

THE Freethinker

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Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?—ECCLESIASTES III. 22.

A Point for Christians.

WE should like to ask the Christians of this country who club together and organise Dr. Torrey's "missions" whether they really approve his methods. We would put the question particularly to the Free Churches, which have been the most energetic in promoting the success of his enterprises in Liverpool, Glasgow, Birmingham, and other great cities. We appeal especially to the *Daily News*, which is the organ of the Nonconformist Conscience, and which has frequently celebrated Dr. Torrey's power of saving souls and bringing them to Christ. Does our contemporary admire his way of libelling dead Freethinkers like Thomas Paine and Colonel Ingersoll? Does it endorse his policy of blackening the personal characters of all who stand outside the Christian fold? Does it, in short, lend itself cheerfully to the most barefaced controversial ruffianism?

We have previously dealt with this American revivalist's blackguardly references to Paine and Ingersoll. It will be remembered that he accused Paine of taking another man's wife away from England to France, and living with her there. His attention was drawn to the falsity of this accusation, but he had not the decency to retract it, and we dare say he will repeat it as soon as he feels it is safe to do so; that is, when he thinks our exposure of his infamous lie has blown over. Dr. Torrey also declared that Ingersoll had tried to break down the law against sending obscene books and pictures through the American mails. This we proved to be an absolute reversal of the truth. We gave chapter and verse for everything, and the matter was made as clear as daylight. Yet this Yankee scoundrel stuck to his libel as though it were as true as Gospel—which perhaps it is. He had not the manliness to admit that he was mistaken. These gentlemen who are so familiar with God Almighty never do that. They cannot afford to. They have to keep up a certain infallibility; otherwise their acquaintance with God might fall under suspicion.

According to the proverb, daws do not peck out daws' eyes; and one would hardly expect one American to go about the world traducing another. But religious bigotry is powerful enough to override most other influences. Dr. Torrey hates Ingersoll because he was a Freethinker; hates him, to use Bible language, with a perfect hatred; hates him, that is to say, with the passion of murder; for killing a man's reputation and killing himself are only two different degrees of the same crime. Shylock speaks the language of nature when he asks: "Hates any man the thing he would not kill?" And we are quite sure that if Dr. Torrey had the chance he would burn a Paine or an Ingersoll at the stake with the greatest pleasure. He is simply a pious ruffian who gratifies the malignancy of his nature where he can do so with impunity.

Dr. Torrey has even said—we gave his own words in a former article—that the profligates and harlots of America were the chief patrons of Ingersoll's lectures. Words almost fail one to characterise such an utterance. Dr. Torrey would never dare to say a thing like this except when surrounded by his friends. Statements of this kind invite blows for an answer. If a man calls your wife a whore, you do not argue with him; you smite his filthy mouth. In the same way those of us who love Ingersoll, and behold a dirty liar pouring mendacious foulness over his memory, are naturally inclined to kick the wretch off the scene of his sordid labors.

We would not trouble about this beastly fellow if he stood alone. Even to kick him would mean the loss of a pair of boots, for who could wear them afterwards? But the fellow does not stand alone. He is puffed and pushed round this country as a sort of a Savior—a kind of second fiddle to Jesus Christ himself. This gives him a representative capacity. For this reason, and for this reason only, we notice his contemptible personality. Why otherwise should we condescend to pillory a howling dervish, with the intellect of a street-corner preacher and the manners of a Yahoo?

We put it again, then, to the Christians. Do they approve this person's methods? Do they go all the way with him? Is there one of them who will find the courage to read him a lesson?

Just let them look at this. Dr. Torrey has been "reviving" at Dublin, and the *Irish Times* reports him as talking the following trash:—

"There might be an honest sceptic to-day, an honest agnostic, an honest infidel. He did not question that, but he could not remain an honest one."

Fancy a preacher put forward by a combination of Christian Churches talking like that at this time of day! According to this apostle of the Christian faith, Charles Darwin, Professor Huxley, Herbert Spencer, and Sir Leslie Stephen were not honest men! Does the *Daily News* intend to go on countenancing this sort of thing? Will it pluck up its courage and tell Dr. Torrey to mend his manners or go home?

But there is much worse to come. The *Irish Times* reports Dr. Torrey as talking in the following fashion:—

"Where was the stronghold of infidelity? The public-house, the racecourse, the gambling hell, and the brothel. Suppose he should come to Dublin a stranger and go down the streets with his Bible under his arm, and walk into one of the public-houses, lay his Bible upon the bar, and say, 'Please give me a tumbler of whisky straight and be sure you make it pretty full,' what would happen? Why, the bar tender, or whatever they called him, would look at him and say, 'Excuse me, sir, but what is that book?' 'The Bible!' 'What did you ask for?' 'Whisky straight, and make it big.' He would be greatly astonished. Suppose he should walk into any one of their public-houses and lay upon the bar a copy of the 'Mistakes of Moses' by Ingersoll, or a copy of that tin whistle 'The Clarion,' or a copy of the best infidel book that ever was written, and order a glass of whisky, he would get it without any question. The Bible and whisky did not go together. Infidelity and whisky did go together. They were twin brothers."

Thousands of Christians sit and listen to this tomfoolery. Dr. Torrey repeats it wherever he goes, and it appears to give great satisfaction. One would

think there were no drinking texts in the Bible, such as "Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." One would think that "infidel" books all advocated drunkenness. One would think that distillers and publicans were all agnostics. But we will let the tomfoolery pass and take the libel. Infidelity belongs to the gambling hell and the brothel! Well, without pretending to rival Dr. Torrey's intimacy with such establishments, and his authority to speak about them, we venture to call him a reckless, gratuitous liar on the subject of "infidelity."

Dr. Torrey and his friends and accomplices might just consider the following case. A man called Alfred Loach, fifty years of age, manager of a large tile works at Cannock, and a local preacher, has just been sentenced to a long term of imprisonment at the Stafford Assizes for trying to blackmail Alfred Lloyd, a corn merchant. There was a woman in the case, and she was Loach's mistress for several years, although he was a married man with seven children. When in the witness-box he admitted having done a good deal of local preaching, and having written thus to his mistress: "I took two services yesterday to crowded congregations, and God came very near to me." No wonder the reading of this letter produced a "sensation" in Court. And perhaps Dr. Torrey will tell us whether this is a fair instance of the connection between brothels and infidelity.

This case will suffice to go on with. When we have heard from Dr. Torrey, and this one has been dealt with, we can provide him with a lot of others.

G. W. FOOTE.

Converting the Japs.

THINGS Japanese are at present very much in evidence, and, as is to be expected, the Christian world is not behind in utilising this subject in both press and pulpit. One paper, *The Church Army Gazette* fills its pages with accounts of the Japanese forces, descriptions of torpedoes, etc., apparently under the impression that glowing descriptions of such things are exactly what "a Gospel paper for working men," to quote its own description of itself, should do. The secular press also tells us in various forms and fashions the story of Japan's wonderful development, the cleverness of its people, and the part it seems destined to play in the future history of the world.

To this there seems only one drawback. The Japanese are intelligent, brave, progressive; but they are not Christian. Whatever the Western world has to offer them that is useful they take gladly; when they are offered its official religion they, with very few exceptions, decline with a polite but firm "No thanks." To an impartial outsider this is really the strongest proof of their intelligence. A stupid people would have argued: These Westerns are progressive; they are Christian—with trifling exceptions, such as men of the type of Darwin and Spencer; therefore their religion is the cause of their greatness. And this is exactly as the stupid among ourselves reason, and as those who hawk about the lying "Bible the source of England's greatness" profess to believe.

The Japanese, however, were 'cute enough to discriminate between essentials and non-essentials. They saw that the forces of Western civilisation—those which might be imitated—resulted from its science, its social and political institutions. Christianity, they saw, had nothing whatever to do with the development of European countries, and they wisely left it alone—at least in the sense of accepting it. From another standpoint they did not leave it alone, for the educated classes became imbued with Agnosticism, or Atheism; and this enabled them to understand Christianity, which is really the surest

guarantee of one's not believing in it. And so, while mendacious preachers and writers cackle about "the Bible the source of England's greatness," another nation is rising to greatness minus anything of the kind.

It is, indeed, hard to see what the Japanese could gain by the change if they all became Christians tomorrow. There are already religions in Japan quite as reasonable—or as unreasonable—as any in Europe. There is also Confucianism and Buddhism, which are far more philosophical than is Christianity, and which can certainly confer as great, if not greater, benefits. Although there are differences in matters of conduct, the Japanese seem to be as well behaved as Europeans—in some respects better. The aged are invariably well treated. They have only about 21,000 paupers; while we, with the same population, possess nearly a million; and Mr. Mortimer Mompes describes the country as an infant's paradise, so well are the young looked after. What inducement is there, then, for the Japanese to become Christian?

But it is not to be expected that the Christian world, particularly the British portion of it, can allow this state of things to endure without some attempt to effect an alteration. Some attempt *must* be made to convert the Japanese; and this for two reasons. First, there is the bald reason that they ought to become Christian; and, secondly, there is a very sober business reason for attempts at their conversion. Many thousands of Britons are engaged in the missionary business; one way and another about two million sterling is spent every year in turning natives of a questionable character into Christians about whom there is no question whatever; and a fresh emphasis on the importance of converting the Japs may put fresh spirit into, and bring more cash from, the subscribers to foreign missions. And, as a powerful reason for the maintenance of these missions is the providing of lucrative posts for members of the "Black Army," it will be seen that the conversion of the Jap is not wholly a matter of sentimental religion.

But to conquer Japan our missionaries have as hard a nut to crack on the religious plane as Russia seems to have on the military. The educated Japanese, as missionaries dolefully report, "bow down before the shrine of Herbert Spencer," and "Agnosticism, the result of Western education, is spreading enormously." This aspect of the matter is strongly borne out by a special article in the current issue of *Seed Time and Harvest*, the organ of the R.T.S., contributed by a resident in Tokio, who has been teaching English in the Imperial Naval Medical College for the last five years; and, although this gentleman says nothing that is not well known to all acquainted with the subject, and little but what I said in my *Foreign Missions* three years since, his testimony as that of a believer in missions is worth recording.

There are, he points out, three difficulties in the way of spreading the Gospel in Japan. The first is the difficulty the people have in understanding the Bible and the New Testament. From one or two examples given, however, one is inclined to think that what the writer means is that they will not understand the Bible as Christians do. One man, for instance, said of the crucifixion that Jesus, being God, probably felt no pain—which is anything but an unintelligent comment. And the statement that the Japanese reading the Bible is not sure whether it is "history or romance, or a mixture of the two," is a difficulty not confined to Japan. Thousands of people at home are exactly in the same dilemma, and thousands of others are deciding that the quality of romance predominates. The writer advocates the dissemination of more Bible dictionaries and commentaries; but as there is as much discordance among the commentators as elsewhere, we hardly see how this is to mend matters.

