

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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*For this is indeed the right order of teaching, first to destroy that which is false, and then to build up that which is true and sound.*—MARTIN LUTHER.

## Good Friday.

HUMAN vanity was never more conspicuous than in calling the anniversary of the death of Jesus Christ "Good Friday." It was a day of tragedy on Mount Calvary after the agony and bloody sweat of the Garden of Gethsemane. He who had cried out "O my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," as he felt the cold shadow of the wings of death hovering over him, cried out still more piteously on the cross, as he drew his last bitter breath, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet the Christians call the anniversary of that event *Good Friday*. Why? Because they stand to gain by it. To the crucified victim it may have been *Bad Friday* or *Black Friday*. But that is from *his* point of view. From *their* point of view it was the happiest incident in all history. He suffered that they might enjoy. He descended into hell in order that they might ascend into heaven. So they feel glad as they think of it. For human beings are terribly vain and egotistical, and religion is nearly always the supreme consecration of the principle of selfishness.

But of all the selfish religions in the world Christianity is the most selfish. The ancients often talked about dying for their gods, and were actually ready to do so.

For how can man die better  
Than facing fearful odds  
For the ashes of his fathers  
And the temples of his gods?

In that spirit Horatius takes his life in his hands and guards the bridge across the Tiber against a host of the enemies of Rome. But the Christian winks his eye, and clicks his tongue, and shrugs his shoulders at such fat-headed folly. He knows a trick worth two of that. Instead of dying for his God, he makes his God die for him. The creator and governor of this infinite universe actually dies—yes, *dies*, and an ignominious death at that—for the sake of a special lot of maggoty souls on this dutch-cheese of a planet. And the maggoty souls who hit upon that brilliant idea of the very opposite of self-sacrifice, that sublimation of unspeakable impudence, actually look down upon those who will have nothing to do with it as wicked wretches deserving of everlasting damnation. It is as if the madmen locked up the sane people, and the scoundrels imprisoned the honest men. No wonder it was in a Christian country that the exclamation arose, "A mad world, my masters." The sacrifice of a God for the sins of his own creatures is really an idea that is worthy of Bedlam.

Good Friday the death-day of Jesus Christ is, however, and Good Friday it will remain. And the Christians will go on commemorating the death of their best friend by eating, drinking, and other forms of jollification. Those of them who can afford it will hurry off to the seaside and enjoy themselves right merrily. He spent *his* last week-end in the grave—or, as their Creed says, in hell; and they will spend *their* Easter week-end at Brighton or Eastbourne, or

some other sunny seaside resort. Yes, they have every way the best of the bargain.

Still we must make *some* allowance for them. They are following an old custom, which was of immemorial antiquity before their "Savior" was born or thought of, and has as much to do with him as it has to do with the man in the moon. We have previously said, and we repeat it, that if Jesus Christ died at all (which he did not if he never lived) he died on a particular day, which should be a regular fixture in the calendar. The anniversary of the death of Shakespeare, for instance, does not shift about with every new year's Almanack. It falls on the same day every year—the twenty-third of April. The only variation is in the day of the week; which is the very thing that does *not* vary in the case of Jesus Christ. The anniversary of his death always falls on a Friday. But it is sometimes in one month and sometimes in another, and is never on the same date two years running. Which conclusively proves that the death of Jesus Christ was not an historical event, but a mythological occurrence. Why else should its anniversary be determined by an astronomical calculation? Why should it be the first Friday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox?

Easter is really an ancient Pagan festival—the festival of spring. The Jews talk about their Pass-over as commemorating their exodus from Egypt, but if that event took place it would also be a fixture in the calendar, which it is not any more than the death of Jesus Christ. What they commemorate, without knowing it, is the passing of the sun over the sign of spring in the zodiac. That was the beginning of the year in ancient times; and we still reckon the four quarters of the year as spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The first of January is an arbitrary date in the middle of the fourth season. The twenty-fifth of December, the festival of the birth of the Sun, was taken as the starting-point in the Julian calendar; seven days were allowed to lapse out of respect to moon-worship; and thus the modern year begins exactly a week after Christmas—the name which the Christians quite as arbitrarily give to the common birthday of all the sun-gods of antiquity.

