providence" to Silesia. The church in the village of Arnoldsdorf has been deluged, the churchyard devastated, and bodies washed out of their graves. Not even the dead are sacred, and "Providence" does not even spare its own meeting-places. —

Catholics and Protestants have been loving each other again at Liverpool. Bricks and stones flew about galore, and glass bottles had their place in the scrimmage. The result was extra work for the hospitals. Good old religion! —

Mr. R. Mudie-Smith, the *Daily News* chief enumerator in the late religious census for London, would like to see "The Bishop of London preaching honesty at the Stock Exchange, and the Dean of Westminster preaching purity in Piccadilly-circus." Is this meant for sarcasm? The first part of it surely must be. —

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

(All Engagements suspended until September.)

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.

GEORGE TREBELLS.—You object to our speaking of Shakespeare's "spiritual experience." We explained in our Emerson articles how the word "spiritual" may be used in a natural sense. You forget that even Atheists cannot "run" a special dictionary. You also forget that many "supernatural" words have already passed into natural significances. Would you quarrel with anyone who said (for instance) that "the orator was quite inspired"? Do you never speak of a man's *genius*? Yet a man's *genius* meant originally his attendant spirit.

F. ROCKELL asks us to make a correction. In his letter, a fortnight ago, on Hospitals, he was made to say that they were supported by the *weakly*. This was a misprint for *wealthy*.

JOHN SMITH (Southend).—What question is it you want answered? You do not say. We have no faculty that enables us to know, without being informed, what passes in conversation between yourself and your mysterious friend.

HACKNEY SAINT.—Yes, the *Daily Mail* leader on Dougal's execution was sensible enough. We have a paragraph in "Acid Drops" on Dougal's answer of "Guilty" to the inquisitive chaplain. There was no doubt on that point, and the man of God was engaged in a work of supererogation.

H. MARGERISON.—Pleased to hear it. Catalogues forwarded as desired.

We must repeat that we cannot reply to anonymous communications. The writer's name and address must be given, not necessarily for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always very welcome.

W. VILE.—There is a similar difference between "Abram" and "Abraham." There is such a difference between the Semitic and the European languages; and the different alphabets make the precise rendering of proper names difficult, if not impossible.

G. CROOKSON.—Thanks for the paper. We will read what Dr. Horton has to say, and see if we have anything to say in reply.

J. BLACKHALL.—See "Acid Drops."

A. FAGG.—Received with thanks. Hope to find room for it next week.

A. POWELL.—Glad to know you have "derived pleasure and instruction from the perusal" of our articles.

J. B. W.—Too late for this week's issue; will appear in our next.

S. P.—The verses shall appear directly we can find room for them.

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.

Mr. Foote will be away from London for some time, and his letters will be forwarded to him. It is requested, therefore, that Lecture Notices will *all* be sent in on *postcards* for the present, and that anything addressed to Mr. Foote for use or insertion in the *Freethinker* will be posted so as to reach the office at the latest by the first delivery on Monday.

Mr. F. J. Gould's letter in our last issue called attention to the Bazaar which will be held in September in aid of the funds of the Leicester Secular Society. No excuse need be pleaded for calling attention to it again in this part of the *Freethinker*. We should be very glad to know that a good many of our readers had responded to Mr. Gould's appeal. Money is not asked for—though no Secular Society would

ever be foolish enough to refuse it, unless it were tainted. Articles are wanted that would probably find purchasers at a bazaar; and, of course, they should in all cases be sent carriage paid to the Secular Hall, Humberston-gate. We may add that the time is short. All who mean to assist this most deserving cause should therefore move quickly. Mr. Gould's own address is 41 Lower Hastings-street, Leicester.

The *Academy* reviews Mr. J. M. Robertson's *Pagan Christs*, and refers to "the accusations of atheism and blasphemy which no very long time ago were showered on him by the orthodox." We are pleased to see the *Academy* recognising Mr. Robertson's intellectual character; but we never heard of his being a special object of orthodox hatred, and it is news to us that his Atheism is a thing of the past. We believe the *Academy* is mistaken.

Two fine tributes to the late W. E. Henley appeared in last week's *Academy* and *Athenæum*, the former from the pen of Francis Thompson, the latter signed "H. B. M. W." "He had ideals," the *Athenæum* writer says, "which would brook no temporising and no compromise. He could not deny the truth, or even keep his tongue from proclaiming it. He would starve his body rather than his mind, and when he had flown his colors once they were never to be struck. As a consequence, he was out of touch with an age which lived by compromise and expected suave treatment."