The second difficulty is the nature of the questions asked by the people. It will be remembered that Bishop Colenso's heresy was set going by the comments of a Kaffir on certain of the Biblical stories,

and wherever people of any intelligence approach Christianity with a mind unwarped the same kind of criticism is met with. What seems to have struck some of the people encountered by this writer is the utter impracticability of Christian teachings. After a meeting had been addressed for some time, one of the audience put a question on behalf of all. This was—"Is there any instance of (these teachings) having been put in practice?" Now what is a poor missionary to do in the face of such a poser? If he were addressing a crowd of natives in some remote portion of Africa, he would probably tell them that all English science and civilisation were due to the Sermon on the Mount and the belief in the Resurrection. The Japanese would probably retort that the Christian nations of the world were hardly convincing evidence of the value of Christian teaching. They are supreme in the art of wholesale murder; the successful soldier receives a far larger share of public attention than the philosopher, and between the various Christian nations mutual trust and confidence is practically unknown. As a matter of fact, the reply of both the Japanese and Chinese to the missionary is that they are not able to see the superior benefits of Christianity in the lives of Western nations; and, at any rate, it would be preferable for Christians to put their own teachings into practice instead of reserving them for exportation.

But the greatest difficulty of all found by this writer is the attitude of the Japanese towards religion in general. There is, he says, "a strongly rationalistic spirit in the Japanese which leads many of those who claim to be Christians to deny miracles, the Lord's Divinity, and the reality of the Lord's Resurrection"—which is rather a curious brand of Christianity. And he further urges the society to "combat the spirit of Agnosticism which is so fashionable at present among the Japanese." The literature of the country, too, is "so cleverly written, and quite opposed to Christianity." So that the outlook is very promising indeed.

In proof of the above he cites a letter in the *Japan Mail* for Jan. 22, 1901, in which an English resident traversed the optimistic statements of missionaries, and said:—

"From the point of view of a man who believes in the Divinity of Christ, in miracles, in the efficacy of prayer, in the reality of future rewards and punishments, the Christianity of the majority of those referred to by the missionary is utterly disappointing. How can people be called Christian who have discarded the essential elements of the Christian faith?.....The people who subscribe most of the money for missions would naturally be quite shocked to find the men who so often figure in the reports as the fruits of missionary efforts hold none of the distinctive doctrines of Christianity."

This letter in the *Japan Mail*, the chief English paper in Japan, was never replied to by the missionaries, and the writer says it was not because the statements are "only too true." Here in London missionaries are ready to tell of the wonderful work they are doing in Japan. In Japan itself, when a sweeping condemnation such as the above is passed on their "converts," they find silence the better policy. Speech would only make the falseness of their claims still more patent. After all, it is the people at home who find the cash, and so long as the reports are calculated to draw subscriptions, a little "lying for God's sake" is pardonable, and even praiseworthy.

In short, Japan seems about as likely to embrace Christianity as to adopt the religious customs of Central Africa. Had it adopted European customs a couple of centuries ago, it might then have swallowed European religion also. But adopting them when it did, it has also taken to heart some of the better and saner aspects of European philosophy, and this has provided her with a defence against which missionary tactics seem as helpless as Russia's Far Eastern Fleet against the Japanese Navy.

C. COHEN.

"Did Jesus Rise Again?"

THE above is the title of one of the lectures now being delivered at Manchester in defence of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Religion. So far as defending Christianity is concerned these lectures must be pronounced total failures. Their reasoning is both feeble and fallacious. Their supreme appeal is to experience or feeling, not to historical facts. The author of the present lecture is Professor A. S. Peake, M.A., late Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, and Tutor at Primitive Methodist and Lancashire Independent Colleges, and he has the reputation of being one of the most stalwart and successful Christian Apologists now living. It will be highly interesting, therefore, to consider whatever such a scholar may advance in support of the belief in the resurrection of Christ. Having carefully perused his lecture I am bound to characterise it as a miserable fiasco. There is not one valid argument in it. He begins by calling attention to the "self-consistency of the character of Jesus and the impossibility of inventing it." But many scholars maintain that the character of Jesus, as portrayed in the Gospels, is self-contradictory and traceable to various pagan sources. Sometimes Jesus is represented as an orthodox Jew who was determined to preserve intact every jot and tittle of the Mosaic law; but at other times he is shown to be in violent revolt against Judaism, and as taking vehement delight in violating its ceremonial commandments. Professor Peake goes on to claim originality for Christ's teaching; and he strangely makes this claim while admitting that it is possible, "by ransacking the world's religious literature, to accumulate parallels" to Christ's sayings. Our lecturer seems to be ignorant of the fact that unbelievers regard Christ's character, not as an invention of his disciples, but as an adaptation of similar characters in other parts of the world. Professor Peake *assumes* the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth, and expresses the belief that there is not living a single expert who doubts it. If he identifies Jesus of Nazareth with the Jesus of the Four Gospels he cannot deny that the living experts who treat his character as largely mythical are a great multitude.

As this is a point of supreme importance we must carefully examine it. Professor Peake builds his whole argument for the resurrection of Christ upon the mere assumption that he is a historical character. Well, he is depicted in the Gospels as the Messiah for whose advent the Jews had, for a long period, been anxiously waiting. But when he came he pursued a course that soon alienated them from him. Instead of heroically facing and overcoming all obstacles and riding on to a brilliant throne, and so delivering his nation from the cruel yoke of Rome, he went through life a subdued, resigned sufferer, and ended his career on the cross. But a crucified Messiah was unthinkable. This is how the Professor puts the case: "While it was quite possible for a belief to arise that a man might suffer and still be the Messiah, what was quite impossible in Judaism was that a man should be crucified and yet be believed to be the Messiah. And for this reason, that according to the Jewish law (Deut. xxi. 23), every one who was hanged upon a tree was regarded as accursed by God. While it was possible for a belief in a suffering Messiah to arise, the belief in a crucified Messiah was impossible to Jewish theology, for which such a conception would have been a blasphemous contradiction in terms." It is not at all necessary to contradict that contention, and I refer to it simply to show the drift of the Professor's argument. This is the use he makes of it: "The Church has consistently asserted that the explanation of this strange fact, that the Jews accepted a person who had been crucified as Messiah, is to be accounted for by the belief that that person had risen from the dead."

When I first read that sentence I could scarcely believe the testimony of my eyes. I had always thought that not even a Professor of Theology could have fallen into such an obvious and absurd error. The Jews never *did* accept the crucified Jesus as Messiah. All through the centuries they have consistently rejected him. In all their literature there is not one direct evidence that such a person ever existed. But if he lived, and suffered, and was crucified and rose again, as the Gospels declare, on what grounds did the Jews, his own people, so cruelly reject him? Was it because the alleged fact of his resurrection was inadequately attested? Was it because they refused to believe the witness of the apostles? Surely, if they had believed in the reality of his resurrection, they would have become his willing and devoted disciples. Belief in his resurrection would have inevitably carried with it the belief in his Messiahship. But the Jews would have none of him, because they looked upon him as an impostor, which they certainly could not have done had he risen from the dead. The cult of Jesus never sprang from Jewish soil. Even according to the New Testament, "He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not."

Professor Peake makes other most astounding statements. One is that the disciples never expected the resurrection. "Now," he asks, "was there any expectancy among the disciples that Jesus would rise from the dead?" and answers, "Certainly not. The narratives show us that there was the intention of embalming his body; but people do not embalm a body unless they expect it to remain in the grave." The narratives show us also that towards the close of his life Jesus was perpetually predicting both his crucifixion and his resurrection. Again and again he is represented as telling his disciples that he should go up to Jerusalem, and suffer many things, and be killed, and on the third day be raised up. In the face of such expressions, how can Professor Peake say that the resurrection was not expected? If he believes in the credibility of the Gospels, this portion of his argument falls to the ground; but if he does not, how does he know that the resurrection narrative is true? If the documents are untrustworthy as touching other matters, may they not be equally untrustworthy in their accounts of the resurrection?

Professor Peake devotes the greater part of his lecture to a refutation of certain theories constructed to explain the apostolic belief in the resurrection of Jesus, such as the theory of fraud on the part of the disciples, the theory that Jesus never died on the cross, but simply swooned and then revived in his tomb, and the vision-theory adopted by Professor Schmiedel and many other able scholars. "The vision-theory," we are assured, "is to-day the only serious competitor to the theory of actual resurrection, and a very serious competitor it is, as we see from the large number of able scholars who have adopted it." According to this theory, no literal resurrection occurred, Jesus was never really seen by any of the disciples, but "their imagination conjured up before them an image of the risen Christ." Professor Peake rejects this theory, as well as the others, and clings to the orthodox doctrine of the physical resurrection. But his defence of this doctrine is absurdly weak and unconvincing, as the following passage abundantly shows:

"We are convinced that the resurrection is, so to speak, of a piece with the whole character and the claims of Christ. We feel that for him to have been left in the tomb would have been a most disastrous, tragic, and unexpected ending to that great career. The Cross without the Resurrection aggravates the dark mystery of suffering. But we also feel that it would have left his followers without that impulse which should enable them to overcome the initial difficulty they must have had in believing in one as a Messiah who seemed to be stamped with the curse of God. We may well believe that for the very existence of Christianity as an historical religion it was necessary that this should come about, and that Jesus should not be left in the tomb, but should rise and appear to his disciples."

Professor Peake offers no other evidence whatever for the reality of Christ's resurrection; and it must be granted that the evidence contained in that quotation is not worthy of the name. But here is a sentence that deserves to be printed in golden letters:—

"I believe it is possible to show that, even had we no New Testament at all, we should be obliged to postulate something very much like either the resurrection or the belief in the resurrection in order to account for Christianity."

I am in full agreement with that statement. No truer statement was ever made. Christianity could not stand a single day without the belief in the miraculous. The resurrection of Christ is the corner-stone of the Christian Religion, and the moment belief in the former dies out of the world the latter will instantly fall to pieces. It is immaterial to the argument whether Jesus actually rose from the dead or not, because it is the belief that he did that keeps Christianity alive. When a theologian admits this, as Professor Peake does in this lecture, Freethinkers are strongly reassured of the correctness of their belief that Jesus did not rise from the tomb.