We repeat that Easter is an old Pagan festival. Everything about it, including its name, indicates its heathen origin. Christians decorate their churches with evergreens and flowers just as the Pagans decorated their temples and altars. Easter eggs are used now as they were used at least three thousand years ago. What connection Easter eggs can possibly have with the death or resurrection of Jesus Christ may be left as a puzzle to Christian apologists. But Easter eggs are quite intelligible when it is remembered that the egg is a symbol of fertility, that Easter is a festival of sun-worship, and that what the Pagans were sensibly glad about was the spring's visible promise of the warmth and fruitfulness of summer, and the glowing and golden harvests of autumn. Yes, the sun springs then from the tomb of winter, and at the same time Christ springs from the tomb of death. Which is another proof that Christ is not an historical personage but a mythical character. He came into the world, born of a virgin and conceived of a ghost, like the other ancient Sun-Gods; his career, like theirs, was marked by portents and prodigies; and

it ended, like theirs, in tribulation and defeat, followed by vindication and victory. This story was common in the East for millenniums before the Christian era; and its association with the name of Christ—which is itself not a natural, human appellation—is of no more historical value than its association with the names of Osiris, Bacchus, Mithra, and the rest of the mongrel Pantheon.

Returning to Good Friday itself, we admit that the story of the last hours and death of Christ is told with a great deal of literary art and dramatic power. But this does not prove in the least degree that it is history, but rather the contrary, for things do not happen in that continuous clear-cut way in real life, but only in the life of imagination, where the incidents can be arranged to produce the most striking effect. Indeed, the details of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Christ clearly demonstrate that the narrative is *not* history. What is related is a perfect travesty of Roman law and Jewish custom. At every important point the well-informed reader is face to face with an absurdity. Take these two instances. Is it conceivable that the Sanhedrim, the great Court of the Jews, conducted its business in the way depicted in the Gospels? Can it be imagined that the judges walked about, indulged in personal altercation with the prisoner, and smacked his face? Is it to be believed that a Roman governor condemned to death a man he knew to be innocent, merely to gratify a fanatical mob? Can anyone fancy a Roman governor doing this, and washing his hands in public, as a sign that he disowned all responsibility for his own act? Especially when washing the hands in this way was unknown to the Romans, and would have been meaningless in one of their courts. No, the story is pure fiction from beginning to end.

G. W. FOOTE.

### Dr. Watson's Lament.

THE front page of the *British Weekly* is not remarkable for the cheerfulness of its articles. For one thing this journal is an organ of Presbyterianism, and this is not a cheerful kind of creed at best. And being a Presbyterian paper it likes very definite dogmas; it even has a sneaking sort of a kindness for what Harold Frederic called "straight out flat-footed hell," and definiteness of dogma is not easy to obtain nowadays. The general tendency is to be very indefinite with one's own beliefs on religious matters, and to make up by definiteness of denunciation of some other preacher's laxity. And as a matter of personal taste I must confess to the greater partiality for the old-fashioned preacher. He was amusing, and in a way stimulating. The florid sentimentality and insincere liberalism of the more up-to-date preacher both wearies and disgusts.

I do not know that Dr. John Watson (Ian Maclaren), who writes the front page article in the current issue of the *British Weekly*, would altogether disagree with what has been said above. At any rate, he takes up a couple of columns in lamenting the lack of "positive religion," although he and I look at the matter from different points of view and with different feelings. Looking at the religious world, he says:—

"What strikes one to-day is not what people believe, but what they do not believe.....They are always letting you know what they do not hold about the Bible, or doctrine, or the Church, or the future life.....If it was the failing of our fathers to be certain about everything, it is our disability to be certain about nothing..... This timid uncertainty is largely the reaction from a strident and imperious dogmatism."