It is not quite correct, however, to say that Henley was "the first critic of repute to call attention to the genius of George Meredith." Mr. Meredith's genius was called attention to more than once in the *Secularist* edited by Mr. Foote in 1876, and particularly by James Thomson ("B. V."), who was a regular contributor. Without discussing "repute," we venture to say that Thomson was a very fine critic, and that nothing superior to his criticism of Meredith has ever appeared.

Returning to Mr. Henley, it is impossible not to admire the brave way he bore himself in spite of constant disease and pain. He did indeed possess, as he said of himself, an "unconquerable soul." His head was indeed bloody under the bludgeonings of chance (to use his own language again), but it was never bowed. He was erect to the end, and (as it were) died standing. But the blow that struck his heart was the cruellest of all. "It is nine years," the *Athenæum* writer says, "since his child died, and it was evident to all his friends that from the date of the loss he began to die." Henley enshrined the memory of that dead child in verse of exquisite pathos. One is obliged to think, though, now the end has come, of Shakespeare's incomparable "There where I have garnered up my heart."

Under the heading of "Is There a God?" the *Midland Express* prints a letter signed "Artisan," dealing with Sir Oliver Lodge's recent lecture. The working-man does not find the learned professor's discourse "very satisfactory," and shrewdly says, "He was speaking to Christians." All Gods, the working-man says, belong to the region of the unknown; and the only difference between the barbarian's God and the God of the scientist is that "the former, through his ignorance, can place his God near him, whilst the latter, with his growing knowledge, has to locate his God further and still further away. But there is always this resemblance, the up-to-date God is generally the ideal of the advanced men of his time."

We are always pleased to see letters like "Artisan's" in local newspapers. They secure a wide currency for Freethought opinions, and are thus of great value; thousands of people reading them, almost accidentally, who would never look at a Freethought journal.

Mr. W. J. Gott informs us that the Leeds police have been interesting themselves in the Bradford N. S. S. Branch's meetings on Woodhouse Moor. They declared that these meetings infringed the bye-laws in several ways; first, the taking up of collections; second, the sale of literature; third, the advocacy of doctrines calculated to offend the general public. Particular stress was laid on number three. It was also stated that a repetition of these offences would result in the arrest of all persons concerned. On Sunday two large meetings were addressed by Mr. Pack; no collections were taken up, and the public were invited to buy literature outside the Park—which many of them did. The rest was left to look after itself. It remains to be seen whether the police will make themselves ridiculous by trying to stop the advocacy of *particular opinions*. Who made them the intellectual and moral censors of Leeds? Mr. Gott and his colleagues will stand up for their rights, and they will have all the support we can give them.

American Freethinkers.

WHEN I was at Boston at the end of 1896 I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. L. K. Washburn, some of whose articles in the *Boston Investigator* I had reproduced in the *Freethinker* for the benefit of readers on this side of the Atlantic. Mr. Washburn has since taken over the editorship of the *Investigator*, which, by the way, is the oldest Freethought journal in America. A few months ago I was very pleased to see that his appreciative readers were raising a fund to enable him to take a long and much-needed holiday. Soon afterwards I saw that he was starting on a trip to Europe, and I looked forward to the pleasure of meeting him again in London. During my absence in June he called at the *Freethinker* office, and left word that he was going to Paris and other continental cities, and would give me another call on his return. When the time came to begin my own holiday I left behind me an intimation that I would more than gladly run up from the seaside to London to meet Mr. Washburn, if he only gave me the opportunity. This he did, and we foregathered at the Hotel Cecil—the new American paradise in London—on Tuesday, July 14. I found Mr. Washburn accompanied by his colleague Mr. Chainey, a capable, modest, and agreeable young gentleman, whom I had seen once before in London, and was really glad to see again. Mr. Chainey was almost a lad when he was at my house some four years ago. In the interval he had developed a manly appearance. Mr. Washburn was greyer and stouter for the passage of nearly seven years, but his mind was as alert and his eye as bright as ever, and his conversation was no less enjoyable. We talked incessantly for more than three mortal hours about the Freethought movement in England and in America, about the late Colonel Ingersoll, about sundry other topics, and last, though not least, about Shakespeare. Mr. Washburn is a devotee of the god of poetry who was born and buried at Stratford-on-Avon. He was proposing to visit the greatest of all shrines on the morrow. I advised him to pick a fine day for the visit, so that his recollection of it might be perfect. Fortunately the next day's weather was glorious, and I suppose my American friends took advantage of it. I hope they were joined by Mrs. Washburn, who was unhappily confined to her bedroom with a bad cold. I was very sorry to miss seeing her, especially from such a cause. I trust they will have "a good time" in Scotland, and a pleasant voyage home from Liverpool. Had it been earlier or later in the year, they might have paid a visit to a Freethought hall in London, and met English "saints" at their "devotions." This was impossible in the circumstances. So I had to speak in the name of all the said "saints" myself, and tell Mr. Washburn and Mr. Chainey how delightful it always is to grip the hands of our distant Freethought brethren, laboring under other skies for the same "good old cause," and fighting under the same great flag of truth, freedom, and humanity.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Myth of Moses.

