

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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For want of general cultivation how greatly individual excellence is crippled. Of what avail, for example, is it for any one of us to have surmounted any social terror, or any superstition, while his neighbors lie sunk in it? His conduct in reference to them becomes a constant care and burden.—ARTHUR HELPS.

Torrey's Trashy Tales.

THE Devil is sometimes called the Father of Lies; but this is only making him a sort of foundling hospital for other people's unclaimed progeny. Shakespeare was much nearer the mark when he wrote "the Prince of Darkness is a gentleman." There are many liars in the Bible, but Satan is not one of them. Nearly, if not absolutely, all of them were strictly orthodox. There was no need to trouble the Devil for a liar. A plentiful stock existed outside his dominions. They were even found in heaven, in spite of the book of Revelation. When Jehovah wanted "a lying spirit" to deceive Ahab and lure him to his doom at Ramoth-gilead, it was not necessary to send to hell for a messenger. A competent volunteer was found at Jehovah's elbow. And his method of procedure was to put lies in the mouths of the prophets.

That same lying spirit (or others of the same fraternity) has been busy in this world ever since. Satan walked up and down this planet; he stood erect and carried on his business honorably. The godly liars sneaked about, dropping profitable or malicious tales right and left as they went "crawling between heaven and earth."

One of this kind is Dr. Torrey—the Yankee evangelist, a deteriorated copy of the late Mr. Moody, who is now on another soul-saving expedition in Great Britain. We have already dealt with his infamous lies about Thomas Paine. We now deal with one of his infamous lies about Colonel Ingersoll.

Dr. Torrey has asserted that Ingersoll was concerned in circulating immoral books through the American mails, that he agitated for the repeal of the law against the transmission of obscene literature, and that he presented a petition to Congress in favor of that object.

This is a sheer, malignant invention. It is not only untrue, but the very opposite of the truth. It is a pure Torreyism.

Our readers will recollect that the late Mr. Gladstone went one better than Dr. Torrey. He "understood"—without taking the trouble to inquire—that Ingersoll had been actually sent to prison for sending "improper" books through the American mails. Such is the progress of malicious fables amongst the disciples of the gospel of charity. No wonder that Ingersoll himself said that nothing in this world flourishes like a good, sound, healthy religious lie.

We have called this infamous lie about Ingersoll a Torreyism. We do not mean by this that he invented it. He does not appear to have originality enough to invent anything. We mean that it is worthy of Torrey, and one of the budget of libels on great Freethinkers which he carries about from town to town—all for the glory of God. *His God.*

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We find that the lie originated before Dr. Torrey took the field. As far back as March 18, 1878, Ingersoll wrote from Washington a letter to the *Boston Journal*, which had stated that he and others felt "aggrieved because Congress, in 1873, enacted a law for the suppression of obscene literature," and that they were agitating for its repeal; and it graciously added that "When a man's conscience permits him to spread broadcast obscene literature it is time that conscience was muzzled." The following is what Ingersoll said in reply:—

"No one wishes for the repeal of any law for the suppression of obscene literature. For my part, I wish all such laws rigidly enforced. The only objection I have to the law of 1873 is that it has been construed to include books and pamphlets written against the religion of the day, although containing nothing that can be called obscene or impure. Certain religious fanatics, taking advantage of the word 'immoral' in the law, have claimed that all writings against what they are pleased to call orthodox religion are immoral, and such books have been seized and their authors arrested. To this, and this only, I object.

"Your article does me great injustice, and I ask that you will have the kindness to publish this note.

"From the bottom of my heart I despise the publishers of obscene literature. Below them there is no depth of filth. And I also despise those, who, under the pretence of suppressing obscene literature, endeavor to prevent honest and pure men from writing and publishing honest and pure thoughts."

Surely this was plain enough. Even evangelists might have understood it. Ingersoll merely objected to the "obscenity" law being used to suppress "blasphemy" and punish "blasphemers." No doubt there are persons who think such a trick impossible. But it has often been resorted to. Under the pretence of excluding "immoral" literature, the Customs officials in Australia, for instance, have seized a great number of copies of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. Now everybody knows that this book is not "immoral" in the ordinary sense of the word. But these Australian bigots argue in the same way as the English bigots did in 1888. When the editor of the *Freethinker* was prosecuted for "blasphemy" and sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment, the bigots were rather surprised at the breadth and depth of the protest made against such an act of intolerance. Consequently, to justify themselves, they declared that the imprisoned man's attacks on Christianity were "indecent"—that is (in their opinion) in bad taste; and, having got in the word "indecent" they proceeded to develop it, so that it presently became "obscene"; and at last the Home Secretary, Sir William Harcourt, stood up in the House of Commons and affirmed that the editor of the *Freethinker* was in prison for an "obscene libel." All protests were in vain. The bigots simply took no notice of them, but went on using the word "obscene." Not even the protest of Lord Chief Justice Coleridge from the Court of Queen's Bench made the slightest difference. "Mr. Foote," he said, "may be blasphemous, but he certainly is not licentious, and you do not find him pandering to the bad passions of mankind." But it was all no use. The bigots had got hold of a good word, and they worked it for all it was worth. They did not care a straw about its truth. They were only concerned with its utility.

Just in the same way it suited the convenience of American bigots to stop Freethought books from going through the mails on the ground that they were "immoral." They merely meant that such books were "immoral" because they attacked Christianity, and without Christianity there could be no morality. Of course it was soon easy to change "immoral" into "obscene." And thus it came about that honest and pure Freethinkers, who objected to their books being seized and destroyed by the American Post Office, found themselves accused of wanting to repeal the laws against the circulation of obscene literature.

Some American Freethinkers were so indignant at this paltry trick, this dishonest manufacture of inferential obscenity, that they did demand the absolute repeal of the Comstock law by which books and other things were impounded by the Post Office, and under which the officials claimed the authority to open anything they pleased, and to break the seals of private correspondence. These Freethinkers thought it better to make the Post Office sacred, as it were, for all citizens, than to hand over such arbitrary power to irresponsible officials. They were the repealers.

Ingersoll, however, was not a repealer. He was a modifier. He wanted the law amended, not abolished. And it was upon this difference, as we shall see presently, that he felt obliged to break away from his freethinking friends on the National Liberal League, when the matter came up for discussion at the Annual Congress; resigning his vice-presidency of the League, and refusing to have anything more to do with the organisation until it dropped all side issues, and confined itself to "the Nine Demands of Liberalism."

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

Faith and Fact.

MR. G. K. CHESTERTON is a gentleman who is fond of paradoxes. The taste is pardonable, it is amusing, and may be quite harmless. But it often carries with it one great disadvantage; in the search for the paradoxical one is apt to lose sight of the real point at issue. A verbal similarity or difference may excite the sportsmanlike sense of the paradox-hunter, and the discussion becomes one of jangling phrases rather than of conflicting thoughts. To an outsider Mr. Chesterton does not seem to be much of a Christian, or even to have much faith in religious beliefs in general. Yet he has for some time in various journals of a more or less religious character taken upon himself the defence of religion, if one can call so a series of articles that seem to aim at nothing in particular, except the one end of proving that belief and unbelief are equally reasonable or unreasonable, just as one likes to take the matter. Someone said of Mr. Balfour's *Foundations of Belief* that its author was trying to hide his general disbelief in religion by emphasising his special disbelief in modern thought; and surely one might say of Mr. Chesterton that he is trying to divert attention from his general disbelief in Christianity by calling notice to his special dissent from Freethought.

Mr. Chesterton's favorite thesis is that whether we have religion or do not have it, we have to swallow exactly the same mysteries; and in a recent article he illustrates his point by criticising the manner in which the average Freethinker deals with the phenomenon of religious faith. The Freethinker, he argues, evades the real question by damning faith as being the outcome of credulity and ignorance, and therefore his after-verdict is but a carrying into effect his initial conviction. He has not experienced faith, and consequently has not tested it. The real question, he submits, is, "Are there or are there not certain powers and experiences possible to the human mind which really occur when the mind is suitably

disposed, but for which that mind, in our particular civilisation, is not suitably disposed? Is the religious history of mankind a chronicle of accidental lies, delusions, and coincidences? Or is it a chronicle of real things which we happen not to be able to do, and real visions which we happen not to be able to see?"

Now all that this amounts to is the familiar pulpit declaration that the Freethinker is one who is spiritually blind, or deficient in a special faculty that other (religious) people possess. Mr. Chesterton says it in a very roundabout manner, and with the air of one propounding something exceedingly novel, but this is really all it is. Mr. Chesterton says that when it is said there is no evidence that faith can work miracles, people are "talking pure rubbish." It is always dangerous to state another person's case, particularly an opponent's, and in this instance the Freethinker is made to look a very thoughtless person by the substitution of one word for another. The Freethinker does not say there is no "evidence" for the alleged working of "faith"; he says there is no *proof* that faith has ever been able to do what it is said to have done. There is plenty of *evidence*—the religious history of the Dark and Middle Ages is full of it, the records of modern revivalism is full of it; but all this evidence is found on examination to be either false, inconclusive, worthless, or based upon a mistaken interpretation of what are now well-known phenomena.

Let us take a few examples. The Catholic Church will produce clouds of testimony from men and women to the effect that certain visions were seen under certain circumstances. And these circumstances are usually long vigils, fasting, praying, a more or less solitary life, and constant meditation upon mystical matters. These witnesses will dilate upon the feeling of exaltation that accompanied and preceded such visions, and will describe the subjective experiences with all the detail that one might use in describing a fit of indigestion, or an attack of the toothache. Now, no Freethinker who understands his case would say that these witnesses were all liars. Nor would he say that they were *all* insane in the general sense of the word. Nor would he deny that under the same conditions he himself would in all probability experience much the same kind of visions and feelings. What he would say, and what he does say, is that all this religious testimony can be explained on pathological grounds as due to an unwholesome nervous strain. If Mr. Chesterton cares to try the experiment, and will sit, like some Hindoo fakir, for so many hours per day contemplating his stomach, and repeating the sacred word "Om," I do not hesitate in saying that he too will see visions; and in that case he need not cite the "cloud of witnesses"—he can cite himself.

Delirium tremens is not a spiritual, although it is a spirituous, complaint. Yet the visions seen by people in this state—the devils and curious animals crawling and rushing in and out—are as real as anything seen by St. Theresa or St. Anthony. Yet I do not suppose for a moment that Mr. Chesterton will argue, particularly in the *Daily News*, that beer or whisky has the power of unlocking a new and real spiritual world to which ordinary people are dead. He will say, of course, that these devils *are* real enough to the people who see them, and that all admit, but that they are in fact the creation of a brain and nervous system disordered by excessive alcoholic indulgence. But will he, or will anybody else, point out the essential difference, if any, between the visions of a St. Theresa and those of a confirmed dipsomaniac? It is beside the mark to run off with the remark that the comparison of a "saint" with a drunkard is degrading. There is nothing degrading in a scientific inquiry; and in all seriousness I assert that the visions of saint and dipsomaniac, the exaltation of the religious mystic, and the exaltation of the opium-eater or whisky-drinker are in all essential features identical. They are each induced by excessive indulgence in one direction, and by the exclusion of counteracting agencies. The dipsomaniac enters

into communication just as much, or just as little, with an actual spiritual world as does the Christian saint.