This explanation has the customary failing of religious theories. It contains a very small measure of truth and a very large amount of error. It is true that the natural reaction from dogmatism is scepticism. Asked to believe *too* much, one replies by refusing to believe anything, just as overloading the stomach may be as harmful as underfeeding it. But, then, dogmatism does not create a reaction save under special conditions. Given an uninstructed and unintellectual people, and dogmatism, as such, is not

offensive. What such a people is inclined to resent on the part of their teachers is not definiteness of statement, but its absence. They expect their teacher to know all about the subject, whatever it may be; and any honest admission of limitations excites their distrust. Dogmatism only becomes distasteful when a developing culture makes it jar upon people who are more alive to the many-sidedness of life, and who decline to receive any expression of opinion as absolutely final. And more particularly is this dogmatism, or even definiteness, resented in regions where it is being realised definiteness of belief is intellectually unjustifiable. In all the essential questions of religion—belief in a god, in a soul, in a future life—a definite belief is quite unjustifiable. Even at the risk of *sounding* dogmatic, one may say that no man knows anything of a god, no man knows anything of a soul, no man knows anything of a future life. Assertions may be made, beliefs may be stated, but analysis shows them to be mere words, like an idiot's tale, sound and fury signifying nothing.

The absence of definite beliefs, about which Dr. Watson complains, is really a symptom of the fact that to-day religious beliefs are no longer in harmony with the environment. Three or four centuries ago, quite apart from the fact that the physical universe was profoundly different in its intellectual bearings to what it is to-day, people did actually believe that real knowledge upon the essentials of religion was possible. The men who drew up the Westminster Confession probably felt less doubt as to their *knowledge* of their subject than a modern writer drawing up a scientific text-book. To-day the attempt to draw up another such document would create nothing but amusement. Pulpit orators play at being profoundly impressed by the absolute truth of their Gospel; but it is all part of an elaborate pretence, and a large number of the people treat it as such. If Dr. Watson can succeed in overturning all the scientific and social development of the last couple of centuries, he may then succeed in bringing about positive religious belief; otherwise he is in much the same position as Mrs. Partington and the ocean.

Dr. Watson is, of course, not without hope. It is a poor heart that never rejoices; and he finds cause for cheerfulness, first, because certain people have a craving for mysticism. It is pathetic, he says, "to notice how negation realises its homelessness, and tries to create some kind of a religion." And he asks: "What does this strange procession of make-belief religions mean—Positivism, Theosophy, Spiritualism, Christian Science, and the others?" with the suggestion that if Maskelyne and Cooke had posed as founders of a new religion they would have "swept the field of unbelief."

Once again there is a very small modicum of truth in Dr. Watson's explanation of this phenomenon, and a very, very considerable quantity of error, if not nonsense. Dr. Watson takes it as a proof of man's craving for religion. And so it is, in a sense. But this craving is of no more value as evidence than the craving of a drunkard for whisky would be evidence against a temperance crusade. Plenty of people who have given up belief in specific Christian doctrines adopt some such mild lunacy as Christian Science or Dowieism, which only proves that they still possess a religious type of mind although they have given up one or two special religious beliefs. And no Freethinker need be surprised at such a phenomenon. For hundreds of generations every endeavor has been made to cultivate this particular type, and for hundreds of generations variations in the direction of a more critical, healthy, and independent type forcibly suppressed. Naturally, therefore, the religious type predominates, and the destruction of a special belief will not, and cannot, destroy this immediately, any more than if one were to abolish whisky drunkenness would cease. Brandy and beer and other intoxicants would still remain.

The sober, scientific truth is that the Freethinker is all along dealing with a mind and a nature that has been debauched by religion. The taste for

religion having been bred in, time is required to eradicate the taste. And time is bringing about the cure. A careful student cannot fail to observe that the religious type is becoming weaker, the sceptical type gaining in strength and extent. More than a gradual reversing of the relative strengths no sane student will expect. And during this we may expect, and shall certainly get, such manifestations as Dr. Watson instances.

And yet again, what Dowieism and such movements show is the break up of all religions that are able to exercise a commanding influence over men and women. Wherever a religion exists that can really control people such movements are kept under. They are fewest where the Roman Catholic Church prevails. Even in England, where the Church of England exerts a strong influence they are kept down to a considerable extent. It is in America, where there is no single church that rules, that religious quacks and impostors find their happy hunting ground. These movements, then, are so many proofs of the dissolution of religion. And incidentally they show to us the raw material out of which religions are formed. They represent in their essentials what all religions were before they were welded into organisations, and partly rationalised by State control and a consciousness of social responsibility.