"I had set out on a journey, with no other purpose than that of exploring a certain province of natural knowledge; I strayed no hair's breadth from the course which it was my right and my duty to pursue; and yet I found that, whatever route I took, before long, I came to a tall and formidable-looking fence. Confident as I might be in the existence of an ancient and indefeasible right of way, before me stood the thorny barrier with its comminatory notice-board—'No Thoroughfare. By order. MOSES.'" —PROF. T. H. HUXLEY, *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. viii.

THE first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch, were once universally believed to have been written by Moses. This view has now been given up by educated people, under the irresistible pressure of facts.

We give the opinion of some eminent scholars who have impartially studied the subject, and whose

interest and preference lay in giving an opposite verdict:—

"The opinion which used to be universally received that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch must assuredly be abandoned" (Prof. Le Page, Renouf, *Religion of Ancient Egypt*. Hibbert Lectures, p. 49).

"As to the Old Testament, no scholar would suppose that it was the work of one man, or that Moses was even the author of the Pentateuch" (Prof. Max Müller, *Natural Religion*. Gifford Lectures, p. 556).

"True, the more attentively the Pentateuch is examined, and its different parts are compared, the more difficult it becomes to see how the current view of its being written by Moses can be sustained. It contains indications of a later age, which have been often pointed to, and never satisfactorily met" (Canon Driver, *Contemporary Review*, February, 1890).

"Jewish tradition bears that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, Joshua the book named after him, Samuel the book of Judges, and so forth. As all Hebrew history is anonymous—a sure proof that people had not yet learned to lay weight on questions of authorship—it is not probable that this tradition rests on any surer ground than conjecture" (Prof. Robertson Smith, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. 3, article "Bible").

"It has been well established that the Pentateuch was put together much later than Moses from documents Elohist and Jehovistic, as well as oral narratives" (Dr. Davidson, *Revision of the Old Testament*, p. 150).

"Now that the Pentateuch, or rather Hexateuch, is held not to have taken its present form till at least 800 years after his death, and the historical traditions which it embodies are seen to be of various dates and to represent various phases of growth, the outline of his life and character has become dimmer than ever. He still remains, nevertheless, a great historical figure" (Rev. Sutherland Black, *Chambers' Encyclopædia*, article "Moses").

This is the conclusion of English scholarship on the matter. And English scholars are, in religious matters, the most conservative in the world. Heine spoke the bare truth when he declared that "If you speak to the most stupid Englishman about politics, he always knows how to say something rational. But so soon as you turn the conversation on religion, the most sensible Englishman will deliver himself of nothing but absurdities."* Therefore when we find English scholars attacking some time-honored religious belief, we may take it for granted that it was impossible to hold that belief any longer. To have cited the results of Continental criticism on the subject, in even the briefest possible compass, would occupy several articles such as this.

It should be remembered that this result was brought about by the internal critical study of the Bible itself. Kalisch began publishing his critical *Commentary on the Pentateuch* in 1855, and Kuenen his *Religion of Israel* in 1869. These great Jewish and Dutch scholars proved indisputably, from the witness of the first five books themselves, that they could not have been composed by Moses.

This verdict has been confirmed by an unexpected witness from the dead and buried past. In 1872 Mr. George Smith, while investigating the Assyrian tablets in the British Museum, discovered the Assyrian account of the Deluge, shortly followed by the account of the Creation and Fall of Man. These Assyrian tablets were copies of much older Babylonian documents, in existence centuries before the reputed time of Moses.