And, as a matter of fact, a man suffering from *delirium tremens* would in the Middle Ages have been placed on the same level as the "saint." His visions would have been of the lower world exclusively; but there would have been no other distinction. All sorts of lunatics were also placed upon the same level. And I would suggest to Mr. Chesterton that a lunatic asylum would furnish him with quite as many people who have "certain powers and experiences when the mind is suitably disposed" as he can find in "the world-old chorus" of religious witnesses.

And here is another aspect of the matter that one would think a man conducting a really scientific inquiry, and not on the mere hunt for imaginary paradoxes, might have noticed. The Christian "saint" sees visions. So, too, does the Hindoo fakir or the Mohammedan dervish. On Mr. Chesterton's hypothesis they are each catching a glimpse of the spiritual world from which the more materialistic evolution of others has shut them out. Yet the Hindoo never saw the Christian form of the spiritual world, the Christian never saw the Hindoo form, the Mohammedan never saw either. Each sees his own; or, to put it in another way, each sees what his education has led him to see. And while there is such an obvious explanation of these facts so ready to hand, it is almost insanity to propound such fantastic hypotheses for their explanation as Mr. Chesterton parades.

There is also the modern form of this spiritual exaltation. This no longer takes the form of visions. The man who went round nowadays seeing visions and hearing voices and fighting with the Devil, as did Luther and others, would soon find himself in a lunatic asylum. Nowadays people say they *feel* the influence of a spiritual world. They have left off seeing it, and have come down to the more general sense of feeling it. And people are no longer moved to rush off to the wilderness, disdain soap and water, and even clothing, for the sake of their spiritual welfare. On the contrary, they talk much of the gospel of social work, of sanitation, advocate the building of workhouses for the greater glory of God, and behave so that the earlier "saints" would, if they were here, denounce them as children of the Devil.

Why should the "spiritual vision" have undergone this change? If it teaches the holiness of social work in the twentieth century, why should it have taught the exact opposite in the tenth? Surely anyone whose mind is not given over to the fruitless labor of hatching ingenious theories to amuse an idle hour or fill a couple of columns in a newspaper, must see that the whole explanation lies in the difference and influence of environments. The present day Christian, living in a community that calls itself Christian, coming of an ancestry that has been Christian, operated upon by the eloquence and influence of people whose business it is to see that he remains Christian, clothes his social feelings and his morality in a Christian dress, as naturally as he—in this country—expresses his thoughts in the English language, and for exactly the same reason. But his feelings and his morality are no more due to Christianity than his thoughts are due to his use of English. Both are mere accidents of the environment. If he did not think in English, he would in French, or Russian, or German, or some other language. And if his social instincts did not express themselves in Christian dress, they as certainly would in some other manner.

The Freethinker does not, therefore, put on one side the evidence of religion. He accepts it, and shows what is its real nature; and in saying that the Freethinker does not consider this evidence, Mr. Chesterton is about as much at sea on the matter as an educated man can well be. In fact, in his desire to be subtle, he runs a great danger of ceasing to be sensible. In the thirst for paradox he is apt to overlook fact. To the religious world it is no

doubt gratifying to see a man defending unreasonable beliefs by the curious method of showing that there are other forms of irrationality. To others it is only a matter of regret that so able a man should engage in so poor a work.

C. COHEN

Theology and Science.

THE present attitude of theology towards science is in the highest degree anomalous, and there is a strong element of cowardice in it. It is largely a deferential attitude, with a distinct dash of servility in it. It is an attitude that eminently becomes an inferior in the presence of a higher and greater. Theology may not acknowledge its inferiority to science, but it acts as if it were perfectly conscious of it. We know that this has not always been the case. Down to within a hundred years ago, science was under a ban. During the period of her supremacy, the Church treated science not only with disdain, but also with active hatred and cruelty, and did her utmost to suppress it altogether. She was more afraid of knowledge than of the Devil, and was much more active in her opposition to the former than to the latter. This is the reason why the Middle Ages were so barren of scientists, and why the few who did arise were so fiercely persecuted. This was also an unwitting confession of the Church's essential weakness. The power of the priest is in proportion to the ignorance of the people; and, as the object of science was the dissemination of sound knowledge, it was the policy of the Church to thwart it in that object. And this policy the Church carried out, for many centuries, with marvellous success. For a thousand years, and more, science was in a state of suspended animation, and its would-be devotees were muzzled and manacled in the most heartless fashion. But the great law of action and reaction made it impossible for the ecclesiastical authorities to continue their despotic policy for ever. At last, the extreme limit of their tyranny was reached, and a powerful reaction set in. A long, slow process of emancipation began everywhere. The Renaissance, although initiated within, and by, the Church, was in reality an anti-Church movement, and was bound, eventually, to imperil the despotism of dogma. It involved the revival of Learning, the bursting of traditional bonds, the shattering of priestly power, and the humanising of institutions and manners. Even the Protestant Reformation was, at heart, a blundering expression of man's innate craving for freedom of thought and action. The cruel reign of Orthodoxy came to an end, the Middle Ages closed, the Modern Era began, and liberty glittered in the air as an object of possible possession and enjoyment. Of course, great movements are necessarily slow. The intellect had been in bondage to tradition so long that its emancipation could not be effected in a day. But the culmination of the Renaissance, during the half century between 1450 and 1500, was a clear indication that mankind had awakened from their long slumber, and would never cease to fight for freedom until they obtained it. No ecclesiastical tyranny, no Inquisition horrors or atrocities, could any longer check the progress of education and science. The progress was painfully slow, but perhaps all the surer on that account.

How did the Renaissance affect the doctrines of the Church? At first it practically made no impression whatever upon them. Theologically, the Catholic Church continued for a long time to stand where it stood in the thirteenth century. Science has accomplished its gigantic work outside the ecclesiastical pale, and in spite of the bitterest theological opposition. All the great discoveries in Astronomy, Geology, and Biology were violently denounced as wicked contradictions of the infallible teaching of the sacred Scriptures. The discoverers were insulted, reviled, excommunicated, and branded as Atheists. The Protestants were not one whit more tolerant than the Catho-

lics. Some of us remember the bad-tempered controversies that raged during the sixties and seventies of last century. Darwin's *Origin of Species* appeared in 1859, and his *Descent of Man* in 1871, and at once all the Churches rose like one man to demolish both the author and his books. His theory of Evolution was a godless, blasphemous, hellish heresy, and the religious press teemed with rancorous denunciations of it. Archbishops and bishops, deans and canons, vicars and curates, and Nonconformist ministers by the thousand, vied with one another in anathematizing this spawn of the Pit. Books appeared by the hundred, the one object of which was to point out the utter absurdity and inconceivableness of the Darwinian hypothesis, as it was scornfully called. But Darwin stood on firm ground, and was able to hold his own. Nor was he obliged to fight the great battle for truth and freedom single-handed. There were intellectual giants, such as Spencer, Tyndall, and Huxley, who gladly joined him, and rendered invaluable service to the cause. It would be impossible adequately to describe the excitement caused throughout Christendom by Huxley's great Lay Sermon, "On the Physical Basis of Life," preached at Edinburgh in 1868, and Tyndall's famous Belfast Address, delivered before the British Association in 1874. For years afterwards all the churches of the land resounded with loud, vehement, and ignorant attacks on Darwinism, and the representative scientists were annihilated again and again by ten thousand preachers, many of whom had never read a line of their works.

Now, the Churches maintained this attitude of furious opposition to science until they perceived that the scientific leaven was beginning to permeate even their own societies, and that Darwin's startling theory was finding lodgment in the minds of many of their own members. Then the theologians saw the wisdom of submitting, as gracefully as they could, to the inevitable. They ceased to denounce science as a dangerous enemy of the Faith, and began timidly to speak of it as a new ally, as a valuable handmaid of religion, as an impartial witness to the truths of Revelation. Here was a sudden and tactful change of front. Denunciation turned to praise, and attack to support. The great business of theology now was to reconcile the Christian and scientific Bibles. Numerous theories of reconciliation were devised by ingenious divines. Even when the two Bibles flatly contradicted each other, these champions of the Faith managed to effect a most satisfactory harmonisation. Nothing is impossible in the realm of theology. At present, not a few ordained ministers of the Gospel are sworn disciples of Herbert Spencer; and to them there is no discord between the Synthetic Philosophy and Christianity. For all they seem to know to the contrary, the author of *First Principles* and the *Principles of Sociology* may yet be a most devout and orthodox Christian. Wonders never cease!

The history of the relation between religion and science may be summed up in three words—*Conflict*, *Harmony*, and *Independence*. As an illustration let us take the Biblical and scientific accounts of the origin of the universe. The Bible says: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Science says: "There is no proof that the universe ever had a beginning." Genesis declares that God made all things in six days, and orthodoxy used to assure us that each day consisted of twenty-four hours. When geology discovered proofs that the earth had been in existence for many millions of years theology indignantly exclaimed: "Nonsense! We learn from Moses, who was divinely inspired, that the earth cannot be more than some six thousand years old, for it was created exactly six thousand and four years before Christ." By and bye, however, theology, realising the utter fruitlessness of the conflict with science, invented an ingenious theory of harmonisation, according to which the six days of twenty four hours each elastically stretched until they became six periods, of many thousand, if not of many million,

years each. The famous Dr. Chalmers was, I believe, the father of that theory in this country; and it continued to be the accepted theory of the Church for many years. But ere long science pointed out that the order of Creation as given in Genesis was not scientific; and there are many who remember the spirited controversy that took place some years ago, in the *Nineteenth Century*, between two eminent men of the near past, Mr. Gladstone and Professor Huxley. The renowned statesman, with all the debating skill at his command, maintained that the rock of Holy Scripture is absolutely impregnable, while the redoubtable scientist advanced irrefutable arguments for the literal accuracy of the teaching of science on the subject. Just as the controversy had closed, the late Professor Drummond stepped in with the, at that time, original suggestion that the story of creation in Genesis is a poem, a fable, or a parable, and should not be taken literally. According to him there cannot be any conflict between religion and science, because they belong to two radically different spheres, and cannot possibly contradict each other.

The same thing is true with reference to other subjects. The old doctrine of Inspiration declared that the Bible was infallible, and that to doubt any of its statements was a sign of rankest impiety. But the science of Literary Criticism alleged that the Book is both fallible and errant, and teems with mistakes, contradictions, anachronisms, and false teachings. At first the Higher Criticism was regarded as a foe that aimed a fatal blow at the Christian Religion itself, and it was to be given no quarters. But here again science has gloriously triumphed, and the theologians have made a complete surrender. Not long ago faith in the proper deity of Jesus Christ, the confession that he was very God of very God, was said to be essential to salvation; but a fuller understanding of the laws of nature has led modern theologians to the opinion that the divinity of Christ can no longer be taught except in a loose, literary, and flexible sense. Fifty years ago this opinion would have been condemned as Unitarianism in disguise.