Dr. Watson asserts that religion has a ground of certitude supplied by the testimony of people who tell us all that "Christ" has meant to them. And he asks:—"Why should we not give the same weight to religious testimony" as we do to "the word of a traveller about a land he has visited, and of a man of science on the work he has done?" Well, so we should if both cases were upon the same level. But there are very important differences. To begin with *anyone* can verify for himself the accuracy of the report of either traveller or scientist. But *anyone* cannot do this in the case of religion. The religious experience is wholly individual and personal; besides being in addition open to the gravest suspicion. How am I to tell that a man is narrating what actually occurs when he informs me that he has "felt Christ in his soul"? He may be mistaken; and what he calls by this term, I may describe in quite a different manner. He may tell me that he has been kept sober by the power of Jesus. To this it is a sufficient answer that other people have been kept sober without the power of Christ. The testimony of a Christian as to the power of Christ is really of no more value than the testimony of a savage as to the power of his wooden idol.

For the complete reply to this much talked-of religious experience is that the Freethinker quite admits all the facts upon which it is based—the emotional outbursts, the modified feelings, and modified ideas—but explains them on quite a different principle. He sees that all the Christian is doing is describing his feelings in religious language when they may be just as well described in terms of natural science. And that he does this is entirely due to education, and to environment. Modify his environment, widen his education, and he may experience all the feelings felt by him as a Christian, without ever associating Christian beliefs with them.

Finally, this appeal to vague, unreasoning emotions is to an impartial mind a sure testimony of the breakdown of Christianity. If Christianity had any really valid evidence to offer it would be produced. But it has not. It can only cite its "cloud of witnesses," who when examined utter discordant and worthless testimony. The emotions of a Christian prove the truth of Christianity. The emotions of a Mohammedan prove equally well the truth of Mohammedanism. The sane outsider sees nothing in either testimony but the evidence of minds debauched by religious influences, and so rendered unable to understand their own processes.

C. COHEN.

## The Imitation of Christ.

AT the present day the really Christ-like spirit—or at any rate, that aspect of it, which, exhibited under certain conditions and in certain circumstances might justly claim our respect and admiration, exists largely outside the churches rather than within them. Indeed, many infidels and agnostics who would scorn to recognise either God or religion, or any stereotyped code of artificial moral obligations, approach much more closely to all that is truly admirable and most worthy of imitation in the Christ-like type than the majority of those who are ostensibly enrolled under the standard of Jesus Christ. Thousands of those who call themselves followers of Christ, have no more justification, so far as their life and conduct is concerned, for assuming such a designation than the African Hottentots have. Perhaps not nearly so much.

What is the explanation of the amazing discrepancy between the much-vaunted precepts of Christianity and the every-day practice of its adherents? It may be accounted for in part at least, by the fact that the figure of Christ the *man* was obscured for so many centuries by the shadow of Christ the *God*, the second person of the imaginary Trinity. The early Christian Church deified Christ, and, having made a God of him, the human side of his character—the only aspect under which he could possibly serve us as a guide or model—was, as a natural consequence, gradually lost sight of altogether. This divine apotheosis of Christ destroyed all the significance and interest his life would otherwise possess for us if he were considered purely as a reformer whose ideas, like those of many another reformer before and since, were in advance of the people amongst whom his lot was cast. Setting aside the alleged miracles, and one or two other exaggerations, the story of his public life and utterances appears to be fairly intelligible and consistent as it is conveyed in the Gospel narratives; but only on the assumption that he was a peculiarly gifted man, not on the hypothesis that he was God.

We say that on the assumption that Christ was merely human, and that the various evangelistic gospels were of purely human origin, the Gospel account of Jesus is fairly consistent and intelligible, because it reveals all the inconsistencies and contradictions we ordinarily associate with human frailty and fallibility. Considered as a man, we might readily yield assent to such of the maxims of Jesus Christ as the experience of humanity, both before and since his coming, has proved to be true and beautiful. Considered as a man, we might make an effort to imitate his good actions, although, as these were mainly in the miracle-working line, such would not be feasible to any great extent nowadays. But considered as a God, Christ is of absolutely no use to humanity as an example to be followed. You cannot take a god as your model. A weak and erring human being can derive no moral support from the example of a divine or semi-divine being who couldn't commit a sin even if he wanted to.