Let me repeat that, according to this lecture, there is absolutely no proof that Christ's resurrection ever took place. The mere belief that it did sufficiently accounts for Christianity. Professor Peake is "perfectly willing to grant, if necessary, that the resurrection narratives exhibit contradictory accounts," and that the "discrepancies create a very serious problem for certain theories of inspiration," but he submits that "the essential fact is not necessarily set aside by the difficulties and contradictions in the narratives." He reminds us that Livy and Polybius give different and irreconcilable statements as to the route Hannibal took in crossing the Alps into Italy, and adds: "And yet no one doubts at all that Hannibal crossed the Alps." So, likewise, he argues, the contradictions in the resurrection narratives "do not prove that the resurrection itself was not an historical fact." But he forgets that the cases are not parallel. We possess independent evidence that at one time Hannibal was north of the Alps and at another south of them; but we have no independent evidence that Jesus died and then on the third day came back to life again. Of this stupendous miracle we have only the irreconcilable accounts of the Evangelists and the Apostle Paul. Furthermore, the story of crossing the Alps is in itself credible. Hannibal was neither the first nor the last to accomplish such a feat; nor did he do it miraculously, on wings or at one bound. He crossed them slowly, laboriously, and naturally. But people are not in the habit of rising from their graves and holding fitful intercourse with their friends. Nor do we expect them to do such a thing. It would be contrary to nature. But the New Testament assures us that Jesus conquered death, burst open the tomb, appeared a few times to some of his disciples, and after forty days vanished into heaven. On the face of it, the story is incredible, being contrary to nature, and the accounts of it are so discrepant that it is quite impossible to believe it, unless there is some independent proof of its truth. Jesus himself is reported to have prophesied that he would return to earth before those listening to him passed away, and immediately after his ascension two men in white are said to have comforted the mourning disciples by assuring them that soon they should see him descending in like manner. But the Christian Church has waited in vain for that promised Second Coming, and is destined to wait in vain as long as it exists.

The conclusion to which we are irresistibly driven is that the story of the resurrection is a borrowed myth, foreign to the Jewish mind, but perfectly congenial to the Pagan. In heathen mythologies there are numerous almost exact parallels. Persephone, Attis, Osiris, Mithra, Dionysos, and many other mythic deities and god-men are reported to have risen from the dead and ascended. And to the

same class belongs the Christ, no more real than they, at least so far as all the alleged miraculous events are concerned.

JOHN T. LLOYD.

Is Religion a Disease?

I HAVE painfully waded through scores of summaries of sermons and addresses on the question, Is Christianity true? expecting to find some evidence or strong argument in the affirmative. But I have been disappointed. Not one of the learned men who have spoken, as far as I have seen, has tried to answer one of the real objections and real difficulties, or produced one argument that would satisfy anyone that was not already a believer. Abuse of unbelievers, accusations against them, falsification of their objections, assumptions, assertions, imaginations, anticipations, prophecies, promises, and assurances are met in all in abundance, but nothing to meet the doubts and arguments of unbelievers.

Pondering over this strange fact in my mind, and trying to find something to explain it, a thought has often occurred to me whether religion is not an infectious malady of the mind—not the Christian religion only, but every other religion, for all have the same origin and nature, however much they differ in outward appearance. Wherever any religion exists, and is alive and active, it excites hatred to every other religion, and a ready—often a burning—willingness to destroy all who profess it. Hence all the furious religious wars and senseless social animosities between different religious sects. How is this sad fact to be accounted for? There must be a cause for it. It seems to me that it must be attributed to wilful wrongdoing, which I think could not be successfully maintained, or that it is the result of a disordered mind, produced by a religious belief. And I would suggest, as a thought worth inquiring into and being discussed, that religion is a species of mental disease of an infectious order.

That religion is infectious seem to be self-evident. It is communicated to young and old by emotions and outward influences, such as singing, praying, passionate oratory, and such means, without in the least affecting the reason of the converts. The conversions of missions and popular religious services would not be possible by an appeal to reason, and all the Churches know this fact well. If religion is a mental malady, it is most likely—partially at least—hereditary, like many physical complaints. A tendency to the disease is inherited, and environment completes the contagion.

When any child, or an adult, cannot distinguish colors, they are said to be color blind. Their inability is known to be the result of natural organic defects, and no one dreams of blaming them, any more than they would blame the blind for not seeing. If so, what are we to make of Christian apologists, many of them learned and really intellectual men, who cannot see palpable contradictions? who fail to recognise facts from fictions, and who see glaring fictions to be facts? who fail to see and feel the force of demonstrated facts and arguments against their creed? In the case of the masses, such inability might be said to be the result of ignorance and want of culture. But that cannot be said of educated and learned ministers and professors. I can see only two ways to account for it. One is wilful refusal to see. It is said that none are so blind as those who won't see. We know that men can tell falsehoods and dissimulate, and it might be said—and as a fact many do say it—that the apologists do see the contradictions, the fictions, and the proofs, but say they do not, as they think a confession would destroy the creed on which they live. The other explanation is that religion has infected their minds, by heredity and environment, to such a degree that they are unable to see the huge fictions and absurdities contained in their

creeds. Of the two explanations, I think the last is the most charitable.

An objection might be raised to this view by saying that the learned apologists are sane on every subject but religion, and that this fact would make it probable that they are sane on religion also. But the objection has no force, as it is well known that many are insane in one thing only. They will converse and act rationally on every topic but one. The moment anyone touches the one topic they instantly lose their mental balance, and begin to talk in such a way that all see their insanity in that particular subject. I know a man, sane enough on ordinary matters, but mention the weather to him, and he is at once off his horse, and talks wild enough to convince anyone that he is weather-mad, for he believes that he has power to control it. He cannot help it, and I would not blame him or ridicule him for it, as I believe his mind is infected on that matter. In the same way, it is quite possible for men to be sane in everything but religion, and very insane in that, as undoubtedly thousands are.

Seeing what does not exist is a symptom of insanity. Men in delirium of fever or any other cause see around them ghosts, demons, monsters, and all kinds of non-existing horrors. The patients see them clear enough, and hear their voices, but they exist only in their own disordered brains. And do not Christians see ghosts, devils, saints, angels, God, heaven, hell, and many other imaginary things? And is seeing the unseen and non-existing forms not a symptom of mental derangement? Sane minds not infected by religion see none of those imaginary objects.

Insanity very often changes the whole nature and character of men. They fancy that their best friends are their bitter foes. The kind father becomes a cruel demon. Their wives and relations and neighbors are looked upon as monsters of iniquity. But nobody blames them, for all know, from the sad facts, that they are insane. And are many Christians not very like them? Christians think that unbelievers oppose Christianity because they hate goodness and love wickedness—a most unjust and libellous assumption. But the assumption exists, and Christians are never tired of bearing false witness against unbelievers. No religion has a good word to say of any other religion. Every one thinks that all other religions are bad and their adherents are wicked—My religion is the only good one. Even different sects of the same religion accuse one another of wrongdoing. But all unite to defame unbelievers. Foul charges against prominent sceptics, invented by fanatics, and spread in the interest of religion, are repeated in pulpit and press, in spite of the clearest evidence of their falsity. How often do we hear Christians defaming France as a wicked, infidel country; and Britons are warned against imitating her—ignoring, or not knowing, that France is a Christian country with a State Church, like Britain. Mohammedans, Buddhists, and other religionists are, of course, bad men. The accusers, as a rule, are ignorant fanatics, whose only knowledge is nothing more than gossip and hearsay. And what is fanaticism but a species of insanity? It is scarcely conceivable that sane men would hurl charges of immorality against persons they do not know, as Christians do against sceptics, unless their minds were deranged under the baneful influence of religious belief.

R. J. DERFEL.

(To be concluded.)

KNEW HE COULD TURN IT IN TRADE.—This is told about President McKinley: When he lived in Canton he had each winter a great stock of blankets, shoes, potatoes, Bibles, and so forth, that he would distribute where they were needed most. One day he gave a Bible to a newsboy. He would not have ventured upon such a gift as this had not the newsboy asked for the book. "I am glad," Mr. McKinley said to the lad, "that you want a Bible. Are you happy now that you have got one?" "Yes, sir," said the boy. "I know a place where I can trade it off for a fiddle."

Acid Drops.

Some weeks ago we commented on the announcement that Mr. John Burns, M.P., and Mr. Will Crooks, M.P., had been retained, engaged (or whatever is the proper word) to address public meetings in connection with the Free Church Congress at Newcastle-on-Tyne. We expressed a hope that the announcement was false as far as Mr. Burns was concerned, and that he would give it a formal denial. He did not do so, however; yet we are glad to see that he did not put in an appearance at the Nonconformist show. Neither did Mr. Will Crooks, who was kept in London by "the exigencies of parliament." This is a wide expression, and we trust it covers Mr. Crooks' retreat from a position in which he should never have allowed himself to be placed.

On the eve of the Free Church Congress at Newcastle-on-Tyne the *Daily News* came out, in a leading article, with a plain declaration in favor of Secular Education as the only logical and satisfactory way out of the present difficulty. But as this solution was contemptuously rejected a few days afterwards by the Free Church Congress itself, we expect we shall hear very little more from the *Daily News* about Secular Education. Now and then a paper, like some men, realises its conscience and tells the truth and acts honestly; but a spasmodic effort of this kind produces very little effect, and is soon forgotten.

Dr. Clifford, the Nonconformist Pope now that Price Hughes and Joseph Parker are gone, took charge of the "Declaration of Policy" on the Education question at the Free Church Congress. And it was safe in his hands. He is the biggest humbug in the whole Passive Resistance movement; and if there is any parson in the Church of England who can beat him at the game of unctuous hypocrisy we should like to see that reverend gentleman's face. Dr. Clifford is simply fighting for the interest of Dis-senting ecclesiasticism, and all his fine phrases about religious liberty and free citizenship, etc., etc., are merely bait to catch the sillier sort of "progressive" voters. His real object is to make the public schools of this country recruiting grounds for the Chapel instead of the Church.

Let us look at the policy he submitted to the Free Church Congress on behalf of the Council, and which the Congress adopted by an overwhelming majority. We will pass by all the "progressive" bait and come to the central matter in Clause VI., which runs as follows:—

"That no distinctively denominational teaching or formula be given or used in public schools in school hours; but simply Biblical instruction may be given according to a syllabus, as is general at present in provided schools. Attendance at such instruction shall be subject to a conscience clause."

There you have the Chapel champion naked and unashamed. Dr. Clifford knows that this is simply a Nonconformist policy of religious education. He knows it is detested by Catholics, repudiated by Churchmen, rejected by Jews, and scorned by Freethinkers. He knows it has hardly more than a handful of friends outside the Chapel party. Yet he coolly proposes it as the policy which the law of this land should force into the public schools, supported by the rates and taxes of Catholics, Churchmen, Jews, and Freethinkers—as well as by the rates and taxes of Nonconformists. And at the same time he talks about freedom, justice, and equality, as though scarcely anybody understood them but himself. Are we not justified, therefore, in regarding him as a humbug of the very first water?