It must be remembered that all these changes, modifications, or developments have been literally forced upon theology by science. None of them have come spontaneously from within. It would do the churches good to bear this in mind. The late Professor Drummond gloried in the fact that science had given Christendom a new Bible and a fresh Evangel. But science shows us, further, that it is unscientific to believe in the Supernatural at all, either as found in the Bible, or in religion which is fed on the Bible. Will the theologians permit science to still drive them on? There are indications that they will. The Rev. Dr. Watson (Ian Maclaren) intimated the other day that, in his opinion, the next revival will be an ethical one, in which, of course, the Supernatural will not play a very prominent part. In the estimation of a few ultra-orthodox members of the Birmingham Free Church Council, this suggestion of Dr. Watson is a sign of disloyalty to Christ, and they unhesitatingly charge him with the sin of wishing to substitute a social gospel for the Gospel of Christ. But the fact that cannot be denied is that the Churches are steadily drifting away from the Christianity of the New Testament, that they are giving up superstition after superstition, that they are concentrating their attention more and more upon the present world in its various interests, and that the very doctrine of immortality is slowly losing its hold upon them. This is incontrovertible; and we owe it all to the diffusion of scientific knowledge. Science pays no respect to tradition, nor can it endure the unverifiable. In course of time it will bring the attenuated theology of to-day into universal discredit. It will shatter all its strongholds, and drive it out of all its hiding-places, and it will force from it the confession that it has not a single inch of ground on which to stand. Then Science will reign alone, and all mankind will be its glad and willing subjects.

JOHN LLOYD.

Is the Bible a Suitable Book for Children in Day Schools?

THE letter of the Primate to Dr. Horton, proposing a conference between Church and Chapel, I should think is an impossible document. In the face of the policy and scheme of education drawn up by the Committee of the Free Church Council for submission to the General Executive, and afterwards to the Annual Council which meets at Newcastle-on-Tyne next March, there seems to be little, if anything, that the Free Churches can agree to in the letter of the Primate.

All the items in the scheme of the Free Churches seem right, with the exception of No. 7, in which the Bible difficulty is introduced. Like all Protestants, they have made a fetish of a book, and they must have their idol in the school. But on insisting to have the Bible in the schools, they do not remove the difficulty, they only remove it from dogmatic theology to the Bible. It is true, they propose to limit the teaching to simple biblical instruction; but they give no definition and no explanation or example of what the simple instruction means. Will it include instruction on the inspiration of the Scriptures, the existence of God, the divinity of Jesus, the immortality of the soul, fall of man, the atonement, hell and heaven, and so on? If not, what is it they want to teach from the Bible?

How simple biblical instruction is to be given without touching upon some of these questions I cannot see, nor how the different sects are ever to agree upon their meaning. At all events, the Free Churches ought to explain what they mean by simple biblical instruction.

Besides, the very fact that a selection from the Bible must be made to prevent incessant quarrels amongst the sects, shows how unsuitable and unfit the book is to be made a school instructor. Very little real thinking, one would suppose, would lead Christians to suspect that there is something amiss in the book itself, when men of average intelligence cannot agree upon what it means and teaches. In the world and in the Church the Bible is a bone of contention. And in the schools the Bible can never be anything but a source of difficulty and disagreement. How can it be anything else when endless variety of sects, all differing from one another, claim to be founded on the same Bible.

If anyone attempted to force a translation of the Egyptian Book of the dead, or the rock books of Assyria into the schools, everybody, even the parsons, would laugh the proposal to scorn. But nothing but familiarity and heredity, prevents them from seeing that forcing the Bible into schools is but little, if any, less absurd. The claim of the churches that the Bible is the Word of God, does not lessen the absurdity, but rather increases it. A book that no two churches or two average intelligent men, understand alike, cannot be a suitable book for children. A book that does nothing much but puzzle the intellect and confuse the understanding, might as well be the word of a demented mystic, as a Word of God. As a matter of fact, the Bible is the word of many centuries, and that is the key to all its difficulties, contradictions, and imperfections, but the key is useless, if the Bible is one book and that the Word of God.

The overrating and extravagant claims made by the churches for the Bible does it far more harm than good. As an ancient book everybody can value and revere the Scriptures, in the same way as they do all other antiquities. But to claim perfection for an imperfect volume, and assert infallibility to errors, mistakes, and wilful frauds, makes it difficult sometimes to be respectful to such documents, as similar claims for the Book of the Dead would inevitably tend to lessen our regard for it. That there are many beautiful thoughts and good moral precepts in the Bible is true; but they are often overrated, and

are mixed, very often, with objectionable matter, and sometimes seem to be like a needle in a haystack.

It is doubtful if Christians are thoroughly aware of all that the Bible contains. If they were, it is difficult to believe that they would be anxious to make it a child's book. They pick some parts here and there and call them the Bible, ignoring or not knowing other parts that no one could read to a decent company. There are passages in it that in any other book would be called blasphemy, and considered an indictable matter. If read with open eyes and clear mind, it will prove itself as destructive to faith as any Freethought criticism ever written.

In no sense whatever is the Bible, as a whole, suitable and fit to be a book for children in school. The very fact that the most learned and intelligent men of every civilised nation disagree as to what it means and teaches proves its unreliability. It is true that selections might be made of suitable and elevating lessons from the Scriptures, but even the best of them are greatly overrated by theologians, which is natural for them to do, considering the connection between the Book and them. But I think, with all due deference to Christians, that the learning and intelligence of the present time could produce better moral and ethical lessons than any taken from the Bible. And there is another alternative: the Bible is only one sacred book amongst many; in all of them there are moral lessons, and a selection from all of them would be better, one would think, than any compilation from one.

Christians themselves—at all events, leading Christians—have given the Bible up in everything but what they call religion, without defining what they mean by the word. The myths of Genesis are abandoned. No one would accept the Bible as a guide or authority in Philology. Anyone quoting the story of the Tower of Babel to explain the origin of languages would be laughed to scorn. No one would think of consulting the Bible on Biology, Botany, Geography, Geology, Astronomy, and especially Anthropology. Even in ancient history the Bible is discarded. With the exception of the sect of Peculiar People and a few other deluded cranks, Christians reject the Scriptures as a medical guide. In business, trade, engineering, domestic economy, politics, and internationalism no sane man would dream of consulting the Bible. As for education in the modern idea of the word, the Bible is a blank.

All the preceding matters, and others that might be noticed, are negative ones. But there are other reasons of a more serious character that may be, and ought to be, urged against the Bible as a school-book. To mention all of them even briefly would require a large volume. It is not a pleasant task to speak or write against a fetish, and to expose its defects and blemishes is to many minds positively painful. But when its devotees force it into every school, it becomes a duty to show why it is not suitable for the place. If Christians were satisfied to cherish the Bible in their own churches and chapels, and in their own homes, little would be said against it except in criticism, as applied to any other ancient book. But this they are not willing to do. They, or their priests, want to force it into the hands of all, whether all want it or not. This is, after all, only natural for priests to do, as the Bible is emphatically a priest's book. I write this, not in any bitterness against a priest, but in the interest of truth. I recognise that the priest is the product of the past as much as everything else; and this fact ought to induce a spirit of tolerance, however hurtful we may consider the office of a priest to be. If all present priests were suppressed to-day, the people who believe in them would institute another priesthood under some name or another to-morrow. There is no way to abolish the priest except by convincing the people that the priesthood is a useless institution. Once the people see that they can do as well without a priest as with one, the priest will gradually, and perhaps almost imperceptibly, disappear.

R. J. DERFEL.

(To be concluded.)

Acid Drops.

There is a wonderful, and wonderfully illustrated, religious weekly paper, price one penny, which is said to have hundreds of thousands of readers. It is a standing proof that Carlyle was not far wrong when he said that England contained thirty millions of people—mostly fools. The name of this paper is the *Christian Herald*. It is conducted by Prophet Baxter—the greatest religious liar in Christendom, and therefore almost certainly the greatest religious liar in the world.

A recent number of this paper which lies before us (and how it does lie, to be sure!) tells of "A Blaspheming Infidel's Conversion." It is one of Dr. Torrey's converts. We thought this imaginative Yankee revivalist had dropped the "converted infidel" business. But we see he is still at it. He trotted out lately at St. James's Hall, Manchester, a converted infidel called Read. Dr. Torrey introduced him as "a man who has stood on this platform right here with Bradlaugh." Stood on the platform with Bradlaugh, mark! He must have been a public "infidel" to do that. Well, then, we invite him, or the evangelist who converted him, to say when he stood on the St. James's Hall platform with Bradlaugh, and to mention some known "infidel" who saw him there. We have visited Manchester a great many times during the past thirty years, and we never knew or heard of anyone called Read in connection with the Freethought movement in that city.

Dr. Torrey introduced this Mr. Read as something more than an ordinary "infidel." According to the Yankee evangelist's account of him, Mr. Read not only stood on the platform with Bradlaugh, but stood once on a still more awful spot. He went into "a churchyard and said, 'If there is any God, strike me dead.'" That is what Mr. Read told Dr. Torrey: that is what Dr. Torrey swallowed; and that is what Dr. Torrey told his audience—who swallowed it too.

What we wish to say is just this. If Dr. Torrey really believes Mr. Read's story, he is a bigger fool than we took him to be. If Mr. Read believes it, he is on the way to making the acquaintance of the Commissioners in Lunacy. If the audience believed it, there is nothing particular to be said; for everybody knows the sort of audience that would be listening to Dr. Torrey.

We understand that Mr. Masterman edits the literary page of the *Daily News*. He also contemplates a political career. Well, we hope his politics will be an improvement on his religion. In a column of his part of the organ of the Nonconformist Conscience, recently, we noted the following sentence:—"The old conflict between Religion and Science is fast dying, and a work which should contribute to its decent burial is announced by Mr. George Allen." What this work is does not matter. It is the fatuous remark that we are criticising. The man who says that the conflict between Religion and Science is dying—if in Religion he includes Christianity—is either an ignoramus or a charlatan. This is not very pleasant language, but it is what Mr. Masterman invites.

Mr. T. P. O'Connor has a strange idea of human greatness. Writing in his weekly organ on Daniel O'Connell, he says: "To me he is one of the greatest beings who ever trod this earth; as great as Cæsar; as great as Napoleon; as great as Bismarck; as great as Gladstone." What a strange confusion of names! Fancy putting Gladstone in the category of Cæsar and Napoleon! It is really too ridiculous for criticism. But out of deference to other people's susceptibilities, if there are any who agree with "Tay Pay" on this classification, we may just take one illustration. Does anybody imagine that Cæsar could ever have got into a dispute with an eminent scientist over the miracle of the Gadarene swine? Is it possible to picture Cæsar discussing a narrative of devils leaving men and entering pigs? The mighty brain of Cæsar could not stoop to such puerilities. Neither, for that matter, could the mighty brain of Napoleon. Gladstone's brain took kindly to such puerilities.