Since then it has been discovered that the ritual and service of the Jewish Temple, supposed to have been revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai, was merely copied from the older Babylonian religion. Mr. St. Chad Boscawen, of the British Museum, in the chapter on "The Chaldean Temple," in his valuable little book, *From Under the Dust of Ages*, shows that—

"The Sippara tablet gives the portions of the victims to be retained by the priests, the remainder being sacrificed to the gods—'The rump, the tail, the skin, and the flanks, together with choice portions of the stomach and intestines, were to go to the priests, leaving the head and shoulders, with certain portions of fat, for the sacrifices.' Thus we find, as under the Levitical law, a definite portion was set apart out of each offering for the maintenance of the priests (Lev. vii. 28-34; Num.

* *English Fragments*, p. 79.

xviii. 8-19), a like provision was made in the sacrificial codes of Carthage and Marseilles. From Sippara we learn that two classes of sacrifices familiar to us from the Hebrew ritual were in use in Chaldea—'The offerings and peace-offerings of the temple E-parra of every kind.' The offerings we may take to be the ordinary burnt-offering, as in Lev. i. 2-14, here called *Karabi*—literally 'an approachment.' The peace-offering is called *Salma Kurubti*, and corresponds to the sacrifice ordered in Lev., chap. iii. It is evident, from the very emphatic expression already quoted as to the sheep offered in the temple, which I read *Zeni-Magaru Damkate Kabrute*—'Sheep pure, large, and well-favored'—that the victims under the Chaldean, as under the Hebrew law, were to be without blemish (Lev. i. 3-10; iii. 1, 6). The heave-offering, which takes so prominent a part in the Hebrew code, was also in use in the temples of Chaldea.....The passage I have already quoted speaks of 'first-fruits' (*Suluppi-Reseti*); and among the Egibi tablets from Babylon, and the contract and fiscal tablets from Sippara, are large numbers of receipts for the 'first-fruit dues' (pp. 21-22).

Further, Mr. Boscawen tells us that "Another offering, common alike to the Hebrew and the Chaldean, was the sin offering," while the representation of the priests "show them with shaven heads, wearing a plain robe resembling the ephod, bound with a girdle, as did the Jewish priests (Ex. xxviii. 6-12), while the mitre may be contrasted with the curious conical headdress worn by a Babylonian priest in one of the sculptures representing the Babylonian war of Assurbani-abela, where a Babylonian priest approaches the king. From an inscription now in the Museum we learn that the king, in his character of Pontifex Maximus, wore a breastplate adorned with twelve precious stones" (p. 25).

We also learn that the revenues of the priests "were derived from tithes payable in kind," and that "The temple was also the Court of Justice, and, as the Jewish Sanhedrim met in the temple, so did the council of the 'grey-haired ones' meet to answer judgment in the courts of the Chaldean temples." The temples also contained an ark, a holy of holies; and Professor Sayce tells us that "The temples of Babylonia were provided with large basins filled with water, and used for purificatory purposes, which resembled the 'sea' made by Solomon for his temple at Jerusalem."

Here we have all the religious machinery said to have been revealed by God to Moses in full working order, centuries before the time when Moses lived! The Rev. Sutherland Black might well remark that the "outline" of Moses became "dimmer than ever." Still, to the orthodox, he nevertheless remained "a great historical figure." It was still believed that he was found in the bullrushes on the Nile, and led the Israelites out of Egypt. But, as we have shown in a previous article, the Exodus is utterly unhistorical; there is no record of it upon any Egyptian monument, nor any record of the Jewish captivity in Egypt; and at the very time the Egyptian army is said to have been destroyed in the Red Sea we find it subjugating Canaan, the very country to which the Israelites are stated to have fled. Moreover, the legend of his birth was related of Sargon I., king of Akkad, who lived 8,800 years before Christ. "The story of his birth," says Mr. Boscawen, "presents many features closely resembling the story of Moses."† He was born on the banks of the Euphrates. The record goes on to say: "My little mother bore me in a secret place; she placed me in a basket of reeds, with bitumen she closed its mouth. She gave me to the river, which did not cover over me, but carried me to Akki the irrigator." The tablet goes on to tell how the hero grew up, and eventually became king, and united all the country under one rule. What plagiarisers these Hebrews were, and how they have deceived the Gentiles for more than two thousand years! It is really worthy of the best traditions of Petticoat-lane.

* *Religion of the Ancient Babylonians*, p. 62.