Christ is held up to humanity as the supreme embodiment of perfection; as the only absolutely pure and spotless man who ever trod this earth. But being God, how could he help being perfect? What merit or praise attaches to his blameless life when it was flatly impossible for him to do any wrong? It reminds us of the valorous but incredible heroes of our nursery days. *They* achieved the most tremendous victories single-handed against fearful odds! *They* performed prodigies of prowess such as the world has never since equalled! But when you began to examine into their career you found that they all had an invulnerable suit of mail that no weapon could penetrate; or they had a sword that slew everyone it touched; or they had a cap that would make them invisible when there was any danger about; or they had a magic ring to rub when they were in any difficulty. So that the

personal credit attaching to them on account of their daring deeds is somewhat microscopical; nor does their heroism seem very heroic. So it is with the figure of Christ. We really know absolutely nothing respecting the life and conduct of Christ. For all that we know to the contrary his life may have been in direct contradiction to his teaching. His career is a complete blank to us until his attainment of the age of thirty, and it is by no means an uncommon thing for a prophet, or a philosopher, or a preacher, to fall, in practice, below the level of the principles which he inculcates. But, granting for the moment that Christ was the most immaculate and perfect being that ever trod this earth—as a *god* he could be nothing else, or at all events, nothing less.

The Church thinks she has raised the death of Christ to the level of a most solemn and awful tragedy by presenting to our trembling gaze the picture of a dying god suffering at the hands of the miserable creatures he had made. In reality, by insisting on the divinity of Christ, she has overshadowed and, as it were, extinguished his humanity. Thus she has eliminated from his character the only element that has any message for us to-day. If Christianity had left to us the figure of Christ the *man*, we might reasonably be asked to sympathise with the pitiful pathos of his life and latter end. If we could regard him as a sincere, lovable *man*, with a keen sense of the miseries and injustices of life, with a heart overflowing with pity for fallen and down-trodden humanity, with a burning hatred for priestcraft, and hypocrisy, and oppression of all kinds, then indeed might we hold his memory in reverence! Then indeed his ignominious death at the hands of those authorities to whom his teachings had made him obnoxious would seem a species of martyrdom for the cause of the rights and liberties of man. But, considered as God, what a grotesque figure is that of Christ! He came to reform a world which, with all his omnipotence, he failed to keep from going wrong. He sorrowed over the afflictions and pains of humanity for the existence of which no one was responsible but himself. Sin and evil—from the consequences of which he came to save us—could never have come into being without his consent. As God he was the primary cause of all the conditions that led to the necessity of his own crucifixion on Calvary; so that from the very beginning of things he must have foreseen and compassed his own death. Therefore the tragedy on that hill outside Jerusalem was *not* a case of deicide, but merely one of suicide. Is not the hopeless absurdity of it all glaringly manifest to any unbiased investigator?

If Christ were God his life in this world is of not the slightest utility as an example for mankind, it being obviously impossible for corruptible man to imitate an incorruptible deity. This evident fact, although not openly avowed by professing Christians, is tacitly admitted by them in their life and conduct. Because it will not even be pretended that Christians imitate Christ, or unswervingly carry out his precepts—except, perhaps, in rare individual cases. They give a vaguely general assent to the teachings contained in the Sermon on the Mount, but they mutually agree to regard the carrying of such teaching into every-day life as entirely impracticable. Undoubtedly they are quite justified in coming to this conclusion, but why keep up the farce of being “followers of Christ?” Ordinary Church-going Christians who believe in the divinity of Christ, yet, with all their superficial orthodoxy, entirely lack the redeeming characteristics of the Galilean prophet, may reasonably plead as excuse the inherent impossibility of copying the example of their ostensible model. He was the actual son of God; therefore it is a vain task for any mere mortal to endeavor to emulate his life or attempt to carry out his precepts literally. In this manner it is that nominal Christians justify themselves in their own minds when they occasionally realise the extent of their shortcomings as followers of the humble Prophet of Nazareth. We do not blame any Christian for his

failure to build his life and conduct after the model of Christ. There is not a single man in business in this more or less Christian country who does not know excellently well, that any serious and persistent endeavor on his part to regulate his daily life and his dealings with his fellow men on the principles of the Sermon on the Mount would land him in the bankruptcy court or the poor-house, if not in the lunatic asylum.