We can easily see what these Chapel champions mean by "equality." There was one M.P. speaker at the Free Church Congress—Mr. James Bryce, and we make the following extract from his speech as reported in the *Daily News*:

"He hoped Free Churchmen would not consent to let the question be whether the settlement was to be with a stronger or a milder flavor of injustice, but that they would declare that there should be no injustice at all. They should stand for absolute equality. The settlement must include absolute equality between members of the Church of England and Free Churchmen."

Could anything be clearer? Could anything show more plainly that this is a Church and Chapel fight? Absolute equality is the theory—or rather the pretence. The practical equality aimed at is equality between Church and Chapel. In other words, each must have a fair share in bamboozling and cheating the people. It is a question of honor amongst thieves.

Perhaps the worst bit of humbug in Clause VI. of the Free Church policy is the reference to "a conscience clause." Nonconformists are denouncing the conscience clause in

relation to Church schools as a mockery, a delusion, and a snare. They say it really operates as a religious test and makes martyrs of their children. But when these same Nonconformists get religious teaching after their own hearts in a public school, they offer the conscience clause to all dissidents as the very beau ideal of fair play. So much do circumstances alter cases.

Dr. Clifford's speech was worthy of his policy. We shall not follow it in detail, but just take a salient point. He advanced an argument (heaven save the mark!) in favor of Bible reading and explanation in the public schools. "They had no right," he said, "to pass a law to prevent children from obtaining free access to the best citizen-making book in the world." This sophistry was addressed to a sympathetic audience. An independent audience would have laughed in the speaker's face. How on earth can shutting the Bible out from the public schools be denying the children free access to it? Have the children no parents and no homes? Are there no Sunday-schools? Are there no places of religious worship? Is there no opportunity for a child to make acquaintance with the Bible outside the five hours a day, for five days in the week, that he or she spends in an elementary school? There are 168 hours in a week, and Dr. Clifford argues that keeping a child without a Bible for 25 hours per week is keeping the child without the Bible altogether! One has only to state this absurdity and leave it to every sensible man's derision.

And now for something nice. There was at least one honest man at that Free Church Congress. Let us name him—the Rev. Walter Park. Some day or other, perhaps, when history is written, this gentleman may stand out above all the clamorous crowd led by Dr. Clifford. Mr. Park moved an amendment. He affirmed that it was inexpedient to have the Bible read in any school supported out of public funds, and that all religious teaching should be the duty of the various sects in their own schools by their own teachers at their own cost and out of school hours. This was the voice of true Nonconformity—of the principle that the State has no right to meddle with religion on any pretence whatever. But it appears that Mr. Park had few friends at the Nonconformist Congress. His amendment was rejected by "an overwhelming majority." Nor was that all. An amendment to the effect that it was not desirable to commit the Free Churches at present was voted down in the same way. Dr. Clifford's policy was then adopted in its entirety. And the Congress appropriately went on to discuss Chinese Slavery in South Africa.

Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad. So says an ancient proverb. And this seems to be the case with the Nonconformist party. They are actually under the impression that all the by-elections in which the Liberals have won seats have turned solely upon the Education Act, and that Dr. Clifford has won all the Progressive victories in the London County Council elections. This is a most ridiculous delusion, and if the Nonconformists go on acting upon it they will come to grief. We venture to predict that if a Liberal government soon comes into power it will never dare to hand over the public schools of England to the Nonconformist Conscience. Anyhow, there will be a much bigger fight than the present one before that dream becomes a reality.

Mr. G. J. Holyoake, rather late in life, has become a Passive Resister. Having declined to pay the Education rate, he was summoned to appear at the Brighton Police Court, where a distress warrant was issued against him. When the distraint takes place we hope the bailiff will not seize the family Bible.

Judging by the *Daily News* report, Mr. Holyoake sent a letter to be read in court, in which he said that if the Church were in distress he should not object to subscribe for its relief; but when it came to taking money from him by force in order to teach tenets from which he dissented, that was quite a different thing. Were friends of his way of thinking to come into power and pass an Act seizing the property of Churchmen to inculcate opinions of which they utterly disapproved, they (the Churchmen) would all resist.

We should be sorry to insinuate that Mr. Holyoake has any other resemblance to Shylock, but he is certainly like him in one thing. "The curse," Shylock says, "never fell upon our nation till now; I never felt it till now." Mr. Holyoake never felt the Passive Resister's curse till now. We presume he has paid rates and taxes ever since the first Education Act was passed, thirty-three years ago. During the whole of that time money has been taken from him by force (if you don't pay they make you) and devoted to the teaching of

various forms of Christianity in the public schools. Mr. Holyoake "dissented" from all those forms of Christianity, yet he never kicked before. He never advised the non-payment of rates when Secularists were taxed for what they often detested, when they were openly oppressed, when their children were subjected to insult, and when these children, as they grew up, were debarred by both Churchmen and Nonconformists from service in the teaching profession. Mr. Holyoake bottled up his indignation until his Nonconformist friends felt the trouble. Now they protest and he explodes. It is the last perfecting touch to the Comedy of Passive Resistance.

One of the subjects discussed at the Free Church gathering at Newcastle dealt with the difficulty of getting working men to attend church. This is, of course, a subject always interesting—to clergymen, who are often in the position of a shopkeeper shunned by customers. Various reasons were advanced for the abstention of working men, and at last Mr. Campbell, of the City Temple gave the real reason. He said: "Working men stayed away from church for the same reason as any other class, namely, because he was materialised, because he was sensual, covetous, often brutal, self-indulgent, insincere, because the working classes were less in love with work than they used to be, because idle habits were on the increase, and he was unthrifty; because he was often not only drunken but dissolute, and a gambler." The unadulterated impudence of this City Temple bantam is simply staggering. One would think the time had passed when any man could stand up in a public meeting and describe working men who stayed away from church as drunken, dissolute, idle, brutal, etc., etc. It is left for this much praised Mr. Campbell to show that ignorance and impertinence still finds a comfortable home in the pulpit.

The Rev. F. B. Meyer also regretted the falling off in church attendance. There was, he said, "less church going and more Sabbath pleasure taking. Indeed, the shameless arrangements of Sunday excursions are nothing short of a scandal.....Fewer at church and chapel on any Sunday..... The masses of the people are outside. There are great cities and towns whole tracts of which are almost wholly given up to irreligion, and seem absolutely impervious to every form of religious appeal. In some places the churches, in despair, have resorted to methods for attracting and holding the young people which are a practical admission that the Gospel is no longer the power of God to salvation, and that the pantomime, the dance, and the tableaux vivants are the only resources left."

So far Mr. Meyer the clergyman. Curiously enough, the same paper from which the above is taken contains the report of an interview with Mr. Meyer, and in this we catch him for a moment as a man, minus the parson. He told the interviewer he would like to "administer a caution to my brother ministers." This is: "Remember to have a Sabbath Day in every week, and to keep it for a game of golf, or for a long ride into the country, or for throwing stones into the ocean.....The weekly day of repose from intellectual toil should be spent in vigorous outdoor exercise, by which the fountains of health will be renewed." So when Mr. Meyer is addressing the people in the pew, or those whom he wishes to get there, he tells them the growth of Sunday excursions is a scandal. There is too much "pleasure taking" to the detriment of church attendance. When he is addressing the other members of the Black Army he discovers that their day of rest should be spent in riding, visits to the seaside, or some other form of "pleasure taking." Now, as Sunday is the only day in the week on which the vast majority have a chance of visiting the country or the seaside, one asks why on earth should these people give up the means by which "the fountains of health will be renewed" in order to attend church or chapel? This is one sauce for the goose and another for the gander with a vengeance. It was really unwise for Mr. Meyer to let the cat out of the bag in this fashion. He should have sent the advice round to his brother ministers in a private circular.

It was natural that something should be said at the Free Church Congress about Mr. Robert Blatchford's attack on Christianity. Most of what was said there came from the not too polite lips of the Rev. J. G. Greenhough, of Leicester. This gentleman evidently looks down upon "unbelievers" as an inferior species. But there are "unbelievers" in his own town who could easily show him his mistake, if he only took the trouble to go near them—which, perhaps, he has too much Christian charity to do.

Mr. Greenhough delivered an address on "Modern Unsettlements in the Christian Faith." He said that there was unsettlement all round, and that religion was only affected

by the general unrest; which is half a truth, and half a very bad blunder; for the unsettlement in religion has been going on for two hundred years, and is not at all a thing of yesterday.

After this preliminary canter Mr. Greenhough broke into a gallop. "They made too much," he said, "of the people who attacked Christianity. They were only a small company." That is what the Russians said of the Japs. They said the Japs were not worth mentioning; besides, they were very small, and three of them would skewer very neatly on a Russian bayonet. But the Russian bayonets have not got home yet—and the Japs have. So the Russians have to sing a little smaller now; as Mr. Greenhough and his friends may have to do before the end of the chapter.

We may also remind Mr. Greenhough that Christians, of all men, ought not to sneer at those who attack Christianity as a small company. Jesus Christ and his apostles were a much smaller company; and they were a smaller company still when he got into trouble, for they all forsook him and fled; which is a thing, by the way, that "unbelievers" have never been known to do yet. Yes, it was a remarkably small company at the arrest of Jesus Christ. It was a trifle larger at the crucifixion; when it included Jesus Christ and one of the two thieves. It was somewhat larger afterwards, but still very inconsiderable. For many years Christianity pattered along in a small way; and in three hundred years it only succeeded in converting one in twenty of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Now we venture to suggest to Mr. Greenhough that "unbelief" has got hold of more than one in twenty of the inhabitants of France, Germany, Italy, and Belgium—not to go further afield in Europe. We even venture to suggest that "unbelief" has got hold of more than one in twenty of the inhabitants of Great Britain. Those who attack Christianity may be a small company, but those who have practically abandoned Christianity are a very fair-sized crowd. And Mr. Greenhough knows it; only he does not choose to say so.

"No Christians," Mr. Greenhough said, "need be alarmed by critics and sceptics of the Mr. Blatchford type, or deem their vulgar, abusing attacks on the Bible worthy of an answer." There you have a good dose of Christian charity. Thomas Hood deplored the "rarity" of that article "under the sun." But it seems to us that the world has always had plenty of it, and to spare. Mr. Greenhough thinks it more politic to call Mr. Blatchford names than to answer him. Well, it is easier, anyway.

We should really like to know from Mr. Greenhough what attacks on the Bible he does *not* consider vulgar and abusive. We should also like to know what attacks on the Bible he *does* consider worthy of an answer. We should further like to know whether he has answered any of them. With this information before us we should be in a better position to judge whether Mr. Greenhough's description of Mr. Blatchford is special criticism or general ill-temper.