† *The Bible and the Monuments*, p. 22; 1895. We can recommend this work to our readers. It is published by Eyre and Spottiswoode; 5s.

Not only did they annex the story of King Sargon, but they actually took the character of Moses as the God-inspired legislator from another king, who lived 2200 B.C., or nearly a thousand years before Moses.

In the beginning of 1902 M. de Morgan, while excavating at Susa, discovered what the *Times* describes as "one of the most remarkable historical monuments that has ever been recovered from the buried cities of the ancient world." This is no less than the code of laws revealed by the Babylonian God to King Khammurabi. The column, which stands nearly eight feet high, is of black diorite, and contains over three thousand lines; is surmounted by a representation of "the king standing before the throne of a seated divinity, from whose shoulders flames of fire proceed to form wings, who is dictating to the king the laws." The *Times* contributor, who is evidently a skilled Assyriologist, considers that the deity represented is Bel or Ellu, "of the 'Great Mountain' or El Shaddai, who figures prominently in the text as the god who inspired the king.....The old Bel was the god who dwelt on the mountain of the world and gave laws to men, and wore on his breast the tablets of destiny. So here we have a curious proof of the existence of the tradition of the mountain-given law long before the Mosaic reception on Sinai." The writer goes on: "We now come to the important question of the relation of this code to the Law of the Covenant and the Deuteronomy laws of the Hebrews. At once we find an astonishing agreement. Both are laws based on the *jus talionis*. The Hebrew is emphatic on this (Ex. xxi. 23-24). So the Babylonian Code (Clauses 196-201)." In a case of unintentional assault the injured party was to be compensated in both laws. "The Hebrews punished an assault on the father by death, the Babylonians by loss of both hands. The most striking example, and an almost undoubted proof of connection, is found in the clauses relating to goring by an ox." The writer adds that "Many other close similarities between the Babylonian code and the Hebrew might be traced, but sufficient have been noticed to show that the Law of the Covenant at least must have been influenced by this code."

This contribution appeared in the *Times* for April 14. On the following day the *Times* came out with a leader entitled "Things New and Old," in which the *Times* concedes all that Thomas Paine, Charles Bradlaugh, and Colonel Ingersoll fought and suffered for, and for which Christians have covered them with the foulest slanders. When we remember all the flouts and sneers indulged in by the *Times* at scepticism, Freethought, and Secularism, we feel that indeed the world does move; we wish that some of the old veterans could be touched with some "reviving herb" to see this day—Woolston, who expired in his prison cell "without the help of a friend's hand"; Carlile, the lion of Freethought, who spent nine years in prison for fighting the Bible. How they would have delighted in the breaches made by modern science in the enchanted walls of superstition. We subjoin the following from the article in question:—

"Archæological research is not, perhaps, always welcomed by those whose accepted conclusions it reverses. If it confirms some old traditions, it discredits others, and, when such traditions are consecrated by religious associations or enshrined in venerated religious literature, doubts thrown upon them are apt for a time, but only for a time, to be regarded as a slur upon religion itself. The code of Khammurabi adds one more to a series of discoveries which have proved to every open mind that the ideas, religious and secular, of the early Hebrews enshrined for us in the Old Testament were not all original, but were largely influenced by an older Babylonian civilisation disclosed by the witness of the monuments. The Biblical accounts of the Creation or of the Deluge are shown to be variants of traditions common to the Hebrews with, or perhaps borrowed by them from, other nations of antiquity. The chronology of Archbishop Ussher, still preserved in our Authorised Version of the Bible, has been utterly discredited by modern discoveries. The 'days' of the Mosaic account of the Creation need no longer be understood literally under pain of excommunication or its equivalent, nor is

the explanation of the Fall of Man as an early attempt to explain the perennially insoluble problem of the origin of evil now received with the pious horror of even half a century ago. We have, it may be hoped, left behind for good the *non possumus* attitude of earlier theology towards new light." §

§ The Times, April 15, 1903.

Nor is the sensation caused by this discovery confined to the *Times*. The omniscient Mr. Stead gives the Code the place of honor in the *Review of Reviews* for May as the "Book of the Month," and he also points out the seriousness of the situation to the believers in the Bible, after stating that "whoever wrote the 'five books of Moses,' Moses did not. The dates at which they were compiled vary, some coming down as late as the sixth or seventh century before Christ. But even when the Higher Criticism had done its worst the laws of Moses were still *primus inter pares* among the ancient codes of the world," he admits that now it is "no longer possible to claim for the Decalogue and the Levitical Law the pride of place which has for so many centuries been regarded as their incontestable right." And he goes on to say "it is impossible to disguise the fact that many good people, probably a majority of professing Christians, will regard the discovery of the Code of Khammurabi with profound dismay. They will have to reconstruct their theories of inspiration and create for themselves some working substitute for the old belief which has served them so long."