Rev. Dr. Stewart, in the Parish Church, Peterhead, preached a sermon the other Sunday evening on "What is God's Christianity?" He had better have taken the question, "What is Christianity's God?" But that would have necessitated his dealing with the Bible; and, except as far as the text is concerned, Dr. Stewart does not appear to have mentioned that volume from one end of his sermon to the other.

There has always been a singular perversity about the *Athenæum's* treatment of great Freethinkers. But it beat its own record in this line in a recent number. Most of our readers will recollect that Giordano Bruno, the famous Freethought martyr, and one of the noblest of all time, was hunted about by bigotry and persecution from one country to another in Europe, and finally captured by the Inquisition, which, after keeping him seven years in prison, and probably torturing him several times, at last burnt him alive on the Field of Flowers at Rome. Well, now, the *Athenæum* actually finds in Bruno's wanderings, flights, and martyrdom nothing but "self-advertisement." It has a sort of belief, we suppose, that he arranged his own tragic death with a view to the greatest possible display. To which stupid malignity of criticism one can only reply that the valet soul never did, and never will, understand heroes.

Sir Leslie Stephen's *An Agnostic's Apology* has just been republished in a cheaper form—although the volume is still priced at seven shillings and sixpence. The *Church Times*, noticing the book, calls it "a very shallow and unsatisfactory collection of essays." We are not surprised at our religious contemporary finding the volume "unsatisfactory"; this, in its way, is a compliment. The only point worth noting in its brief and rather unfair criticism is that it seizes upon Sir Leslie Stephen's praise of Jesus as a man, apart from his divinity, as the point of attack. Freethinkers will one day, perhaps, see the absurdity of lavishing praise upon the moral exhortations placed in the mouth of the gospel Jesus, as though these were something strikingly original and of superlative value. When they do, their own case will be much stronger in its presentation, and critics like the *Church Times* will have to either grapple with important issues, or be silent.

The Bishop of Madras is confident that, judging from the present outlook, "the whole of India may be converted in two or three centuries." Of course, pigs may fly, but we have our doubts. Still, we admire the Bishop's wisdom in placing the realisation of this event three hundred years ahead. The prophecy business is the safest of all trades if one only bears this precaution in mind. Educated Hindoos and Europeans "in the know" will smile; but the pockets of the gullible will be opened; and that is the really important thing in the missionary movement.

Mr. Robert Blatchford offers the Rev. R. J. Campbell, the Rev. Dr. Horton, and other Christian leaders a fair hearing in the *Clarion*. Surely the net is spread in vain in the sight of any bird; and some of these birds are very "fly." Perhaps we may add that the said Christian leaders are also welcome to a reasonable space in the *Freethinker*. We should not have said it if Mr. Blatchford had not given us the opportunity. And we don't pretend that there is much in it now that we have said it.

The *Clarion* has lost at least one reader by "substituting Atheism for Socialism." That is the lost reader's explanation. Mr. Blatchford answers that he has not substituted anything for Socialism. He is a Socialist still, but he has taken on Atheism likewise. This is addition, not substitution; and the fact should be obvious even to a clerical gentleman; but some of the species are very dull dogs.

The Secretary of the Middlesborough and district Branch of the N.S.P.C.C. reports that in response to an appeal made to all the churches in the town for financial support, not a single church had seen its way to make a collection, or even assist in one, in aid of the society's funds. The conversion of the heathen is one thing: the prevention of the ill-treatment of children another, and a very different thing.

The City of London Mission has been requested by one of its supporters to express an opinion upon Mr. Charles Booth's recent work on the religious life of London. The Society replied by a letter from one of its agents to the effect that in one of the districts mentioned by Mr. Booth, several conversions had lately taken place. We are at a loss to see how this disposes of Mr. Booth's practical condemnation of these agencies. It is the easiest thing in the world to secure "conversions." No one questions this; all that is questioned is their worth. We need not discuss the very mixed motives that bring about these "conversions," but what is their value as a means of reducing the mass of destitution and misery and vice of London? Absolutely nil. The only way to meet Mr. Booth's charges—which are only the charges that have been made over and over again in these columns, is to take a particular district, and after eliminating the work of non-religious agencies, to see what is left as the result of these "missions." Parading converted burglars no longer able

to work at their profession, or emotional drunkards who are "saved" one week, and as drunk as ever the next, is after all a simple performance; but the man who imagines that this kind of work is helping to solve *the* problem is fit—for a missionary. Nothing can help towards this end but raising the level of the average intelligence, and economising energy by directing it towards purely social ends, without any admixture of a theology that always has the effect of blinding people to their real interests.

The Bishop of London, speaking at a meeting at Oxford, repudiated the suggestion that the career of a clergyman was a "poverty-stricken life." He also urged his hearers not to debate in their minds whether another profession was not more lucrative, but to ask themselves the question: "May not God be calling me to a life of self-sacrifice rather than to a more lucrative profession elsewhere?" The Bishop evidently has a keener sense of humor than he has been credited with.

A hairdresser at High Wycombe has just been fined for the 102nd time for cutting hair on Sunday. Far from being downhearted by this almost, if not quite, unique experience, he has hung up in his shop a placard inscribed, "102 not out; still running." The notice reflects credit on both his spirit and humor. The bigots seem to have got hold of a tough case this time.

Mr. F. B. Meyer has been visiting the North of England, and his experience there is not very cheerful—for Nonconformists. He says: "The morning congregations are almost as low as they can be. The evening congregations are better, but people seem to know little or nothing about deep religious work." Their chief interest is in tableaux vivants, raffling, theatricals, and suppers. He was told by one preacher, "Our elder scholars like kissing games every two or three weeks," and added that if he failed to satisfy them in this respect they would go to another chapel. And so, we presume, the great task for preachers is to see who can provide the most attractive kind of "kissing games" and general entertainments. And a crowded chapel is chronicled as a "great religious revival," or a great "outpouring of the spirit."

Dr. Gore, Bishop of Worcester, lectured in Birmingham the other day on "Sin." This is a theological subject, and accordingly his hearers were treated to an overdose of theology and an underdose of common sense. Dr. Gore does not believe in progress as "a general and uniform upward tendency"; nor, so far as we are aware, does anybody else. It is all a question of conditions. But he does believe that, "although progress is Divinely destined for man, the actual amount of progress in human history is extraordinarily thin, and the facts of stagnation or deterioration extraordinarily widespread." So that on this theory God "destined" progress for man, but man steps in and knocks the "divine" plan to smithereens. God would like to, but man won't let him. The Devil wrecked his plans at the creation, and man has been wrecking them ever since. In brief, God *could* produce some very fine results if there were no one to interfere with him. So could we all.

Dr. Gore finds that east of the Mediterranean, with the exception of Japan, there is little or no progress. We do not wish, for the moment, to question this too sweeping generalisation; we would only point out that within this proscribed area there exists some of the oldest Christian bodies in existence. Yet Dr. Gore finds here "stagnation..... or manifest deterioration of the intellectual and governing capacity." Well, all we would like to ask is, in the face of this generalisation, What is the value of Christianity as a civilising force? Perhaps, if Dr. Gore were not a theologian, a little further study might enable him to get a really scientific view of the causes of the relative development of nations.

Dr. Gore's conclusion is the usual nonsensical religious one that the cause of the survival of nations, or of their greater development, is solely a question of morals. Certainly, as moral conduct is ultimately a question of adjustment to environment, this may be reckoned as a cause; but to put it down as *the* cause is absurd. Still more absurd when, as with Dr. Gore, morality is synonymous with Christianity. As a matter of fact, almost every nation of antiquity went down before greater military strength and organisation. And does anyone imagine that the mere fact of a small modern nation living cleaner lives than a large one would enable it to conquer in a military tussle? Were the Boers, for example, defeated because they were less moral than the English people? Spain and England, says Dr. Gore, have changed places since the eighteenth century. The date is a trifle late; but let that pass. A sounder historian would

have noted that Spain is a Christian country; that before it became a wholly Christian country it was one of the foremost Powers in Europe, and a centre of civilisation. He would also note that Spain's decline commenced with the expulsion of the Moors and the Jews, and that its fall in the scale of nations is a first-rate example of the paralysing effect of Christianity on a nation's wellbeing when it is not checked by other forces.

Or, finally, take one more case that should appeal to Christians. The Jews went down before the Romans—to go by the Bible they were always going down before someone or other. Was the Babylonian captivity, or the Roman Conquest, due to their moral inferiority? They had the Bible, they had, so Dr. Gore would say, the best and truest knowledge of God that the world then possessed, yet they were frequently beaten, and finally dispersed, and all, on Dr. Gore's theory, because of their moral inferiority to the people who conquered them. Then, in the name of all that is wonderful, what was the value of their Bible and of their knowledge of God? We question whether, on any other subject than theology, an educated man could land himself in so hopeless a muddle. There is small wonder at so many political and social absurdities being perpetrated, when the nation's intellect is fed with stuff of the kind criticised.

The Passive Resistance movement seems to be fizzling out. So we judge from the fact that in some districts a circular is being sent round to every house asking people to assist the movement. The circular contains the usual hypocritical complaint about sectarian endowments and tests, and it also adds that the conscience clause is, and always has been, "an imperfect protection." Yet, whenever Freethinkers have objected to religious instruction in State schools, they have been met with the retort that there was the Conscience Clause, and that gave every reasonable protection. Now it is discovered to be very imperfect. One had better learn late than never; only we believe the admission by Nonconformists *now* is but an admission of their hypocrisy since 1870.

The Education proposals of the National Free Church Council, which were noticed in these columns some time back, have now been officially put forward. With a fine disregard for honesty, and even decency, in view of the agitation that has been carried on, the Council asks for Biblical instruction in the schools, because of "its solemn conviction that the training of the child is not complete without the religious teaching and the presentation of the great Christian verities." It, of course, sees no injustice in having these "verities" taught at the expense of non-Christians. It also objects to ecclesiastical and theological tests, which does not do away with *religious* tests, as the two terms have a very special and limited application as they are used by the Council. Yet everyone knows that, with religion in the schools, a Freethinking teacher will be in exactly the same position as a Nonconformist in a Church school, or a Churchman in a Nonconformist establishment. But, then, as they are Freethinkers, this does not, of course, matter.

It was stated in the daily organ of the Nonconformist Conscience a few days ago that the number of Passive Resistance summonses issued up to date was 6,868, and that there had been 283 sales. Presumably the vast majority of the remaining 6,585 "martyrs" paid up at the sticking place.

Generally speaking, Freethinkers know the Bible much better than Christians; that is often the reason why they are Freethinkers. But there are exceptions to most rules. We notice a correspondent of the New York *Truthseeker*—an admirable paper, in no way responsible for the mistakes of subscribers who write letters to be printed in its columns—referring to "Elijah, the bald-headed gent who was carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire." This is a personal insult to Elijah, who, whatever else he lacked, was not deficient in hair. His successor, Elisha, was the bald-headed gent who played the devil with the children that called attention to his dilapidated condition.