Mr. Greenhough went on easing his mind about Mr. Blatchford, who, if he is not worthy of an answer, is worthy of a ragging. This is what he said of the Blatchford tribe: "They were almost equally devoid of wit and novelty, being a weak, stale, hash-up of things which had done service in the same business a hundred years ago. They ran through the Bible after the manner of their tribe with the dog's keen scent for decayed bones. They were totally insensible to the noble, lovely, and divine things in that garden of the Lord. They had no spiritual discernment, no reverence, no emotion, and, what was worse, they lacked the saving grace of humor, which would save them from a great many things, and especially from the enormous egotism which was sometimes positively amusing. The working classes would not be captured by Mr. Blatchford, for they had more than a grain of humor. He had been extensively and audaciously advertised. Active Christian workers had no time to trouble about such attacks."

Thus Mr. Greenhough troubled himself to show that nobody need trouble about Mr. Blatchford. With the alteration of one word, Hamlet's observation applies to him: "Methinks the preacher doth protest too much."

Mr. Blatchford, like other Freethinkers of his type, has very little head, according to the foregoing account, and still less heart; and it is a wonder that Mr. Greenhough did not deny him the possession of a liver and kidneys—to say nothing of lights. But all this is sheer impudence. It is an old orthodox trick to avoid debate. Your opponent says nothing new, he squints, he has no wit, no humor—or only enough to laugh at you; he is devoid of this, that, and the other common virtue; consequently there is no need for you to say anything else to show that he is utterly in the wrong. This how the dear Christians have been going on for ever so

long; and Mr. Greenhough only proved at the Free Church Congress that if you scratch a preacher you find a priest.

Religion may not make the best of the next world, but it is always trying to make the best of this world—for itself. It has just been officially stated in the house of Commons that during the past five years the annual grants to religious bodies by the Admiralty were as follows: Church of England, £12,278; Roman Catholic, £13,434; other religious bodies, £11,316. We presume the "other religious bodies" are all Nonconformists. These people abhor State religion, but they like to join in when the cash is being shared out.

Mr. Lloyd-George, Welshman, lawyer, and M.P., presided over the meeting of the London Welsh Auxiliary of the Bible Society at Exeter Hall, and talked a great deal of rubbish about the fetish-book of his faith. He maintained, for instance, that the Bible was at the root of the humanitarian tendencies of the age. This is a statement made without the slightest proof, and all we have to do is to give it a flat denial. That the Bible has "lessened the horrors of war" is a most ridiculous assertion. The God of the Bible ordered certain wars to be waged, and they were wars of extermination. His pious soldiers, or his bloody bandits, were commanded to slay all, man, woman, and child, and leave alive nothing that breathed. And they did it. Yet the Bible has lessened the horrors of war! Mr. Lloyd-George had better try again.

Feeling that his audience would go with him to the length of any absurdity, Mr. Lloyd George claimed that "from the Bible had sprung the idea of international arbitration." We imagine that this will be news to Mr. Cremer. It will assuredly be news to the European friends of international concord. Mr. Lloyd George should condescend to point to the parts of the Bible that justify his extraordinary statement. He must know, as a lawyer, the necessity for specific evidence. You cannot prove a man guilty of theft by alleging that he is a thief. You must demonstrate that he has stolen some particular thing. And what Mr. Lloyd George has to do is to extend this practical logic to his eulogy of the Bible.

Christian Science came before the public at a recent inquest at Chelsea on the body of William Wright, thirty-two, a gardener. He was a member of the Christian Scientist community, and had come to London from Yorkshire to undergo treatment from a member named Miller, of Albion-street, Hyde Park. Mr. Miller is butler to Mr. Maxim Graham. It does not appear that he has any other qualification for the job he undertook. He assisted Mr. William Wright by prayer, understanding that he suffered from paralysis of the left leg; and he says that his prayers were efficacious because the affected limb improved. But with all his Christian Science he did not know that the patient suffered from chronic disease of the kidneys, nor foresee that he would pop off under an attack of double acute pneumonia. Christian Science, therefore, doesn't amount to very much in this case.

Shoemakers have been advised to stick to their lasts. George Miller, the butler, should stick to his tray.

This Christian Scientist, by the way, was asked what he would do if a member broke his leg. He replied that in the case of broken bones he advised his followers to have the aid of a surgeon. How naive! A broken bone is a nasty stubborn fact, and is not to be played with, even in the name of Christian Science.

Ayr does not seem to have derived much advantage from the propinquity of Robert Burns—in the flesh or the spirit. Some Freethought literature was offered to the Ayr Public Library, and the result was a debate at the Readers' Union as to whether such literature should be admitted. Bailie Wallace opened with an eloquent plea for all-round toleration. He wanted to know why the Christian religion required protection, if it was true and came from God. But the Rev. Millar Patrick was not to be caught by such chaff. He was all for free criticism, but he drew the line at license; and evidently the license began when the reverend gentleman's creed was touched without kid gloves. Mr. James H. Goudie, a solicitor, asked why the Library Committee excluded one side of the question. Other speakers declared that "infidel" literature carried with it a moral pestilence. Altogether the bigots were in a majority, but no vote was taken, so we cannot state the numerical strength of the respective parties. After the debate, which was rather dry, some of the

orthodox speakers probably sampled the national beverage. While religion and whisky hold out Scotland may defy the world.

They are still continuing the Sunday afternoon replies to Mr. Robert Blatchford at the Central Hall, Manchester. The last lecture was by the Rev. J. S. Simon, governor of Didsbury College, his subject being "Wesley and Voltaire." Now this is a silly subject, for the genius, the work, and the environment of these two great men were so different as to render comparison unprofitable, and even absurd. Voltaire could not have done Wesley's work. True. But neither could Wesley have done Voltaire's work. The question then arises, was Voltaire's work necessary and fruitful? On this point a Wesleyan preacher is not the best of judges, and we may be pardoned for preferring the opinion of his betters. For our own part, we are broad enough, which the Rev. J. S. Simon is not, to admire Wesley as well as Voltaire. We may also observe that Mr. Simon talks like a Simple Simon about Voltaire's "immoral life" and like a nincompoop about the "failure of the French Revolution." It is really astonishing that the governor of a College (but then it is a Wesleyan College) can talk such historic nonsense at this time of day.

Of the Rev. Frank M. Bristol, pastor of the Washington Metropolitan Memorial Methodist church and of the late President McKinley, we are informed by a resident of the district that he is a small person given to braying forth his disapproval of men like Thomas Paine, Thomas Huxley, and Herbert Spencer. Evidently Mr. Bristol is of the Blatherskite order. That he is an unfaithful historian we know from the following statement in his sermon of Feb. 21. He was speaking of George Washington, and said: "He was a conscientious observer of the Sabbath in his private and public life, on the farm and in the camp, as civilian, soldier, and President. His character was the embodiment of Christian virtues, his life and conduct were controlled and guided by the precepts and principles of the gospel. He was a member, supporter, and habitual attendant of the Christian Church." Washington observed the Sabbath in a "conscientious" manner when at home by working at his accounts and riding over his farm. He may have been a member of the church by baptism in infancy, but was not such by profession. He absented himself from church about three Sundays out of four, and habitually dodged the communion. By ministers who were his contemporaries he was called a Deist—a word also used as descriptive of the religious belief of the "two Toms"—Jefferson and Paine.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Any person who has got religion is more or less insane or unsane. Religion is not the product of sound minds. Recently a man by the name of Isaac Hall, who lived in Van Buren, N.Y., shot his sister while she was asleep; then he dragged her wounded body through the house and cut her throat, and to make sure that his infernal work could not be mended he placed her neck across a chopping-block and severed her head from her body. All this was done to obey God, Hall said. Never was a worse deed laid to the devil. It is stated that this Hall is very religious. Religion has done lots of mischief in our poor old world, and has committed some of the most horrible crimes ever inflicted upon humanity. Of course Christians will say that Hall was mistaken, that God never commanded him to commit so foul a deed, but the fact remains that it was his religious belief which inspired his act.—*Boston Investigator*.

That was a nice advertisement the other day in the *Morning Post* for "A Sporting Parson" in a "good hunting country" in the Midlands. Nothing was said about the soul-saving part of the job. That was only an accident of the situation.

"Not even the most cantankerous Freethinker," the *Daily Graphic* says, "has a stone to fling at the Bible Society." Our contemporary exaggerates the average Freethinker's reverence for the Bible. We might advise a reference to our last week's leading article. Perhaps our contemporary would call us "cantankerous," but we do not mind its adjectives. They break no bones—nor even the peace.

The Russians ought to beat the Japs easily now. General Kuropatkin has left St. Petersburg for the seat of war, where he will take command and knock the enemy to smithereens. This result is secured by the present made to him on the railway platform. It was a sacred picture, bearing the inscription, "By this sign thou shalt conquer." That settles it. The Japs know what to expect. No doubt they will sue for peace immediately.

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

Sunday, March 20, North Camberwell Hall, New Church-road, London, S.E. : at 7.30, "Holy Russia and Heathen Japan."
March 27, Birmingham; April 10, West Ham.

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.
- J. LLOYD'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—March 20, Newcastle-on-Tyne; 27, Birmingham; April 3, Sheffield; 10, Manchester; 17, Merthyr Tydvil; 24, Failsworth.
- F. S.—Thanks for cutting.
- H. COOPER.—See "Acid Drops." Cuttings are always welcome.
- GEORGE SMITH.—There is not an atom of truth in the statement that Americans became cool to Paine because he dishonorably divulged State secrets. The constant concoction of lies about Thomas Paine by Christians only proves that Christianity is the meanest religion on earth.
- W. P. BALL.—Always glad to receive your useful cuttings.
- G. SCOTT.—Send more along whenever you please. Our readers help us by supplying us with newspaper cuttings that will serve as texts for "Acid Drops."
- J. PARTRIDGE.—Particulars of your letter noted: also see paragraph.
- J. BLACKHALL.—Thanks. Some of the matters have been commented upon.
- I. H. ELSTON.—We have devoted several paragraphs this week to the Free Church Congress and its doings. As you say, the vote of ten for the abolition of Bible reading in public schools was ridiculous, yet in another sense significant, being "the little cloud no bigger than a man's hand" that must in time cover the whole Nonconformist sky.
- H. R. CLIFTON.—Your own report of Mr. Shaw's lecture on Shakespeare was in type before we received the one you sent us from the local *Advertiser*; and we rather think your own the better of the two. Mr. Shaw cannot help being entertaining, and he is entertaining on Shakespeare; and, if it were possible, Shakespeare on Mr. Shaw might be more entertaining still. Byron, by the way, said wilder things about Shakespeare than Mr. Shaw has said yet, though nobody knows what he may say; but Byron knew very well, in his heart of hearts, the unapproachable greatness of the poet he amused himself by slanging.
- CHILDREN'S PARTY.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges the following sums of money per collecting cards:—J. G. Neate, 3s.; S. Samuels, 4s.; G. Childs, 4s. 6d.
- W. BIRDON.—(1) Our debate with Mr. Logan revived the Free-thought cause in Bristol; a new N.S.S. Branch was formed, and Sunday lectures were largely attended. The movement fell away there partly because it passed into wrong hands, and partly because of the general reaction which swept over England, of which the Tory government is only one expression. (2) We cannot answer your questions about "adaptation" in this column. The matter is dealt with fully in our *Darwin On God*. Briefly, adaptation as a result is accounted for by natural selection operating through the struggle for existence. The survival of the fittest implies the extermination of the unfit.
- W. T. BARKER.—Comte's *General View of Positivism* and *Positivist Catechism*, both published at half-a-crown, would give you a very fair idea of his philosophy. The larger works translated into English are dearer and scarcer. The *Positive Polity*, for instance, in four large volumes, fetches some £3 second-hand. We believe it is out of print now. Comte's *Discourse on the Positive Spirit*, admirably translated by Professor Beesly, has just been published at half-a-crown by Reeves, 83, Charing-cross-road.
- E. PARKER.—See paragraph. The matter of the Stratford Town Hall lectures is left entirely, as far as we are concerned, in the hands of the Secular Society's secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.
- SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY.—We insert your lecture notices, but you must not send us lecture notices for other societies.
- E. CHAPMAN.—See paragraph.
- The National Secular Society's office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- 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.