Let us not forget that it is these Books of Moses that Churchmen and Nonconformists wish to have taught in our schools, and thrust upon the heathen, with the help of British gun-boats, with money which should be used in the cause of social amelioration.

W. MANN.

Is There a God?

THIS question is so large, and contains so much, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to give a brief and a clear answer to the question.

The belief, not only in one personal God, but in many gods, is so old and so general, that we have been born, under the force of heredity, more or less strong, with a bias towards the belief. There is no doubt that primitive society believed in a multiplicity of personal gods, and the gods believed in were of the same type and character as the people themselves. It could not be otherwise. It took long ages to evolve the idea of one personal God from the belief in many gods. Any idea, habit, or sentiment, long established, dies hard. If the belief in one personal God will ever evolve into a belief in one universe instead of one God, it is certain to take long ages to do so.

In addition to heredity, environment has played, and still does play, an important part in fixing a belief in a personal God in our minds. The home, the nursery, the school, church and chapel, courts of justice, and society at large, are all full of the idea. It is taught that doubt is a great sin, and to deny is the greatest crime. An Atheist and an Agnostic are looked upon as bad and dangerous men. They are shunned and socially punished in many quarters. Many offices and positions are closed against them, unless they become hypocrites and conceal their doubts. It is impossible to avow even a doubt of the existence of God without a sacrifice, and only men of courage are equal to the task.

Is there a God? The question is vague. It requires a definition. What do people mean when they use the word "God"? When we use the words "house," "field," "factory," and "railway," we have objects in view corresponding to those words, and we could tell an inquirer what we mean when we use the words. Have men any definite idea when they use the word "God"? I scarcely think they have. The truth is, that most people have never given the matter a thought. They have received their belief from society, and repeat it like a parrot, without a thought of what it means. Once people begin to think and

ask questions, doubt begins, and much of what was supposed to be knowledge vanishes like mist before the sun, and is no more.

What is the definition of the word "God"? We have a right to know. Men who tell us to believe, and blame and punish us if we cannot, ought to give us full information on the matter, if they have any information to give. If they know nothing, it is presumption, if not something worse, on their part to pretend to know, when they know nothing. Is God a person? It seems to me that the only conception possible to man of a person is an organised being, something similar, or after a like fashion, to man himself. If God is a being, he must have a body and members of that body. Whatever the nature of his body, it must have sustenance to continue its existence. All that we know of nature teaches us that everything is changing and wasting, and nothing can continue without being replenished. An organised being must have a place. If God is a person, he must be somewhere. He cannot be everywhere. Were we to conceive him to be a being as large as the sun, he would still require a place to be in, and would be a mere speck in infinite space. It is possible there may be bodies in space millions of times larger than the sun, of which we have no knowledge, and which the most powerful telescopes have never revealed to astronomers. But a being of that sort can scarcely be the God we are commanded to believe in. We are told he is infinite and eternal. We can conceive of infinite space and duration, but we cannot think of space and duration as a person. We have an idea of light, heat, motion, love, truth, and justice, and many other such things, but we cannot think of them as organised beings. An infinite person is unthinkable. An infinite is everything. Two infinities are impossible. If there is a God, and he is infinite, he is everything, and everything is part of him.

All these considerations show the need of a definition of the term God. What is he? Where is he? Can he be seen? Can he be approached? Has anyone ever seen him? Has anyone ever had a talk with him? Does he ever show himself? Is there anywhere anything to prove to all men that he exists? It is of no use to call these frivolous questions. They are pertinent, and ought to be answered, or a confession ought to be made that we know nothing of such a being, and therefore cannot answer such questions. It is useless to say that the universe, part of which we can see, is an evidence of the existence of an infinite being whom we cannot see. The universe is an evidence of itself only. If it is asked who made the universe, implying that it was made, and made by God, we can answer the question by asking another, Who made God? If we are told that God was not made, but existed eternally, we can reply that the universe, which we see in part and know in part, is eternal. The evidence of that is in the fact that matter cannot be destroyed.