Just recently there arrived in this country particulars of the bankruptcy of a firm of American seedsmen and grain merchants, at one time in a large way of business. During the examination proceedings it was stated in court that the unfortunate position of the firm was mainly due to the exceptionally generous treatment they accorded their employees. For a long period of years the firm in question had been noted for paying liberal wages to all their staff, from the highest to the lowest. When periodic slackness occurred in their trade they did not discharge any of their hands, but tided them over the spell of depression; and no one was allowed to leave their employment on account of old age or ill health without being made comfortable for life. And this was the result of their fair dealing! They had not run their business on “commercial lines,” and in consequence the stress of competition had compelled them to go the wall. Now there is nothing surprising in the fate that has overtaken this firm. In the circumstances it was the most natural result in the world. Under modern economic conditions very few private firms could venture to carry on business in the above fashion, unless they had almost unlimited wealth at their command. Or so at least they would argue. We have always wondered how such an estimable and benevolent couple as the “Cheeryble Brothers” in *Nicholas Nickleby*—who (as Charles Dickens assured his readers) were not wholly fictitious characters—ever became rich at all.

It has not been asserted that the American firm referred to above made any claim to be considered Christians. All honor is due to them for treating their employees in a manner that is not extensively imitated at the present day, and much sympathy will go out to them in their latter predicament; but it is not suggested that even *they* went to the extremes of altruism recommended in the Gospel according to Matthew. Their case is quoted here simply because it illustrates some of the difficulties attaching to even an approach to carrying out in daily life those principles of conduct that are supposed to animate every Christian. We repeat we do not blame anyone for failing to act up to the teaching of Christ, nor even for declining to attempt to do so. What we do find fault with is that so many people should keep up the pretence that the imitation of Christ is *necessary*, and yet utterly ignore in practice some of the most important points of his teaching. They extend a sentimental and theoretical approval to Christian ethics, but their following of “the Master” goes no farther. Probably this attitude of bland but passive sympathy towards Christ’s teaching, which is characteristic of many nominal members of the religious bodies of Christendom, is mainly adopted *pour encourager les autres*.

Those who are exteriorly cased with a thin veneer of conventional Christianity, and who are nevertheless incapable of a single unselfish or self-sacrificing action, are often enough gushingly appreciative of the existence of altruistic qualities in others, and not slow to take advantage of those who possess what they themselves so conspicuously lack. They might, indeed, quite plausibly argue that if there were no such thing as selfish egoism there would be no scope whatever for the exercise of the altruistic virtues, and that the absolute neglect of so-called Christian principles in some, is essential to the development of these very principles in others. This may appear fantastic reasoning, but it must be obvious that if we were *all* entirely forgetful of self, and *all* went about in life solely with the object of

carrying out the precepts of Christ, there would be no one left on whose behalf we could expend our altruism. Which would bring us to the remarkable position that if every individual man and woman on this earth were to guide his or her thoughts, words, and actions in accordance with the maxims of Jesus, there would be no room or opportunity for the exercise of what are called Christian virtues at all! This opens up a branch of thought too vast to be entered upon at the end of an article. What appears clearly is this—that if the numerous men and women who at present *tacitly* admit the sheer futility and impossibility of the imitation of Christ under modern conditions of life, could summon up sufficient moral courage to *openly* profess so much, social problems would be dealt with in a much more thorough and practical fashion, and we would be within measurable distance of that social regeneration which is the goal of all reformers.

G. SCOTT.

### Missions.

THE exploits and successes of missionaries are paraded in the churches and the press as a proof that Christianity is true. It is a queer way of answering objections, and a strange idea of what evidence is required to prove the truth of anything whatever. Christian apologists must be at their wits' end for proofs when they think that authority, testimony, and success can prove the truth of a creed or speculation. If this method of proving a thing true were allowed, every religion and imposture in the world could be proved to be true. Sometimes Christian apologists challenge unbelievers to prove the negative, which shows how illogical they are and what little evidence they have at command. If they had evidence they would produce it, instead of calling upon others to prove they have none.

The missions paraded are Protestant missions. But there are many others. Mormons have missions, and they have been successful. Does their success prove Mormonism to be true? Does it prove that the Mormon Bible is the word of God? Catholics have missions, and they have been successful. Does their success prove that Romanism is true? Buddhism had successful missions centuries before Jesus was born. Does their success prove that their creed was true? If not, neither does the success of Protestant missions prove that Christianity is true or that the Bible is the word of God. Falsehoods or have been successful, but no success can make a falsehood true.