A young Italian priest of this city named Cirringione disappeared for a few days, and when he turned up again he had a weird tale to tell about being kidnapped and imprisoned by masked men. His watch and \$270 belonging to his sister were missing. The police do not take much stock in the priest's story, the more generally favored theory being that the reverend father had been away for a little social relaxation in which he could not very well indulge at the parsonage, and that his sister's money paid the bills. The priest who does not break loose occasionally is an exception. Those who live out of town come to the city, and the city

clergy make little excursions into the suburbs. The police could tell a good deal about this that does not get into the newspapers.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

The City of New York contains 1,750,000 Protestants, 1,260,000 Catholics, and 600,000 Jews. There is no way of getting at the number of "infidels," but they must be a pretty big crowd. Some of them are probably included in the foregoing figures.

The new Roman Catholic Cathedral at Westminster will be opened four days after Christmas. It is the largest house of God in London after St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey. It has cost a tremendous pile of money, and is reckoned to be a handsome dwelling-place for the Deity. There are some people, however, who fancy the money would have been better spent on improved dwellings for the slum population in the immediate vicinity.

"Providence" has begun what promises to be a bad winter's work in the European world. London has had its first experience this season of a heavy pea-soupy fog, choking up people's breathing apparatus, and playing the deuce with the traffic. Storms have raged around the French as well as the British coast—a very unpleasant form of the *entente cordiale*; and terrible snowstorms swept over Italy, doing great damage, and causing serious loss of life. Still, as the good old book says, he doeth all things well.

"One thing befalleth them." Religious buildings get burnt down as well as profane buildings. The Roman Catholic University at Ottawa has been destroyed by fire. Several persons, including two priests, were injured in jumping from a window.

One thing saveth them. The Ottawa University was insured, like secular buildings, in \$178,000. To that extent the managers did not trust the Lord implicitly.

To-day (Dec. 4) is the anniversary of the suppression of *suttee*, or the practice of immolating widows on their husbands' funeral pyres, in India. It was on December 4, 1829, that Lord William Bentinck carried a resolution in Council, by which all who abetted *suttee* were declared guilty of "culpable homicide." In the year 1817 seven hundred widows were burnt alive in Bengal alone, but since the passing of the Act the practice has entirely died out. *Suttee* was really a primitive rite, a survival from barbarous times, and not sanctioned by Hinduism, the passage in the Vedas supporting it being a wilful mistranslation. But no previous Governor had the courage to violate our tradition of religious toleration. Lord William Bentinck is also known for his suppression of Thuggism, which made strangling a religious rite to the goddess Kali. This practice, too, has been completely stamped out, though its name still survives in the police department for the suppression of *Thagi* (Thuggee) and *Dakaiti* (Dacoitee).—*Daily Telegraph*.

Margaret Byers, a St. Pancras charwoman, aged sixty-eight, poisoned herself with oxalic acid, and the coroner's jury returned the usual verdict. In a letter she left for her daughter the deceased said that the Lord was calling her, and quoted the text, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." We don't know whether this poor, tired, distressed old charwoman has found "the Lord," but we feel pretty certain that she has found the "rest."

The Bible's strong point is not arithmetic, and Bible readers are often weak in that direction. It is reported that at a mission conducted at St. Mary's Church, Jersey City, six hundred and fifty married women signed a pledge to abstain from intoxicating liquors. What a lot of female tipplers for one congregation!

Swear not at all, said Jesus Christ; but he got precious near it when his collar was up; and, after all, such expressions as "whited sepulchres," "vipers," and "children of hell" are a bit worse than a big big D. They don't look at the matter in this light, however, in America. An artilleryman at Washington has been fined twenty dollars for swearing in the presence of Mrs. Roosevelt, who wanted him to get out of the way with a heavy load to let her carriage go by. We suppose the lady never heard such language before. President Roosevelt, of course, is far too pious to swear outright.

No wonder the Catholic Church is wailing over its losses in France. During the last eighteen months 10,049 schools

depending on Congregations have been closed; the number of boys' establishments belonging to the Christian Brothers to be suppressed shortly is 1,058; and the girls' schools affected number 1,822. What is worse, the French Premier, M. Combes, threatens to bring in a Bill to abolish the connection between Church and State altogether. This would mean the loss of the salaries paid to all the parish priests and dignitaries of the Catholic Church. "Come in any other form but that."

The Dutch Reformed Synod at Capetown has been discussing that ancient problem, the conversion of the Jews. One of the speakers, the Rev. Mr. McGregor, of Nicuwkerk, argued that the Mission to the Jews should continue to be carried on, because the Jews, as Jews, were a curse to the country, while when converted they were a blessing. Perhaps they are. We don't know. But are there enough of these blessings to do any appreciable good in such a vast place as South Africa? A converted Jew is a very rare bird in England, and we fancy he must be quite as scarce in the land of the Dutch Reformed Church. A correspondent of ours informs us that after twenty years' residence in Cape Colony he only knows of one converted Jew, and that one has "done time" for receiving stolen goods.

"In Charles the Second's time," as the *Daily Chronicle* remarks, "Scotland had her Drunken Parliament, which, with every member but one intoxicated, established episcopacy in Scotland." If it were known what they got drunk upon, the Anglican Bishops might buy some of it and send it round to the leading Passive Resisters.

Mrs. Dowie and her son are touring in grand style in the Eastern hemisphere. In the Western hemisphere Prophet Dowie is reported to be in the hands of the bailiffs. Oh what a fall was there! How are the godly persecuted!

Mrs. Amy Mitchell has obtained a decree nisi against her husband in the Divorce Court on the ground of his adultery and gross cruelty. The cruelty was denied, but the adultery was admitted. The curious plea was advanced that he ought to be dealt with leniently, because he went wrong when his mind was torn with religious doubts. He appears to have sought help from the Lord and the housemaid. The result was that he became a Roman Catholic. He had previously been a Church of England clergyman.

Francois Coppee, the French poet, who is so foolish and bitter an anti-Dreyfusard, is also a Roman Catholic. He became a Catholic after a severe attack of illness. See?

Leo Deutsch, in his graphic and terrible *Sixteen Years in Siberia*, tells the following story, which throws some light on the value of religion as an aid to morality: "One of the most notorious criminals was a man named Lissenko. It was reported of him that in one of his robberies he killed a whole family, men, women, and children. He was about sixty when I first knew him, and still had the strength of a giant. He struck me as being crafty and reckless, but not a malicious kind of fellow, and he was extremely pious withal. No one who knew him personally would easily believe him to have murdered innocent children. I was curious to learn from himself how much truth there was in the reports current concerning him, and I found an opportunity one day of questioning him on the subject. 'Yes, of course, it's true,' said he. 'What about it?' 'But how could you have the heart to kill a child?' 'Oh, I cried all the time I was doing it; but still I killed them,' was the answer. 'It was just God's will. If He had not willed it, I should not have been able to commit the murder; I should have been struck down myself. So it was really God who made me do it.' 'Well, would you murder me if you met me in a safe place?' 'If I knew you had a lot of money about you I should certainly wring your neck,' said the man, with cheerful frankness; 'but there, one does not kill without good reason.'"

It is natural, perhaps, that the Kensit Crusaders should be unusually hot-tempered at Birkenhead, where the late John Kensit received his death-blow. This is no excuse, however, for their going to a Church meeting and howling the Bishop of Chester down. The Bishop called them "a reforming mob," and the "mob" so stuck in their throats that they still demand its withdrawal, and hint that Dr. Jayne will be refused a hearing until he complies. Now we do not care twopence about the Bishop of Chester, but we do care about the right of public meeting, and we would uphold it even if five hundred policemen were required to deal with the disturbers.

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

(Suspended till after Christmas.)

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton. December 20, Camberwell.
- W. P. BALL.—Thanks once more for your useful cuttings.
- H. GLASSE.—Pleased to hear from a Cape Colony reader. See "Acid Drops."
- T. H. ELSTOB.—Mr. Foote will take all possible care of himself, as you desire: but it is sometimes easier to talk prudence than to practise it. The truth is that Mr. Foote has borne too heavy a burden of work and responsibility, and he is trying to find some remedy for this state of things in the new year. Whether he will succeed in finding it is another matter.
- J. A. M. McCORIE.—Thanks for the paper. See "Acid Drops." We are not astonished at the non-appearance of your letter to a local paper on the Torrey Mission. Probably the editor of that paper does not care a straw whether Dr. Torrey libels Thomas Paine or not. There are men, you know, who get their living by pandering to orthodox prejudices; and, after all, perhaps, the poor creatures must live.
- A. E. Q.—We hope you will find the *Freethinker* a help.
- G. C. (Peterhead)—See paragraph.
- W. MASON.—The reference to the *Freethinker* in the list of press opinions (which you send us) on Mr. Ballard's book is not quite honest. It reminds us of the man who made the Bible say "there is no God" by leaving out the context.
- F. J. VOISEY writes: "I am sorry that the question of copyright has arisen in connection with the Leeds case, but I think you are perfectly justified in upholding your rights, and if Mr. Gott is a sensible man he will see the matter in the same light." Mr. Voisey rightly holds, however, that this should not interfere with the duty that is incumbent on Freethinkers to oppose any and every prosecution for "blasphemy." And he will subscribe his mite if necessary.
- R. C.—We cannot carry our mind back to your particular notice. All we can say is that what reaches us in time is inserted.
- A. E. E.—(1) Mr. Birrell is, of course, too much of a professional politician (if we may use the phrase) to see and speak plainly on the Education question. Nevertheless he has more than hinted that Secular Education may be the result of the present strife between rival Churches, as well as a considerable damage to general Christianity. (2) Pleased to have your thorough approval on the other matter. We agree in the main with what you say on your own account.
- J. JONES.—Your suggestion shall be borne in mind. No doubt such a catechism would be useful. Pleased to see you keep so mental bright at your great age.
- A. K. DOUGHTY.—Your comment is humorous. But, after all, there is some credit due to Parson Foote, of Upper Teddington, for hoping that Dissenters may get to heaven. A number of parsons don't even hope it.
- T. H. KEELL.—Very glad to see that one of our readers, at least, noticed the mistake and identified the passage. The motto in last week's *Freethinker* was taken from Richard Jefferies' *Story of My Heart*. The printer had a Lord Chatham extract beside him at the time—it appeared in another column—and got the names mixed up. We noticed the blunder too late to correct it.
- T. WILLIAMS.—Mr. Foote is writing you.
- A. G. LYE.—Mr. Foote is writing you with respect to visiting Coventry. We are happy to hear that you have now a prospect of obtaining a more suitable hall. As a rule, the better the hall the better the audience.
- THE COHEN PRESENTATION FUND.—E. Martin, 3s., J. Jones 10s.
- 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.
- PERSONS remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send halfpenny stamps, which are most useful in the Freethought Publishing Company's business.
- THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.
- SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS: Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. Displayed Advertisements:—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

Death of Mr. Herbert Spencer.