Of nature we know a little. We are parts of it, we can see it, we can handle and use it. But of a god we know absolutely nothing. We have never seen a god. We have never heard the voice of a god. We have never received a message from a god. And besides, we have never come across any one who has seen, heard, or had a communication from a god. We are in total ignorance on the question, and so are all others. The sum total of our knowledge on this question is nothing. Therefore the only wise course for us to pursue is to suspend our judgment, neither affirming nor denying, until we obtain some positive knowledge on the subject.

Is there a god? We do not know. What there may be in infinite space it is impossible for any finite man to know, and all men are finite individually and in the mass. It is quite as easy to imagine many gods as to imagine one. As a matter of fact men do imagine many gods. Like the climate and the fauna, the belief in God or gods varies with the geographical position. It varies also in the same latitude and longitude. Even here some have no god. Others have one. The many have three, but they say that

the three are only one. The very diversity of the ideas of God prove that they are mere imaginations, without a single foundation of facts and knowledge underneath them.

Belief in a god is affected by circumstances and conditions locally existing, as well as by geographical and climatic positions. A slum child has a different god to the high-born child. Heredity and training determine, at the beginning, the character of their god. We are all the creatures of circumstances. We did not make ourselves nor the conditions in which we find ourselves. Individually, it is very little we can do to change ourselves or our surroundings. Man's power is mostly in the mass, and not in the unit. All the units united and trained to act intelligently together, are almost almighty, and could do much to alter the conditions of all. The difficulty is in the training and organising. But the unit can do but little, even in manhood. In childhood and infancy the unit is helpless, and depends entirely on others. Hence every one grows up with different ideas of God and other matters. An Unitarian child, a Jew child, a Catholic child, a Protestant child, a Nonconformist child, will each have a different god. In an Agnostic family, again, the child, in all probability, will grow up without a god of any kind. Such a difference shows that there is no real knowledge on the question existing. It is all guessing and imagining, and a great deal of it, I fancy, the result of interested teaching, of knowing, cunning, and designing priests, kings, and rulers, carried on throughout the ages in order to keep the masses in economic and intellectual bondage, for the benefit and aggrandisement of the privileged classes.

R. J. DERFEL.

(To be continued.)

Correspondence.

MR. ENGSTRÖM EXPLAINS.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I do not complain of your attack upon me in your issue of July 19, p. 457; for you could not know that, when I wrote the letter you refer to, I was not at all certain that the Christian Evidence Society could supply Dr. Schaff's book at the price I named. Its ability to do so entirely depended on a reply from the publishers, which had not then come in.

I may also observe that I am not Secretary of the C.E.S.; inasmuch as I resigned that post in October last, being unable to bear the strain of official duties, though I still work for it to the utmost of my power as Hon. Sec.

As my labors, 1881-1902, were the result of intense conviction, there never has been anything of a merely official character about them; and, though I have always been proud of being the mouthpiece of a Committee who have consistently striven to realise the ideal standard set up by two of the Society's very oldest friends and coadjutors—Dr. Sanday and Mr. Alex. J. Harrison—I have often written, dating from this Club, as a private individual.

C. LLOYD ENGSTRÖM.

United University Club, S.W., July 17, 1903.

[We should be sorry to do Mr. Engström an injustice, but it is a pity he put himself in the way to be misunderstood. We were not aware that he had ceased to be the Secretary of the Christian Evidence Society. Still, it was rather an unfortunate expression, on the part of the Honorary Secretary to say that "at least he believed" a certain book could be purchased at the Society's office. We regret that, through ignorance, we did not allow for the difference between the knowledge of a Secretary and that of an Honorary Secretary.—EDITOR.]

PURITAN QUALITIES.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—If I may be permitted to interrupt Mr. Trevor's interesting series of articles, I would ask for some further particulars of the "admirable and fascinating qualities" with which he credits Puritanism. My excuse will be that I have totally failed to discover them myself, and, as we are threatened with a recrudescence of Puritanism, it would be well to be prepared to seize upon these good qualities (if they exist) to compensate for the bad everywhere recognised. Details of the *Righteousness* claimed would be welcome.

Also any proof that this Righteousness is of any value to the world at large.

Pray do not take this letter as being written in any carpenter's spirit. I only seek information.

G. M. POOLE.

IS LIFE A PRIVILEGE?

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I wrote informing you that a correspondent had stated in the *Freethinker* that "life is a privilege."