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote had fine meetings at Liverpool on Sunday, and a most enthusiastic reception. The evening meeting was particularly crowded and lively. The chair was occupied in the afternoon by Mr. Schweitzer, who used to be an active worker for the Branch many years ago, and has lately resumed his activity. In the evening the chair was occupied by Mr. H. Percy Ward, whose work as lecturer and organiser on behalf of the Branch is evidently much appreciated. We hear that the Branch membership has considerably increased during the past twelve months. There is also a sustained improvement in the Sunday audiences.

Mr. Foote lectures at the Camberwell Secular Hall this evening (March 20). His subject, "Holy Russia and Heathen Japan," is one that should draw a full meeting. The local "saints" should do their best to advertise the lecture in the district, and try to bring some of their less heterodox friends and acquaintances along to hear it. The admission is free, and the collection, of course, optional.

A special course of Sunday evening lectures, under the auspices of the Secular Society, Limited, will take place in the Stratford Town Hall, for the benefit of the West Ham district, on Sunday evenings, April 3, 10, and 17. Mr. Cohen will take the first and last of these lectures, and Mr. Foote the middle one. Mr. Foote's services may be required in connection with another hall that we are "after" in the vicinity of Holborn; the Queen's Hall being only available on occasional evenings for some time to come.

Mr. C. Cohen, who has not visited Manchester for some time, lectures there to-day (March 20) in the Secular Hall, Rusholme-road. No doubt the local saints will be very glad of the opportunity to hear him again. We hope to hear that he had first-class meetings.

Mr. John Lloyd's meetings at South Shields were very well attended, and his lectures were highly appreciated. Mr. Lloyd's pamphlet was in good demand and a thousand copies of Mr. Foote's *God at Chicago* were distributed. The new Tivoli Hall experiment was successful enough to encourage repetition.

Tyneside Freethinkers should note that Mr. John Lloyd is lecturing this afternoon and evening for the Newcastle Branch in the Co-operative Hall, Whitehall-road, Gateshead. The fact that Mr. Lloyd was at one time Minister of one of the Gateshead Presbyterian Churches lends this visit a somewhat unusual interest, and it is hoped that a good number of the orthodox will be curious enough to attend to hear the newer Gospel that Mr. Lloyd is advocating. Tea between the lectures will be arranged for visitors.

The Birmingham Town Hall has long been booked to the local N.S.S. Branch, by the kindness of the Mayor, for Sunday, March 27, and Mr. Foote arranged to speak again from that historic platform. This he will do exclusively in the afternoon, when he will deliver a lecture on "Holy Russia and Heathen Japan." In the evening, however, he has agreed to preside at a Freethought Demonstration. Besides himself, the speakers will be Mr. C. Cohen and Mr. John Lloyd. Councillor Fallows has also been invited to join in the oratory. The local "saints" may thus look forward to a special treat, and the more general public who are likely to attend will probably not object to the varied bill of fare provided for them.

The West Ham Branch begins its open-air propaganda at Stratford Grove again on the first Sunday in April, when Mr. Ramsey is the lecturer. Local "saints" who may wish to help this enterprise in any way can communicate with the secretary, Mr. E. Parker, 50, London-road, Plaistow, E.

We print in another column a brief report of Mr. Bernard Shaw's recent lecture on Shakespeare. It will be noted that Mr. Shaw allows what we have always maintained, that Shakespeare had no religion of his own and no belief in a future life. We hold, indeed, that this is quite demonstrable, in spite of the dramatic nature of the Master's writings. Mr. Shaw's agreement on this point is a sufficient reason for the report of his lecture appearing in the *Freethinker*. Of course there is a great deal in the lecture, or at least in the report—which, however, we have good ground for believing a faithful one—that will raise smiles and produce little conviction. Byron impertinently referred to Shakespeare's "plays so doting," but they have long outlived Byron's plays, and are more admired than ever. Mr. Shaw, too, is a very clever

man; but it is possible that "Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant" may not be acted or read a hundred years hence; while the odds are ever so many to one that Shakespeare's will still hold the field. And perhaps Mr. Shaw knows it. He is an all-round iconoclast, and it must be exhilarating, when he feels that way inclined, to have such a genius as Shakespeare for a literary Aunt Sally.

Progress is being made with the popular sixpenny edition of Mr. Foote's *Bible Romances*, which will be issued by the Secular Society, Limited. This edition has been to some extent revised, and enlarged by the inclusion of two chapters that did not appear in the more expensive edition at present in the market. The sixpenny edition is being well printed in new type on good paper. The get-up will be all that is desirable, and the cover title-page will bear an excellent portrait of the author. This edition of *Bible Romances* should have a wide sale. It may be followed by a similar edition of *Bible Heroes*.

The New York *Truthseeker* reproduces Mr. Foote's article from our columns on "The Redeemer and the Redemption." We sometimes have the pleasure of reproducing from our American contemporary. Which is a very fair exchange; for, while no one is injured, Freethinkers on both sides of the Atlantic are brought into a kind of acquaintance with each other. We may add that the *Truthseeker* is one of our most welcome exchanges.

An important meeting of the West London Branch N.S.S. will be held at Newnham-street, Edgware-road, on Thursday, March 24th, at 8.30 p.m. All members are earnestly requested to attend.

Cassell and Co., Limited, the great publishing house, confess to having dropped £5,893 15s. 10d. over their new publication, *Men and Women*, which has been discontinued. Yet there are some people who wonder at a few pounds being required to help along a boycotted organ of unpopular opinion. The fifty-eight hundred pounds dropped on *Men and Women* would put the *Freethinker* in a position of prosperity and security.

LIFT NO VOICE IN PRAYER.

(DU MAURIER'S TRANSLATION OF A LYRIC BY MADAME NECKER).

KINDLY watcher by my bed, lift no voice in prayer;
Waste not any words on me when the hour is nigh—
Let a stream of melody but flow from some sweet player,
And meekly will I lay my head and fold my hands to die.

Sick am I of idle words, past all reconciling—
Words that weary and perplex and pander and conceal;
Wake the sounds that cannot lie, for all of their beguiling,
The language one need fathom not, but only hear and feel.

Let them roll once more to me, and ripple in my hearing
Like waves upon some lonely beach where no craft
anchoreth;
That I may steep my soul therein, and craving naught nor
fearing,
Drift on through slumber to a dream, and through a
dream to death.

LITTLE LYRICS.

PROSPERITY.

If God, as you urge, left his crown and throne,
To snatch us from sin's vile flame,
How is it that millions have never known
So much as that even he came?

FAITH.

Poor mask, so oft in many a bloody fray
Sword-slashed and mud-befouled since man's dim
youth,
Piteous the trapping thou dost make to-day,
Perched batlike on the grand white brows of Truth!

THE GULF.

"I feel that my soul is immortal,"
You tell me with visage aglow;
But emotion was never yet knowledge,
And ah, the infinity stretching
To sunder "I feel" from "I know!"

SOCIALISM.

Alas, rash optimists, who fondly plan
To consummate the Equality of Man,
Between your purpose and the goal ye prize
What alps of human selfishness arise!

—Edgar Fawcett.

The Ethics of Aristotle.

II.—VIRTUE.

WE have seen that Aristotle teaches that the supreme object of human conduct is the attainment of Happiness; and that the happy man is the one "who exercises his faculties in accordance with perfect excellence." This phrase is often rendered "in accordance with perfect virtue." Such a rendering is perfectly correct from a lexical point of view; but leads us into the question, What is virtue? Virtue is a thing much talked about, but seldom defined. Directly you begin to think about it you perceive how difficult it is to nail it down to any one significance. In such cases it is sometimes sought to fix the meaning of a word by searching out its derivation. But this word comes from the Latin *vir*, a man; and Virtue is, literally, "manliness." That being so, how can we speak of "female virtue?" It is as absurd as "female drake" or "female gander." Therefore Etymology only leads us astray. Consequently, it is preferable to adhere to "excellence;" because from an ethical standpoint Virtue is best considered as moral excellence or perfection. Of course, opinions may differ as to what is excellent. What is approved by one man is not regarded with friendly feelings by another; but, still, the word conveys an intelligible and vivid idea. It leads us to regard the exercise of the faculties as being a subject for comparison, so that we can describe it as good, better, or pre-eminent; and instead of seeking for an impossible standard we can suit the action to the case.

The Greeks reckoned four cardinal virtues, Courage, Moderation, Justice, and Prudence; that is to say, they considered that a perfect moral character had its foundation in the exercise of these four qualities.

Courage is placed foremost. It is sometimes said that Aristotle meant military valor; and that such a quality is of secondary value nowadays, because it is very seldom that the citizen is likely to figure on a battlefield. Such a sentiment, however, betrays complete misconception of the idea. It is quite useless to be either good or bad, unless one has the courage to carry out one's designs. This quality varies in different individuals; and the man who is said to have force of character is really a person who possesses a high degree of moral courage; whereas the weak, vacillating, man is a moral coward. Several varieties of good qualities, such as fortitude, perseverance, and presence of mind, will be found on analysis to be merely names for courage displayed under certain circumstances; while many failings, such as bashfulness, nervousness, and despondency, are merely varieties of cowardice. For courage, being a *cardinal* virtue, has other degrees of excellence depending upon it.