AS we are going to press we learn of the death of Mr. Herbert Spencer. He had lived to a great age, and the end was not unexpected; in a certain sense it was probably a release. What we have to say about "our great philosopher," as Darwin called him, had better wait for a week than he said hurriedly. Meanwhile we beg to record our profound admiration of his devoted and laborious life, his far-shining example of courage and simplicity, and his magnificent development of the philosophy of Evolution.

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote had a bad experience in getting to Leicester on Saturday (Dec. 5): On arriving there he found the fog fairly in possession of the town. There was a good audience awaiting him at the Secular Hall, however; the best Saturday night meeting there this winter; and his lecture was highly appreciated. Mr. F. J. Gould occupied the chair. On Sunday evening the fog was still worse, though not as bad as it was two years previously, when all street traffic was suspended, and it was difficult to find the way even for a short distance on foot. Unpleasant as the weather was, it did not prevent a capital audience from assembling in the Secular Hall; and Mr. Sydney Gimson, who officiated as chairman, said that Mr. Foote ought to take it as a personal compliment that so many came to hear him on such an evening. The lecture, which was warmly applauded, was preceded and followed by some congregational and choir singing.

We are glad to hear that the Leicester Secular Society is now in a reasonably prosperous and progressive condition, and we wish it a long career of useful activity.

Mr. Cohen visits Birmingham again to-day and delivers two lectures in the Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, where he will doubtless be greeted by good audiences.

Mr. John Lloyd lectures this evening (Dec. 13) at the Camberwell Secular Hall. We hope the South London "saints" will give him a good audience and an enthusiastic reception.

Mr. Elstob, the Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch secretary, sends us an enthusiastic report of Mr. John Lloyd's recent visit to the "canny" city. Mr. Lloyd's lecture was admirable, and he passed successfully through a novel and very trying ordeal—namely, answering a number of questions put by members of his old congregation at Gateshead. Mr. Elstob says that Mr. Lloyd gave the impression of being a modest man with plenty of courage. The Newcastle "saints" all hope that the N. S. S. Branches will keep Mr. Lloyd actively engaged, and see that he nowhere fails for want of adequate support.

Mr. J. W. Gott has written us a letter which we are not sure he meant for publication in the *Freethinker*, and therefore we do not print it *in extenso*. As he registered the letter, however, we must regard it—at least to some extent—as in answer to our public explanation and remonstrance in last week's *Freethinker*. Mr. Gott says he is sorry it did not occur to him that we might object to his reproducing things from this journal, and we "need feel no alarm" about his continuing to do so. We beg to assure him that we did not feel any "alarm." Our feeling was one of mingled regret and annoyance. We also beg to remind him that, while it may not have occurred to him that we might object, when he lifted the first cartoon, he could hardly have been in the same blank state of mind when he lifted the second, together with an article; for he did it in spite of our sufficiently plain, though very mildly expressed, objection in a "Sugar Plum" paragraph on the subject. However, we are glad to receive his promise now to refrain from this sort of thing in future.

Mr. Gott asks us this question: "Don't you think I should have ceased that which is objectionable if you had written me privately without the bitter attack in your paper?" To this we reply that we had—as we hinted—written him privately; and that his answer, whether he intended it so or not, did not contain a shadow of the promise he now sends,

but rather treated the whole matter as a joke, and facetiously informed us that we might seek compensation by reproducing "good things" from his own paper. Besides, what we complained of was a public act on his part, and it called for public expostulation. There was no "bitter attack" on him. There was no "attack" at all. He did what he had no right to do, he persisted in doing it, and he was apparently bent on doing it again. We had no alternative, therefore, but to make a public explanation and utter a public warning. It is really absurd when you compel a man to act in self-defence to complain that he causes unpleasantness. And probably Mr. Gott will recognise this in cooler moments.

We understand that Mr. Gott intends to "reply" to our "Freethinker article." But this is not a matter of much importance. We mean to ourselves. If he likes to pursue the subject to the bitter end, he must take his own course. We do not intend to follow him. We simply said what was requisite to gain a necessary object; and, having gained it, our interest in the matter ceases. We cherish no ill-feeling and do not intend to reciprocate any.

The Leeds "blasphemy" case was adjourned until December 8. That is Tuesday—the day on which the *Freethinker* pages are made up. Consequently we are unable to deal with the case any further until our next issue. Meanwhile we express a hope that the case will break down in the Stipendiary's court.

Freethinkers who happen to be persecuted as Freethinkers are informed that they may always write to us if they think we are able to do them any service. For some time we have been posting a gratis copy of the *Freethinker* every week to a very aged Secularist who has to spend his last days in the Union. He now writes begging us to send it no longer as "they" will not let him have it. Won't they? We shall see.

The *Watford Critic* is a lively little paper and strongly on the side of real progress. The last number before us contains a firm defence of Secular Education, and a vigorous censure of the ratting policy of the Nonconformists. This editorial item refers to the Devil as "a theological scarecrow." The *Watford Critic* is therefore far from being orthodox in religious matters.

The Liverpool Branch, which has not been able to pay Mr. H. Percy Ward, its lecturer and organiser, as well as it would like to do, has resolved to get up a sort of "benefit" for him next Sunday (Dec. 20). Mr. Ward will deliver two lectures, and there will be a charge for admission. The tickets, which are now issued, are 3d., 6d., and 1s. each, according to the position of seats, and can be obtained at Alexandra Hall, or of the secretary, Mr. T. Kehoe, at to-day's meetings. We earnestly hope the Liverpool "saints" will take this opportunity of giving Mr. Ward a little practical encouragement. They might purchase a ticket even if circumstances prevent their attending the lectures.

A meeting of Freethinkers will be held at the Bute Arms Hotel, Aberdare, on Monday (Dec. 14), at 8 p.m., to consider the advisability of having some Freethought lectures. All Freethinkers in the locality are earnestly requested to attend.

The Voice of Labor is a new little penny weekly published at Leeds and supported by the local Labor Representation Committee and Trades and Labor Council. We gladly note an editorial paragraph stating that "In Education the policy of the paper will be distinctly secular." The rest of the paragraph is worth reproducing *in extenso*: "We believe that the State has no right to interfere in matters of religion. Like the Nonconformists of a century ago, we think it immoral for any sect of any religion to receive a state subsidy. That present-day Nonconformists are so recreant to their principles, as to accept State money in the case of the children, is disgraceful to them, but it does not alter the principle for which their fathers contended. It makes it more necessary though, that others should defend the right, and if there is any question of public importance, where the worker ought to make a stand, it is on the education of the children. For, be it remembered, whatever they are taught in their plastic years, will be the dominating factor in after years, hence from the point of view of general progress, much that is being taught in our public schools to-day is not only non-social, but absolutely immoral. To the parsons, priests, or ministers, the cry of parents should be, 'a plague on all your houses,' and the dictum of the State ought to be, 'hands off' to every representative of every sect and every creed where the training of future citizens is concerned."

We see that *The Voice of Labor* is edited by Mr. John Badlay. Is this the gentleman whose name used to appear in Freethought papers years ago as secretary of the local N. S. S. Branch? Anyhow, we wish success to his paper.

Dr. Conway's *Life of Thomas Paine* has lately been translated into French. It is recognised in Paris as a standard biography.

Mr. A. G. Lye has another long and well-written letter, in reply to the Rev. Mr. Blomfield, in the *Coventry Herald*. He explains what Secular Education really is, shows that Mr. Blomfield has fallen into confusion regarding it, and points out that the Nonconformists are betraying their own principles.

The *Northern Echo* prints a good letter on "Education and Religion" from Dr. J. G. Stuart, ably supporting the case of Secular Education. It also prints a remarkable letter from the Rev. G. C. Sharpe, Primitive Methodist minister, Spennymoor, denouncing the Free Church Council Scheme, which includes "Biblical instruction." Mr. Sharpe says that this is worse than the Education Act itself: "For, whereas the Act made some attempt to accommodate the needs of all sections of the religious community, this proposal is conceived in the most rigid sectarian spirit, having in view simply the convenience of the Free Churches." Mr. Sharpe recognises "the equal incapacity of all organised religious bodies for the discussion of national affairs on a broad, liberal basis." He plainly tells his Nonconformist brethren that "to resist the unjust encroachments of one church merely in the interests of another, and not in the interests of public justice and liberty, would be the most palpable fraud of the century." Yet that is the direction in which the Nonconformists are "going headlong." We congratulate Mr. Sharpe on being a Nonconformist in the older and better meaning of the term; namely, one who objects to State interference with religion on any ground whatsoever.

The *Daily Chronicle's* review of Mrs. Tallentyre's new *Life of Voltaire* follows M. Roget in saying that "Heartless Voltaire is a Myth, Mephistophelean Voltaire was a Mask." It celebrates his "tireless indignation against intolerance and oppression," and observes that "his centre of gravity was fixed upon earth and not beyond it." The reviewer's last word is that Voltaire "helped with all his might to plant the tree of Liberty upon the soil he loved."

Some years ago Mr. Foote published a pamphlet entitled *Who Was the Father of Jesus?*—a question which was put in a London Board school, and the answer to which by a boy (who said "Joseph") caused such a profound agitation, first on the Board, and afterwards in the constituencies. That pamphlet of Mr. Foote's is still in print, if anybody wishes to read it. Since then—indeed, quite recently—a far more plain-spoken pamphlet has been "printed for private circulation" by the Rev. Francis Hadyn Williams, of Flowergate Old Chapel, Whitby, on a similar question—*Who Was the Father of Jesus of Nazareth?* It is dedicated, without permission, of course, to the Dean of Ripon, who has suggested that the birth of Jesus was not miraculous. It appears that Mr. Williams knew Dean Fremantle many years ago. Now the latter is very well off, and the former is very poor, but congratulates himself on keeping his self-respect. Mr. Williams's view in this pamphlet is the same as that of Tolstoy, namely, that Jesus was an illegitimate child. We don't know that it much matters at this time of day whether he was so or not. Those who care to probe the question, however, can obtain a copy of Mr. Williams's pamphlet gratis by applying to him through the post.

The Failsworth Secular Sunday-school has an unusual Sunday Evening Service to-day (Dec. 13). The platform is to be occupied by a blind lecturer, Mr. Hornby, of Bolton, president and organiser of the National League of the Blind, and delegate on the Trades Council. His subject is to be "Great Lessons from Carlyle."

There has been some unavoidable delay with the new *Secular Annual*, but it is now rapidly on the way to publication, and orders can be sent in for it to 2 Newcastle-street. It contains a number of interesting special articles by G. W. Foote, C. Cohen, John Lloyd, Chilperic, F. J. Gould, Abracadabra, and Mary Lovell, besides the customary official matter; and it ought to have a large sale at the small price of sixpence.

The Riddle of the Universe Answered.