Christianity means a belief in a personal God, in a soul immortal and apart from the body, in the creation story, in the fall of man, in the divinity of Jesus, in the atonement, in the resurrection of the body, in the Bible as the revealed word of God, and of course in heaven and hell. If Christian apologists mean business against unbelievers they must undertake the huge task of proving the truth of their belief by something stronger, more direct, and more convincing than the success of missions and the testimony of any number of worthy adherents.

But this, apologists never do in these days. In times gone by Christians boldly defended all articles of their creed, and proved them all true from the Bible, and the Bible itself by its own testimony. But these are degenerate days, and most Christian advocates prove the truth of their faith by concealing their chief articles and ignoring all the facts and objections urged against them. Such a mode of defence will do their cause more harm than good, and in this there is some consolation for Freethinkers.

That religion and missions may do good and influence believers to live a decent life may be conceded. But it must not be forgotten that there are millions upon millions who lead decent and useful lives without being influenced by any religion or missions. Besides, every religion, in addition to its theological creed, includes moral and social principles and influences,

No religion could succeed without insisting on the common virtues of humanity and society. And it is never possible to tell exactly the root cause or causes of a virtuous life, or the change from a wicked to a good life. Nature makes saints as well as sinners. Heredity and environment accounts for more than many suppose, and effects are often claimed for religion that really belong to nature and natural influences.

Much is made of the bravery of missionaries. They sacrifice comforts and face risks and dangers amongst savages and hostile barbarians. All that may be granted without conceding that it proves Christianity to be true. There are many men naturally prone to court adventures and risks. Hence the yearly sacrifice of lives in facing the risks of climbing the Alps and other mountains. And are there not multitudes of men ready to face the risks and dangers of arctic explorations? And thousands of men will, at any time, risk being shot in order to shoot other men whom they have never seen? Miners and sailors live in dangers as great, if not greater, than any encountered by missionaries, but no one dreams of citing such bravery to prove that Christianity is true. Again we are reminded of thousands of people at home pouring forth their possessions to support missionaries. But how does that prove that Christianity is true? I fail to see. Wealth is poured forth to support every religion. If there was no wealth attached all would soon die a natural death.

"Christianity begets a true enthusiasm for humanity," and therefore it is true. It is the enthusiasm of humanity that prompts missionaries to face dangers abroad and sustains them in their work. If Christianity really did that, one could accept it, for the good it did, true or not true. But as there are many sorts of missionaries, representing different religions and sects, it is difficult to see how they can be all influenced by the same thing. If the Romanist and Protestant, Mormon and Mohammedan, not to mention others, are animated by enthusiasm for humanity, it must be generated by something common to all, and not by religion. Or, if Protestant religion only begets enthusiasms for humanity, we may ask, is it church, high, low, or broad, or chapel religion? for they all differ. Which is the real true article, for they cannot all be true? Such arguments are always dangerous to the user, as they prove too much or too little. Causes and motives in men are difficult to find out, and supposed enthusiasm for man may be really enthusiasm for self, idea, creed, sect, or religion. Besides, it is by no means an exclusive character of Christians. Lovers of man have appeared in all ages, amongst all people, and in every church. And enthusiasts for humanity have often appeared outside of all churches. The world has never seen a greater enthusiast for man than Robert Owen, and he had no belief in Christianity. And to-day the Socialists of the world manifest more enthusiasm for humanity, a thousand times than all the churches put together, although the vast majority of them are unbelievers, and the few amongst them who call themselves Christians are believers of a very nebulous sort.

Missionaries have translated the Bible into savage languages, and converted even cannibals into Christianity and civilisation. As far as that is true and good, there is no need to deny it or to detract from the praise due to a meritorious service. But there is nothing in all this to prove that Christianity is true, or that missionary work on the whole is either necessary or beneficial. Even missionaries have confessed that the effects of their work has not been all good, and many declare that they are anything but a blessing to the world.