Moderation is equally important. In fact, in discussing the nature of virtue itself, the Greek sage demonstrates that it is chiefly to be found in Moderation, that is to say, in the middle course. A man who is extravagant beyond his means is called a spendthrift. A man who is niggardly is called a miser. Both are considered vicious persons. The liberal man stands between the two; he neither squanders nor stints unduly, and in that resides his virtue. It is the same with the moral faculties as with the physical. Too much exercise or too little are alike destructive of strength; and to eat or to drink too much is as injurious as to eat or drink too little. By the same rule a virtue in excess or in defect becomes a vice. Even courage pushed to undue limits becomes foolhardiness; while deficiency of courage is poltroonery. Thus true excellence always lies in the "Golden Mean."

The virtue of Justice is sometimes said to stand outside the doctrine of the Mean, because one cannot be *moderately* just; but it seems to the writer

that this virtue is a striking example of the doctrine: for either excess or defect is injustice, not justice. Professor Sidgwick agrees that justice is best defined as "equality"; and in Art the virtue is personified as a genius holding a pair of scales; thus again expressing the idea that justice consists in an equal balance. Courage and Moderation are qualities that concern the individual alone; but Justice is called into play when he proceeds to deal with others. We say that a man is just or unjust to himself; but this is a mere figure of speech, for he can hardly add to or take away from his own self. If we say a man is just to himself in taking a holiday, it is merely a roundabout way of saying that he is consulting his own health by doing so. And if we say he is unjust to himself in not taking credit for a certain thing, we only mean that he is too modest. But directly men begin to act reciprocally, the question of justice arises. The moral man seeks to avoid the fault of the Dutch in "giving too little and taking too much." Thus in human intercourse justice is the chief of the virtues; and to say that a certain individual is just in all his dealings is to give him the highest possible character.

Lastly, we have Prudence, *i.e.*, practical wisdom. The other three virtues deal with general principles; this deals with particular facts. It has been objected to Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean that it merely tells us that virtue is to be found between two vices; but fails to inform us *where* to locate it. That is the office of Prudence. The prudent man avoids wasting his substance to an extent that would make him a spendthrift; but at the same time he is sufficiently liberal to avoid the stigma of being thought a miser. It is his practical wisdom that fixes his standard in the particular case; and this wisdom is the result of reasoning and calculation. But the reasoning implies familiarity with the conditions involved; and such familiarity can only be acquired by experience; that is why the young are seldom prudent, because they have not had the necessary experience. Courage without prudence has often led to a man's destruction; and without practical wisdom it is often difficult to decide upon the justice or injustice of a particular action. Therefore the fourth cardinal virtue is an indispensable equipment of the perfect man.

These, then, are the four excellencies which, when exercised to perfection, bring happiness to the individual; or, in other words, conduce to self-realisation. These virtues are only to be attained by practice; no one supposes that they are implanted in us by nature, although different temperaments make the exercise of them easier or more difficult. Planing wood, and playing the piano, are things that are only learned properly after long practice; that is to say, they are *arts*. The exercise of virtue is also an art; for it is by doing just acts that men become just; and it is by the performance of acts of temperance and courage that they become temperate and brave. Were it otherwise, Ethics would be a useless study: for if moral excellence cannot be acquired there would be no reason for endeavoring to inculcate it. It is sometimes said that it is difficult to teach virtue. This is perfectly true, for it is a matter for the individual to practice of his own volition. External rules, or attempted compulsion, are alike fruitless. The Turks who placed officials with whips behind their infantry did not succeed in making their footmen brave. Their battles were won by their horsemen, who had no flagellators to urge them on. By the same token, virtue is not a thing that can be *suddenly* acquired. The old lady who hands a tract to a man coming out of a public-house, foolishly imagines that a platitude on a bit of paper is going to work a sudden miracle, and alter the habit of years in a single instant. If the drunkard is to be reclaimed at all it must be by his own endeavor; for he can only attain temperance by continuously habituating himself to it.

In all the arts, as one becomes expert, the action

becomes easier; and therefore the man who does it easiest is the better workman; but it is sometimes argued that the reverse is the case with virtue. It is said to require a greater effort of virtue for a habitual cheat to do an honest act, than for a just man to perform the same thing—therefore the cheat is the more virtuous! Such a statement is an absurdity; and Aristotle shows that moral excellence is incomplete and imperfect unless the agent can do the virtuous action without a conflict of impulses.

Therefore, to form a good ethical character, it is necessary to train oneself in courage, moderation, justice, and prudence; and right action is that which is recommended by reason and observation, and is carried out with fortitude. This is the secret of the noble life; and although we cannot all shine in the centre of the world's stage, we all have faculties and potentialities that can be trained and exercised; and if these are brought to their highest excellence we have not lived in vain.

CHILPERIC.

Mr. Haw's Defence of Christianity.

If the articles which Mr. George Haw has so far contributed to the *Clarion* may be taken as samples of what its readers may expect to get for several weeks to come, it seems likely that they will be inclined to regret that the editorial generosity has allotted so much valuable space for the purpose of allowing Christianity to defend itself against the Blatchford onslaught. For a feeblier exhibition, or a more hopeless waste of space, it would be difficult to imagine. It would obviously be unfair and unreasonable to impute to Mr. Haw personally, all the blame of his failure. It is not a case of the competence or incompetence of the writer of the articles. It is—as all Freethinkers will cordially recognise—the poverty of the cause defended that mainly handicaps the advocate. He is engaged in fighting a losing battle, and no amount of fine writing or sentiment can permanently supply the lack of solid fact and argument so painfully apparent in the results of his lucubrations.

In the second of his articles Mr. Haw deals with the "voice of God." "Why," he plaintively asks, "will the people nowadays not turn to God and listen to his voice?" Probably the people would answer: "Because we do not know where to find him or how we are to identify his voice." As Blatchford pertinently puts it, "You, my Christian friends, have never seen God; you have never heard his voice; you have received no message in spoken or written words. God has made no sign." But, says Mr. Haw, through all the ages people *have* heard God's voice, and *are* hearing it to-day. Have they? And are they? How do *we* know or how do *they* know that they have heard God's voice telling them to do anything or to abstain from doing it? All we have to go upon is their own personal testimony, and that, in a case of this kind, is no evidence at all. Mr. Haw's contention is that whenever any man or woman does anything transcending the achievements of ordinary mortals it is done in obedience to the voice of God. But it cannot be the same God who speaks to them all. If it be the same God, he must have as many voices as some of the ancient oracles, for every man Jack and every woman Jill of them who profess to hear the voice of God, interpret it according to their own fancy.

We never have heard or read in history of any religious fanatic who did *not* claim to have God on his side. You cannot mention any religious persecution where the butchers and the butchered did not alike claim to be obeying the voice of God. The Roman Catholic missionary endeavouring to extend the dominion of the Church of Rome—*he* hears the voice of God telling him to persevere. The equally zealous Protestant evangelist doing his utmost to exterminate the Papacy—*he* also hears the encou-

raging voice of God. John Knox and Luther heard the voice of God, but so did Ignatius Loyala, the founder of the Jesuits; and so, for that matter, did Torquemada and the mediæval inquisitors. "General" Booth hears the voice of God; so does Dr. Torrey; so does the American "Elijah"; so did Brigham Young. They all act implicitly in accordance with the Divine inspiration, or, at least, so they say; and we have nothing more to go upon whatever. Now to anyone but a Christian apologist in desperate straits the idea of the voice of God contradicting itself on every side in this fashion must appear absurd to the verge of lunacy.

And even when we consider the case of any single individual who may be admitted to have done something to advance human progress, it must entirely depend upon our point of view whether we believe he acted on the Divine prompting or not. For instance, take the case of Oliver Cromwell, who, Mr. Haw tells us, heard the voice of God. Without wishing to detract from the greatness of his character or to depreciate the value of his achievements as soldier and statesman, we may still ask what the victims of Cromwell's bloody campaign in Ireland would be likely to think regarding the alleged source of his inspiration. The "voice of God" theory would scarcely satisfy them. Yet in justice to Cromwell it must be said that he as sincerely believed he was doing God's will by exterminating Papists as any of the Old Testament worthies who slaughtered men, women, and children to satisfy the bloodthirstiness of Jehovah. But there is no need to labour the point. We all—*vide* George Haw—hear the voice of God; and the Roman Catholic who embraces Protestantism, or the Anglican clergyman who goes over to Rome, are, on Mr. Haw's showing, equally following the guidance of the remarkable being who governs this world of ours. It really sounds comic. If God has any knowledge of the fantastic conceptions respecting his personality and attributes that have arisen in the minds of men throughout the centuries, he must be inclined by this time to turn Atheist himself.

Some of Mr. Haw's anecdotal illustrations are of the type and quality we are accustomed to find in "tracts." We have the story of the "grizzled old war correspondent" who "thought" he heard the voice of God in the Transvaal a couple of years ago. We gather that all the grounds for this "thought" were, that while his companion was shot dead, he escaped, although he was fired at twice by "one of the best marksmen in the Transvaal," who afterwards solemnly assured him that he (the war correspondent) had been preserved by God for a purpose! In proof of this the Boer marksman added that he had never missed anything in his life before. Did anyone ever read a more childish story than this, even in a "tract" or in the *Christian Herald*? If the Boer really had never missed anyone in his life previously, the probabilities were all in favor of his missing something very soon, and our war correspondent luckily happened to be there when he missed. That seems to be all. We do not learn if the gentleman who escaped death so providentially has yet discovered what he was spared for, but we do know that we have a very low estimation of the intellect of any man who is convinced of the existence of the supernatural by an incident of that sort.

Then we are told of the "old sea captain in East London who lived for his little child." The child died, and the father could not get over his bereavement for a long time—"until the words of Christ came to him." We seem to have heard stories like this before, and they do not become more convincing by repetition. But as regards this alleged hearing of the voice of God, it does not appear to occur to Mr. Haw that it is susceptible of a natural explanation, and is indeed purely a figment of the imagination. It need not be contested that many people have thoroughly and conscientiously persuaded themselves that they *did* hear God's voice; but these were, generally speaking, persons of that peculiar mental type to whom ideals and fancies are always more real than actualities. In all ages there have

been men and women to whom an ideal was far and away more important than all the realities of life. Whether it be in the domain of poetry, or painting, or music, or architecture, or sculpture, or social reform, or in fact any of the arts or sciences—men and women have ever heard and ever will hear that inner voice spurring them on to fresh endeavor and to higher achievement; but they do not necessarily conclude that they are listening to the voice of God.