By the sea, by the desert midnight sea,
Stands a youth,
His heart is full of anguish, his head full of doubt,
And with sullen lips he questions the waves :

"Oh solve me the riddle of life,
The painful primordial riddle,
Which already has racked so many heads—
Heads in hieroglyphic caps,
Heads in turbans and black berrets,
Heads in wigs, and myriad other
Poor, perspiring, human heads;
What is the meaning of Man?
Whence comes he? Whither goes he?
Who dwells there above in the golden stars?"

The waves murmur their everlasting murmur,
The wind sweeps, the clouds scud,
The stars glitter indifferent and cold.
And a fool awaits an answer.

—Heine (James Thomson's Translation).

PART I.

NOT by idle questioning of the sea and stars can the Riddle of the Universe be unfolded, but by the patient, unwearied investigation of the facts of Nature and the researches of the trained scientific intellect armed with the instruments of precision of Modern Science.

In summarising the latest results of Biblical and scientific research in solving the Riddle of the Universe, we commence with the Bible, as that book is still regarded by many as containing the only correct solution of this ancient riddle. In the first chapter of Genesis we learn that the Universe was created in six days, and that the earth was created several days before the sun and stars, they being created for the express purpose of giving light to the earth.

Now astronomy teaches that the sun existed millions of years before the earth, and that the earth is really a child of the sun, being evolved from it. As Professor Tyndall remarked, "The same molecular force which rounds a tear, rounded the sun and planets." The earth is of such insignificance that if the sun—says Sir Robert Ball—were cut into a million parts, each part would be larger than our earth. The stars themselves are suns, some of them larger than our own, it being only their immense distance which makes them appear small. The star Sirius is forty-eight times as brilliant; and, when we consider that there are at least 50,000,000 stars visible to the telescope, we can see the absurdity of the idea that the sun and stars were created to give light to the earth, and that they were all created in six days.

Says Sir Henry Thompson in *The Unknown God*:—

"It is now known that the earth is an insignificant speck, a mere atom of dust in the universe, and that the millions of stars, visible with any good telescope, are suns like our own, many being much larger, and that these are almost certainly surrounded by encircling planets."

"When Sunday after Sunday," says Professor Huxley, "men who profess to be our instructors in righteousness read out the statement, 'In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is,' in innumerable churches, they are either propagating what they may easily know, and therefore are bound to know, to be falsities; or, if they use the words in some non-natural sense, they fall below the moral standard of the much-abused Jesuit." Even the churches see that the game is up. "The faintest semblance of harmony," says Dean Farrar in *The People's Bible History*, "between Genesis and physical science can only be obtained by a licentious artificiality and casuistry of exegetic invention." And Canon Driver declares that, "read without prejudice or bias, the narrative of Genesis i. creates an impression at variance with the facts revealed by science." Attempts to reconcile them are only "different modes of obliterating the characteristic features of Genesis, and of reading into it a view which it does not express." It is evident that this book can throw little light upon the subject. So we pass on to consider the question from a scientific standpoint.

PART II.

Matter.

Xenophanes the Greek declared, 600 years before Christ, that "The infinite universe cannot have emanated from nothing; something must necessarily have existed eternally, or that which exists must have been produced by nothing. If ever there could have been a time when nothing existed, then there could never have been any such thing as existence." Modern science has demonstrated the absolute truth of this reasoning of the ancient Greek. The first and last word of science is the uncreatability and indestructibility of matter. "It is an experimentally ascertained fact," says Professor Tait, "that no process at the command of man can destroy even a single particle of matter, still less create a new one. It is on this definite basis that the great science of chemistry has been accurately built" (*Chambers's Encyclopædia*, article "Matter"). It is obvious to the meanest intelligence that something that cannot be created or destroyed must have existed from all eternity. It is at this point the theologian steps forward, and says: "Although man cannot create matter, God can; all things are possible with God. Every effect must have a cause, and God is the First Great Cause." Very well, then; if God created matter, there must have been a time when matter did not exist. There was nothing but empty space—an infinite black vacuum. What was God doing during the millenniums of ages before matter existed? He could not see; there is no light apart from matter. He could not hear; there was nothing to carry the waves of sound. He could not think; there was nothing to think about. And, to finish up, if every effect must have a prior cause, how came God to exist at all? He must have required another First Cause to create him.

This matter of which our world is composed consists of about eighty elements, as oxygen, hydrogen, gold, iron, etc.; and it is from combinations of these elements that everything as we know it is built up. For instance, water is composed of two gases—oxygen and hydrogen; air, of oxygen and nitrogen; and so on; and they can be decomposed into their constituent gases, but the elements themselves are not decomposable by any means at the command of the chemist. "A particle of iron," says the famous scientist, Dubois Reymond, "is, and remains, exactly the same thing, whether it shoot through space as a meteoric stone, dash along on the tire of an engine-wheel, or roll in a blood-corpusele through the veins of a poet. Its properties are eternal, unchangeable, untransferable." Nevertheless, it is highly probable, from what is known as Prout's law of atomic weights, that the elements themselves have been built up by a process of evolution from a simpler material, as we know existing plants and animals have evolved from simpler forms. If the atomic weights of the elements are arranged in consecutive order, they show what is called a periodical law. By means of this law the Russian chemist, Mendelejeff, was enabled to predict the existence of three new elements, which have since been discovered, filling up gaps in the series which his law required. In the same way that the mathematicians discovered the existence of Neptune before it had actually been seen by the telescope of the astronomers. It only remains to add that the spectroscope tells us that the stars, the sun, nebula, and comets are composed of the same elements known to us upon our earth.

"Matter," says Schelling, "is the general seed-corn of the universe, wherein everything is involved that is brought forth in subsequent evolution." The process of nature, says Professor Tyndall, in his famous *Belfast Address* "is one of unravelling and unfolding. The infinity of forms under which matter appears was not imposed upon it by an external artificer; by its intrinsic force and virtue it brings these things forth. Matter is not the mere naked, empty capacity which philosophers have pictured her to be, but the universal mother, who brings forth all

things as the fruit of her own womb." And why should we go outside matter to find a cause of the universe? If a being existed who created matter, and existed before matter, he must either have created matter out of nothing—an utterly unthinkable and impossible performance—or he must have created it out of himself, in which case we ask with Hume, in his *Dialogues*, "Why may not the material universe be the necessarily-existent Being?" for, as he acutely remarks, "We dare not affirm that we know all the properties of matter; and, for aught we can determine, it may contain qualities which, were they known, would make its non-existence appear as great a contradiction as that twice two are five." Why should people profess to find the idea that matter had no beginning absurd, and yet find the idea that God had no beginning quite reasonable?

PART III.

Life and Mind.

At one time our earth consisted of a molten mass like the sun, and, of course, was devoid of life; we now find it covered with vegetable and animal forms. How did life originate? Did creative energy pause until the nebulous matter had condensed, asks Professor Tyndall; and, having waited through these eons until the proper conditions had set in, did it send the fiat forth: "Let there be Life"? Against this primitive view the Professor puts the scientific conception of its origin. "Supposing," he says in *Fragments of Science*, "a planet carved from the sun, set spinning round an axis, and revolving round the sun at a distance from him equal to that of our earth, would one of the consequences of its refrigeration be the development of organic forms? I lean to the affirmative. Structural forces are certainly in the mass, whether or not these forces reach to the extent of forming a plant or an animal. In an amorphous drop of water lie all the marvels of crystalline force; and who will set limits to the possible play of molecules in a cooling planet?" And further, he affirms that: "in the eye of science the animal body is just as much the product of molecular force as the stalk and ear of corn, or as the crystal of salt or sugar." In fact, life is merely a highly specialised form of that energy which "sleeps in the stone, dreams in the animal, awakes in man." "Divorced from matter," asks Tyndall, "where is life? Whatever our faith may say, our knowledge shows them to be indissolubly joined. Every meal we eat, and every cup we drink, illustrates the mysterious control of mind by matter."

Now, although most educated people, and even the majority of the clergy are ready to admit the Darwinian theory of evolution, yet many of them make their last stand at what they call the spiritual part of man. They will admit that man's body has evolved from lower animal forms, but hold that God has endowed him with a soul, which is therefore not the result of evolution.

But we ask, with Professor Ray Lankester, in his *Advancement of Science*, "At what particular phase in the embryonic series is the soul, with its potential consciousness, implanted? Is it in the egg, in the foetus of this month or of that, in the new-born infant, or at five years of age?" The answer of science may be given in the words of the famous scientist, Carl Vogt:—

"Physiology declares itself decidedly and categorically against individual immortality, as against all theories in general which include the special existence of a soul. The soul does not enter into the foetus as the evil spirit does into the possessed, but is produced by the development of the brain, just the same as muscular activity is produced by the development of the muscles or secretion is produced by the development of the glands.

"Thoughts stand in the same relation to the brain as bile to the liver or urine to the kidneys."

If the mind is independent of matter, and can exist without it, how is it that, if the blood circulates too rapidly, as in drunkenness or fever, the mind becomes confused? Why is it that a blow on the head, the bursting of a blood-vessel, the inhalation

of chloroform, or a few drops of opium can suspend its operations altogether? The answer is: Because it is a purely material product, and has no existence apart from matter.

Science solves the Riddle of the Universe by tracing the evolution of primitive matter in the beginning to mind in the end. In the words of Professor Huxley (*Lay Sermons*): "Harmonious order governing eternally continuous progress—the web and woof of matter and force interweaving by slow degrees, without a broken thread, that veil which lies between us and the infinite—that universe which alone we know or can know, such is the picture which science draws of the world." SPERA.

Correspondence.

WHY FREETHOUGHT?

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—After reading "A Mere Man in the Street's" letter in your former issue, I am wondering what it is he is trying to drive home, and what he means by his "Constructive Policy" so gently offered for my consideration. His letter is simply a condemnation of "Modern Freethought," and where the "Constructive Policy" comes in I fail to see.

By reason of the familiarity of your readers with the policy of Freethought, I deemed it was worthless to waste a column in expounding this. It is certainly not incumbent upon me to do so for the mere sake of giving your correspondent something more to ramble about. It is plain that he is simply writing for writing's sake, and it would be "casting pearls before swine" to give him further food for misconstruction and misrepresentation.

Take this last remark of his: "If 'Freethought' is part of a scheme of progress, it fails to fulfil its destiny by persistent attempts to destroy that which has been such an important factor in all true progress." "A Mere Man in the Street" knows very well that the most Christian countries to-day are the most savage and uncivilised; and if this religion is such an "important factor in all true progress," how is it that these religiously saturated countries (some of them having adopted Christianity before this country and France) are so demoralised and backward?

Evidently your correspondent is fully versed in the regular pulpit platitudes and C.E. platform want of candor. He still asks that played-out absurdity, "Where's your hospitals?" He requests me to reflect upon "£24,000,000 raised in half a century for the building and propaganda of this 'faith founded upon ignorance,'" not dreaming himself what a curse this Christianity is in taking this money whilst our education is starved for want of funds, our poor people have to die in the workhouse for want of better remedies to cope with poverty, whilst most institutions of a benevolent character are heavily in debt. What does this £24,000,000 represent but the unpaid earnings of the workers sweated by their employers, who go to church on Sundays and take good care to drop their religion during the other six days of the week? This huge sum is a glowing condemnation of the inadequacy of Christianity to deal with present-day evils. If one carefully follows this amount of money he will see that in the end this world, instead of gaining by it, will suffer, inasmuch as the leaders of religion will use it to bolster up their dying creeds, thus creating riot and discord at the expense of the reformation of society.