Knowing the correspondent's address, I wrote asking him to tell me what his assertion meant. Not getting any reply to my inquiry, I wanted to see if you could assist me to clear up the mystery. Now, you very fairly offer to insert my application in your journal, which kindness I readily avail myself of, as perhaps this might be the means of inducing some of your readers to help me to solve the enigma.

GEORGE JACOB.

Indictment of the Church.

HUMANITY has a terrible indictment against theology, but the charge cannot be laid at the door of our contemporaries. Nevertheless, in the degree that the Church has not purged itself of the old Adam of the anti-progressive spirit, she stands condemned before the modern world, and with no such plea as antiquity might offer. Her condemnation is complete. Taking history no farther back than the last century, it will be found that there was not a movement, political, social, or intellectual, having for its aim the bettering of the condition of the people, which she did not oppose tooth and nail. She lifted no voice against the barbaric criminal code under which, well within the nineteenth century, two hundred offences were punishable with death; her bishops opposed the measures for the abolition of theological tests for public offices, for the removal of disabilities on Roman Catholics, Jews, and Dissenters, in the abolition of slavery in British possessions, and in the reform of the incredibly horrible state of prisons and of the inhuman treatment of lunatics in this kingdom she took no initiative. She fought against unsectarian elementary education; she still wages bitter war to enforce the teaching of her discredited dogmas, and, to her even greater shame, fairs and fosters the spirit of militarism in temples on whose walls are inscribed, "On earth peace, good will toward men." And, withal, trading on the ignorance of the multitude, her ministers have the audacity to claim credit for the removal of unjust and brutal measures from the statute-book of the realm and for the general spread of humanitarianism, whereas it is solely to the development of sympathy born of knowledge that these are due. The Church has tardily followed where these have led. For these reasons, written clear on the page of history, Huxley called the ecclesiastical spirit "the deadly enemy of science."
—Edward Clodd.

OVERPRAYING.—"These turrrible floods out in Kansas make me think of a story my father used to tell of the early days in a Western settlement," reminisced the oldest inhabitant. "Pa said that once in his colony the crops were sufferin' from a long dry spell, till it looked as if the corn and wheat wouldn't be knee high to a grasshopper when the time came for harvestin'. At last things got so serious that the Methodist preacher, a lively little chap, got his people together for a protracted prayer-meetin' to ask for rain. They prayed powerful hard, and after a few days the rain sure 'nough come, but not in the shape they was hopin' for, but a genuine cloudburst, rip roarin' and ragin' and sweepin' everything loose and most things that was supposed to be fast, before it. In the midst of the excitement one old settler yelled back as he floated down stream on the top of his pig-pen: "Durn them Methodists! I allus did say they was given to over-doin' things!"

IN THEIR 'ATS.—Colonel X—got a poor woman, in whom he took some interest, admitted into a hospital. She found herself dying, and sent an urgent message to the Colonel to come and see her. She had a favor to ask him. She had had read to her about the Broad Gate and the Strait Gate, and Christ had said of the latter, "Few there be that go in their 'at"—would the Colonel see that they buried her in hers?

A CHURCH FAIR BOOMERANG.—Mr. Jackson: "Dat grab-bag am a swindle. I paid a quartah fo' a grab an' see what I done got?" Mr. Johnson: "What am it?" Mr. Jackson: "De same lead nickel I put in de contribution box last Sunday."

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.**OUTDOOR**

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 8.15 and 6.15, Mr. Davies.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Station-road, 11.30, G. Green; Brockwell Park, 3.15 and 6.30, E. B. Rose.

EAST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Mile End Waste): 11.30, a Lecture.

FINSBURY BRANCH N. S. S. (Clerkenwell-green): 11.30, W. J. Ramsey.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (corner of Ridley-road, Dalston): 11.30, C. Cohen.

STRATFORD GROVE: 7, W. J. Ramsey.

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

COUNTRY.

BINGLEY (Main-street): Monday, 27, at 7, Ernest Pack, "What Is Atheism?"

BRADFORD (Town Hall Square): 11, Ernest Pack, "Where Is Heaven?"

HALIFAX (Market-place): Tuesday 28, Ernest Pack, "Religion and Freethought."

HEDDERSFIELD (Market Cross): Wednesday, 29, Ernest Pack, "Christian Infidels."

KRIGHLEY (Recreation Ground): Thursday, 30, Ernest Pack, "Salvation."

LEEDS (Woodhouse Moor): 3, Ernest Pack, "God"; 6.30, "Parables."

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