As has been already said, to quote the names of people who allege they have heard the voice of God, is no proof to others of the existence of a Supreme Being, or that he still speaks to man. The statements of such people, if they are sane and to be relied upon for truthfulness, prove no more than that they *believe* they heard God's voice. Those to whom God has clearly demonstrated his existence are, of course, fully entitled to believe in him; meanwhile not a few of us are waiting patiently to hear that voice, and wondering how we shall recognise it as God's. As a rule people who believe in God have a correspondingly strong faith in the Devil, and we know that the "saints" of old were often much worried to decide from which of these two almost equally powerful beings any given idea emanated. Mr. Haw should really afford us some measure of guidance in this important particular.

Mr. Haw has a fondness for the "Dark Ages." Or rather, he says there were *no* Dark Ages. He thinks he has proved that the condition of the people was better in mediæval times than it is to-day when he mentions that there were no factories or millionaires or jerry-built houses at that period. He says: "The sun shone very brightly, and the air was very pure, in the Dark Ages. There was no Black Country, no Wigan, no Whitechapel, in the Dark Ages, so that the sunshine and the sweet air came free to all." It is a very pretty picture, but one fails to perceive what credit attaches to the Christianity of the Middle Ages for the absence of evils that are solely caused in our day by the deplorable economic, industrial, and social conditions of modern civilisation. Christianity has done nothing to *prevent* the rise and development of these evil conditions. Such, indeed, it may not have been possible for her to do. But it is certain that Christianity—as represented by the Churches—has over and over again blocked the path of those who desired to *remove* the evils that have grown up in the social organism; and still continues to do so with all the power she has left.

With regard to the condition of the people in the Middle Ages, Mr. Haw appears to labour under a pleasing delusion. He evidently looks back upon the past through the softening and deceiving glamor cast over events by the magic wand of Father Time. If he would put on one side much of what passes for history—the records of dynasties, the details of military campaigns, the careers of statesmen and warriors and churchmen—and endeavour to get down to the real *people* and examine *their* condition, he might not see so much reason to regret that he did not live eight or nine hundred years ago. By dint of much slow and painful reading between the lines of history, and much patient and laborious probing beneath the surface of things, some measure of knowledge has been obtained of the manner of life led by the mass of the common people during those "Dark Ages," and we are by no means warranted in supposing that the period in question was a golden age. Nor does the "voice of God" seem to have been very audible. The people were mainly serfs and bondmen, the debasing drudgery and monotony of whose lives was occasionally varied by pleasing interludes of famine, pestilence, and the ravages of war. Their lives, their property, and the honor of their women were alike at the mercy of their over-lords, and in all countries the long contest between Church and State seems to have turned principally upon the question who was to have the first fleecing of the people. Mr. Haw reminds us they built cathedrals in the Dark Ages. They did; and it would have been much better if they had utilised their time and energy

in building decent houses for themselves, instead of erecting gigantic piles of masonry as habitations for an imaginary being who has no use for them.

We are also told that "even kings, who to-day often despise both people and Churches, were often humbled in public, and made to do penance for their sins." We remember no case where a king was made to do public penance for his personal immoralities or for infringing on the lives and liberties of the common people. Where, however, it was a case of the violation of the so-called *rights of the Church* he was usually brought to book very speedily. If Thomas à Becket—for encompassing whose death our own Henry II. was compelled to do public penance—had not been a prelate of the Church, there would have been very little fuss made about the matter at Rome. King Henry might have slaughtered a few thousand of his ordinary subjects on much easier terms. Mr. Haw brings in the French Revolution. This, of course, was inevitable. Whenever you make any allusion to the persecutions and infamies of the Church, the Christian apologist asks you to consider the French Revolution and its attendant horrors. We have considered them, and we ask distinctly—Who alone is to blame for the fact that the French Revolution was necessary? Who alone can we hold responsible for the fact that after hundreds of years of Christianity in France the condition of the people was such that their wrongs could only be wiped out in the blood of the aristocracy and the clergy? France was the brightest jewel in the Papal crown; her monarch was the "Most Christian" king; for generations Churchmen were all-powerful in the State; and the result of it all was that the French Revolution was not only possible, but inevitable. To read of the deplorable condition of the French peasantry prior to the Revolution is almost enough to make one shed tears of blood. Is it to be wondered at that men who had taken their first draught of that glorious liquor—Liberty—should have been led into excesses by sheer ignorance of its potency? They were for a time mad, and it was their wrongs that made them mad and that called aloud for vengeance. The memory of the manifold oppressions of Church and Aristocracy, continued through long, weary years, seethed in the brains of the down-trodden helots, and engendered such a fire of righteous wrath as nothing but blood could suffice to quench. And the guilt of it all lies at the door of that Christianity which had so scandalously abused its acquired privileges, and so grossly neglected its ostensible duties.

No! Mr. George Haw, the French Revolution cannot be cast in the teeth of Secularists or Atheists. Try something else.

G. SCOTT.

DORA.

She knelt upon her brother's grave,
My little girl of six years old—
He used to be so good and brave,
The sweetest lamb of all our fold;
He used to shout, he used to sing,
Of all our tribe the little king—
And so unto the turf her ear she laid,
To hear if still in that dark place he played.
No sound! no sound!
Death's silence was profound;
And horror crept
Into her aching heart, and Dora wept.
If this is as it ought to be,
My God, I leave it unto Thee.

—T. F. Brown.

Shaw on Shakespeare.

Mr. GEORGE BERNARD SHAW lectured on "Shakespeare" at the Public Hall, Croydon, on Sunday, March 6, and a crowded audience listened with intense interest to his racy delivery, interspersed, as it was, with displays of logic and wit, and the address was frequently punctuated with

laughter and applause. He likened Shakespeare to a modern journalist with an aptitude for picking up little bits of information, and making the most of it. Speaking of the poet's plays, Mr. Shaw said that *Love's Labor Lost* showed divination of character; but Shakespeare, like modern playwrights, had to pander to the popular taste, his ambition being to become rich, go back to Stratford, be a prominent personage there, have his coat of arms, etc., etc. The public would not look at *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, and plays of that description; therefore he wrote a play of another type, and said: "There; you would not have so-and-so; I have done what I can for you; take it, *As You Like It*." Shakespeare had no message to give to the world. He came upon the scene at the beginning of a period of which we were nearly at the end; he had no religious belief—no philosophy of life. He was an extraordinarily shrewd observer. He saw all the creeds tumbling to pieces; he saw through men and women, and found that all the pretence of religion was imposture. There was not a single line in all his writings which suggested that he had a belief in after-life. The result was that when he philosophised he twaddled, as in the *Seven Ages of Man*, which any schoolboy would write for five shillings. Shakespeare must have written that with his tongue in his cheek. His writings charmed one very considerably, but they conveyed no message, no teaching. Bunyan at his best was enormously greater than Shakespeare, because Bunyan had spiritual insight. Shakespeare was a gentleman who became a hanger-on of the Arts and the upper classes, and he did not give such a vivid picture of real life as Bunyan did in *Pilgrim's Progress* or the *Life and Death of Mr. Badman*. Shakespeare had the reputation of being an admirable family man, but he was certainly nothing of the kind. He was away from his wife for twelve years. Shakespeare would always be a man to make men despair; but, fortunately, people had such an extraordinary faculty for reading things without understanding them, just as people read the Bible with a vague sense of the meaning of the word "Mesopotamia."

The Humanitarian League's Work.

THE Humanitarian League has just published its annual Report. In the Criminal Law and Prisons Department the question of corporal punishment has been prominent, and effective protests have been made against a number of illegal and "extra-judicial" sentences, while the flogging of young men which still goes on in the Royal Navy has been closely watched. That the League's protests against this practice are not without avail is shown by the fact that, while the juvenile element in the Navy has increased, the number of floggings inflicted with the birch have decreased. Other Departments of the League have been actively engaged in combating spurious sports, hare-hunting at Eton College, the cruelties of the Irish cattle trade, the private slaughter-house system, the fur and feather fashion, etc. Satisfaction is expressed at the reforms lately adopted at the Zoological Gardens, especially in the discontinuance of feeding the larger serpents on living prey. The work of the Humanitarian League has so greatly increased during the past few years that it has become more and more necessary to confine it to the lines of its four special Departments.

NO SOLITARY HEALTH.

The intellectual *Dives* would shut himself up in the pleasant garden of his own thoughts—pleasant garden, walled round from the turbulent passions, the superstitions, and the panic terrors of mankind—open only to the calm and glorious heavens. All in vain. Those panic terrors leap his walls and enter every chamber of his house, every chamber of his thoughts. They were bred in that crime, and ignorance, and suffering, that lies weltering there without; but they do not stay where they are bred—they walk abroad through the minds of all men. The swamp of ignorance and vice should have been drained. By whom? It should have been done. That is the only answer that you get. There is no perfect immunity to any man, from any kind of pestilence, till the whole city is taken care of.—*William Smith.*

IGNORANCE IS BLISS.—Lady Visitor (to Shopkeeper): "Have you any more of those sixpenny Dickens's Calendars?" Shopkeeper: "No, madam; but we have several of these Scripture ones in stock." Lady Visitor: "Oh, no, thanks; I prefer standard works!"—*Sketchy Bits.*

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, G. W. Foote, "Holy Russia and Heathen Japan."

EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Brnley Vestry Hall, Bow-road, E.): 7, Harold Johnson, B.A., "Oliver Cromwell."

FINSBURY PARK DEBATING SOCIETY (79 Grove-road, Holloway-road, N.): 7, Debate, "Spiritualism." Open discussion.

NORTH KENSINGTON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Cornwall Hall): 7, W. Sanders, "Life and Labor in London."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, Dr. Stanton Coit, "Idylls of the King."

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

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): 3, Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, "Forced Labor"; 7, "Religious Intolerance."

GATESHEAD (Co-operative Hall, Whitehall-road): John Lloyd, 3, "What Think Ye of Christ?" 7, "Why I Gave Up the Supernatural."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon and 6.30, J. M. Robertson.

LEEDS (Covered Market, Vicar's Croft): 11, George Weir, "The Doom of the Gods"; Woodhouse Moor: 3, "Christ and His Disciples"; Town Hall Square, 7.30, W. Woolham, "What Shall We Do to be Saved?"

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 3, H. Percy Ward, "Do the Dead Return?"; 7, "Can Man Sin Against God?" Monday, 8 p.m., J. Gilham, "Socialism."

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): 3, C. Cohen, "The Present Position of Religion and Science;" 6.30, "Outgrowing the Gods." Tea at 5.

NEWCASTLE (Lockhart's Cathedral Cafe): Thursday, March 24, at 8, H. W. Halbaum, "The Ice Age."

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): Charles Watts, 3, "Christianity and Science: Are They in Harmony?"; 7, "Rationalism Triumphant: The Doom of the Churches." Tea at 5.

PORTSMOUTH ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP (Temperance Hall, Commercial-road): Greville MacDonald, M.D., "The Seed in the Soil."

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