Reading your correspondent's *nom de plume* reminds me of that well-known character in Genesis who, although he was a man after "God's own heart," yet did not hesitate to cheat and lie for a fancied benefit.

It is one thing to be convinced that the system which one is advocating is able to perform all that is claimed, but quite another thing to vindicate by the half-hearted manner in which one defends a system, and the remarks made (only appealing to the ignorant and unlearned, and bearing the brand of abuse), that you are a mere platitudist. The former is true to his principles; the latter is simply "seeking whom he may devour"; and therefore to continue a correspondence with one who evidently has this latter aim in view would be only a waste of your valuable space, which can be far better utilised.

H. W.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—"A Mere Man in the Street" seems to object to "the destruction of faith," not on the ground that faith is logically justifiable, but that it is necessary for the preservation of morality. By faith I take it that he means belief in the supernatural, since it is that which "Freethought to-day"

attacks. If he holds that belief himself, would it not be more to the purpose to show that it is reasonable than to endeavour to persuade Freethinkers, who hold no such belief, that it is useful? If Freethinkers could be convinced of its truth, they would not be likely to deny its utility. If, however, belief in the supernatural is not reasonable, those who reject that belief are, in that respect, more intelligent than those who accept it. But if that is so, does "A Mere Man in the Street" really think that those who reject it should disguise their opinions? It would seem strange indeed if the morality of the community could only be ensured by the hypocrisy of its most intelligent members.

"Faith in a supreme power" is no doubt "a product of evolution," but it by no means follows that it is "a natural necessity of man"; and the fact that religious belief is discarded by great numbers of thoughtful men and women in the most civilised countries, although "almost invariably possessed by the wildest and most savage races," suggests that with the further evolution of civilisation it will disappear altogether.

The opinions expressed under headings 2, 3, and 4 being open to question, it seems a pity that your correspondent did not think it worth while to support them by argument. Perhaps they appear to him self-evident. I, however, am quite unable to see that "the influence for good from religion . . . preponderates," but, on the contrary, I think that it is immeasurably outweighed by the evil. The wars and persecutions, the sectarian hatred and bigotry, the opposition to science and consequent ignorance, the distorted views of nature and of morality resulting from religious belief, are evils which it is difficult to imagine to be counter-balanced by any good which religion may have done.

"A Mere Man in the Street" suggests that we should combat Sacerdotalism, but not attack faith, which seems very much like lopping off the branches but sparing the root. But for faith Sacerdotalism could not exist; but where faith is general it is tolerably certain that impostors will be found to exploit it for their personal advantage.

"A Mere Man in the Street" seems anxious to know what is "the constructive policy of Freethought." I do not know whether Freethought, as such, can strictly be said to have a constructive policy, but Secularism certainly has; and as there is plenty of literature dealing with the subject, he might, by a little reading, discover what it was, whether he approved of it or not.

E. J. HIRST.

Y FREETHOUGHT?

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—“Mere Man in the Street” is manifestly to be numbered among the unemployed, or he would never have time to indite such long letters. I perceive that he is an expository epistolary apostle of Progress whose delectable aversion is *Sacerdotalism*. (Good word that! I'll back it both ways.) But the cardinal omission of his communication is that he pretermits the divulgence of the *direction* of his progress. It is the *direction* which is important; and this reminds me. Three lunar revolutions since I had entrusted myself to another in the collateral design of proceeding to Richmond by the Underground Railway. But the concatenation of stations aroused misgivings, and interrogation of the attendant satellites unveiled the dreadful truth that our *progress* was rapidly taking us in the direction of New Cross. I would implore “Mere Man in the Street” to disclose to us the direction of *his* progress, not necessarily for publication, but as evidence of good faith.

Our hortatory correspondent proposes further to rectify religion by amputating priesthood.

This surgical operation conveys a piquant reminiscence of the astute individual who severed the canine caudal appendage immediately posterior to the quadruped's aural organs, and the obunbilated mind may be instigated to interrogate as to what will survive after such vivisection.

I am not interested in the *Oxford* movement, as I prefer the *Alhambra*; and as the correspondent is anonymous, I subscribe myself,

LITTLE MARY.

National Secular Society.

REPORT of monthly Executive meeting held at the Society's offices on Thursday, December 3. The President (Mr. G. W. Foote) in the chair. There were also present: Messrs. E. Bate, C. Cohen, H. Cowell, F. Cotterell, T. Garniot, W. Leat, J. Neate, Dr. Nicholls, F. Schaller, S. Samuels, T. Thurlow, F. Wood, and the Secretary.

The minutes of previous meeting and the cash statement were adopted, and the ordinary business of the meeting having been dealt with, the President reported that, upon his

invitation and at the expense of the Society, Mr. Pack, one of the Secularists recently summoned at Leeds for blasphemy, had visited London for the purpose of consulting him (the President) as to his course of action at the hearing of the summons. The Executive unanimously endorsed the President's action, and, after hearing the President's view, the following resolution was moved by Mr. Neate, seconded by Mr. Samuels, and carried unanimously:—

“That this Executive, while regretting that the blasphemy prosecution at Leeds turns upon matter in the *Truthseeker*, borrowed without permission from the *Freethinker*, and that the prosecution is thus almost gratuitously invited, nevertheless feels that all blasphemy prosecutions must be opposed on principle, and therefore resolves that the President be authorised and requested to take any steps that may be advisable to assist in repelling the present attack on freedom of publication, until the next meeting of the Executive.”

The meeting then adjourned.

EDITH M. VANCE, *General Secretary*.

HIS PLEA.—“Er-It'm! Mister Speaker,” began the moss-grown member from Shellback county, rising in his place in the midst of the Arkansas legislature. “I ask for the passage of this yere hen-hawk bill o' mine in the interests of religion, good morals, and civilisation. If we don't have a law payin' a bounty for killin' 'em, nobody will kill hen-hawks; if nobody kills the hawks the fetch-taked hawks will kill the chickens; if we don't have no chickens we won't have no preachers after a little while, and whur there ain't no preachers there ain't no religion, and whur there ain't no religion there ain't no morals; without good morals there ain't no happy homes, and happy homes is the bullyworks of the state—without 'em, Mister Speaker, our boasted civilisation becomes a howlin' wilderness! For the preservation of civilisation we've got to have happy homes in our midst, and in order to have 'em we've got to have good morals; good morals depend upon religion, and to have religion we must have preachers, and it 'pears like preachers have just naturally got to have chickens; if we want 'em to have chickens we must slay off the hawks, and in order to git the hawks slew we are fo'ced to make it to the interest of somebody to kill 'em. No bounty, no chickens; no chickens, no preachers; no preachers, no religion; no religion, no morals; no morals, no homes. Therefore, I ag'in ask you that this yere bill o' mine be passed.”—*Tom P. Morgan in "Puck."*

LOCATING JONAH.—It was on a street of Camden, Arkansas, that Sambo met his colored brother Joseph. “Hello, Joe,” said he, “when y'all be'n this ev'nin?” “I be'n to chu'ch' that's wher I be'n.” “What y'all leahn theh?” “What I leahn theh? I leahn 'bout Jonah, that's what I leahn.” “Huh! Jonah. Huh! Who dat Jonah?” “He de man what swaller de whale. Dat who Jonah is.” “Swaller de whale. Huh! Wher dat Jonah come f'om?” “He come f'om Vaginny, I reckon. Wheffohe you askin' dat?” “F'm Vaginny. Huh! I reckon dat jes' so. Dem big-mouf Vaginny niggahs always was hell on fish.” And, sniffing contemptuously, the unregenerate Sambo went his wicked way.—*John Swaim.*

PRAYED OUT.

A young bride recently visited one of the stores of this city. She wished for a bread board in her kitchen just like the one her mother had at home, with “Give us this day our daily bread” carved around the border.

The young girl who waited upon her brought bread boards with other inscriptions upon them, saying in a patronising way:—

“The words you want are old-fashioned now. We don't have any call for them any more.”—*New York Times.*

GROUND FOR COMPLAINT.

An old farmer, who was complaining terribly of a bad harvest, met the minister of the parish, and, as usual, proceeded to hold forth on his favorite topic. “Ah, yes, Farmer Giles,” said the worthy parson, “you have, I must confess, good cause to complain, but you must remember that Providence cares for all, and that even the birds of the air are provided for.” “Ay,” said the old man, significantly, “all o' my corn.”

A good story is told of twin brothers, one of whom was a clergyman and the other a doctor. A shortsighted woman congratulated the latter on his admirable sermon. “Excuse me, madam,” was his reply; “over there is my brother, who preaches; I only practise.”

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.

NORTH CAMBERWELL HALL (61 New Church Road, Camberwell): 7.30, John Lloyd (ex-Presbyterian Minister), "The Trial of Christianity."

EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Bromley Vestry Hall, Bow-road, E.): 7, Harrold Johnson, B.A., "Awe and its Ethical Significance."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, H. Snell, "The Other Side of Darwinism."

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, High-street): 11.15, Dr. Stanton Coit, "Tennyson."

WOOD GREEN ETHICAL SOCIETY (Fairfax Hall, Portland-gardens, Harringay) 7, Miss McMillan, "Ethics in Elementary Schools."

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): C. Cohen: 3, "The Present Position of Religion and Science"; 7, "Is Christianity worth Preserving?"

EDINBURGH SECULAR SOCIETY (Temperance Hall, 84 Leith-street): 6.30, Mr. Robertson, "Pagan Christs."

FAILSWORTH SECULAR SUNDAY SCHOOL (Pole-lane, Failsworth): 6.30, Mr. Hornby, "Great Lessons from Carlyle."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, Discussion Class. D. Baxter, "How I became an Atheist"; 6.30, Echinus, "A Dredge in our Firth." With Lantern Illustrations.

LEEDS (Gladstone Hall, Skilbeck-street, New Wortley): H. Percy Ward: 11, "Jesus the Infidel"; 3, "Is Blasphemy a Crime"; 7, "Christianity: its History and Creed."

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): Ernest Pack, 11, "The Protestant Reformation"; 3, "Miracles"; 7, "My Prosecution for Blasphemy."

NEWCASTLE DEBATING SOCIETY (Lockhart's Cathedral Café): Thursday, December 17, at 8, A. Howson, "Chamberlain's Protectionist Utterances."

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7, A Reading; 7.30, Financial Committee.

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MR. FOOTE has generously given particulars week by week of the difficult propaganda which I, along with my friends, Mr. Pack and Mr. Weir, have been carrying on in the City of Leeds. We have already answered no less than sixteen separate summonses. Now we are all charged with a much more serious offence—namely, that of **BLASPHEMY**.

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