The claim that Christianity has fought tyrannies and uplifted the masses is not true. Christianity as a doctrine cannot be separated from Christians and the Church; and the Church as a whole has always been, and is now, on the side of privilege, authority, and wealth. The poor have little to thank the Churches for. In our own country a third of our

people are always on the verge of starvation, and the Churches do nothing to change the social order and remove the exploiters who are the root-cause of poverty. And Christian missionaries abroad are no better than Christians at home. Wherever they are, they are on the side of the wealthy idle class and the exploiting trader, all of whom ride in state on the backs of the poor.

If the missionaries at home and abroad helped the masses to throw the idle classes off their backs, they would have some justification for claiming to be enthusiasts of humanity. But whilst they continue to uphold the present unjust and unsocial system of society, which is the chief cause of the poverty, wickedness, and misery of the world, by siding with the wealthy classes, I am afraid that progressive thinkers must consider their services more mischievous than beneficial to the world. I have often thought that a Social Secular Missionary Society would be a blessing to the world, especially in countries where Governments, landlords, and capitalists have not yet grabbed the land and all other sources of wealth. Missionaries to teach the people the arts of life and social order, and show them how to make wealth for themselves, by retaining possession of the land and all its treasures, as well as the wealth produced by their labor, would save them ages and centuries of misery and degradation, and would be a fruitful object-lesson for all nations at the same time.

R. J. DERFEL.

### Acid Drops.

A fortnight ago we commented on Mr. G. J. Holyoake's having joined the Passive Resisters. Honestly and fairly, according to our custom, we gave every word of explanation offered by Mr. Holyoake, as it was printed in the *Daily News*; and then we presented our own criticism of what he had said. And the point of our criticism was this: that Mr. Holyoake had never turned Passive Resister during all the thirty odd years in which his own party, the Secularists, were trampled upon by Church and Dissent together under the School Boards of England; and that he had turned Passive Resister only when his Nonconformist friends felt the trouble. Whether our criticism was sound or not, it was certainly pertinent; and it was couched in perfectly parliamentary language. We did not expect, however, that Mr. Holyoake would like it. Still less, if possible, did we expect that he would offer the Secular party a vindication of his attitude. He has written a vindication, but he has offered it (through the *Daily News*) to the Christians. Which, we are sorry to say, is very characteristic.

Mr. Holyoake's letter in the *Daily News* is also characteristic. He sneers at the "superior people" who do not favor Passive Resistance. But we will not take up *their* case. And they must be poor controversialists indeed if they cannot dispose of Mr. Holyoake's rejoinder. We intend to stick to what he says in answer to ourselves. Naturally he does not mention us. It would never do to introduce the *Freethinker* in religious society. We are therefore alluded to as "another objector." But instead of answering the pith of our criticism, he seizes hold of a mere incidental expression, and devotes his time to worrying that. We said, merely in passing, that Mr. Holyoake had become a Passive Resister rather late in life; and he replies that he "was so" before the "writer" of that observation "was born"—only the writer did not know it. Then he goes on to tell how he resisted Church rates before our advent in this world. Well now, we *did* know all about that. Mr. Holyoake forgets that he has told it so often. Just as he forgets that the editor of the *Freethinker* is no longer a young man; and just as he forgets that there is really no need to keep saying that a man eighty-five years of age was born before a good many other people.

Yes, it is perfectly true that Mr. Holyoake resisted Church rates. But it is also true that he resisted them in common with a multitude of Nonconformists. Mr. Holyoake has not gone with a multitude to do evil, as the Scripture says; but he has always been fond of going with a multitude to do well.

Passive Resistance, even on the part of Freethinkers, did not end with Mr. Holyoake's resistance of Church rates a

long while ago, before we "were born." Freethinkers have resisted evil laws since, in the sense of refusing to obey them; although they have not ventilated their virtue in Christian journals, or made a great song about it anywhere else. The editor of the *Freethinker*, for instance, refused to have his children vaccinated: a piece of information now printed for the first time. He did not pose as a "martyr." He merely declined to let his children be poisoned.

What we were anxious to know Mr. Holyoake does not deal with. Why has he become a Passive Resister now? And why did he not become a Passive Resister when Secularists, instead of Nonconformists, were the victims of the Education Act? On these points he does not shed a gleam of light.

What the veteran Secularist (if he now acknowledges the term) has to say about "the Parliamentary clergy" is a mere waste of words. What on earth can it matter to a Secularist whether he has to appeal to the Conscience Clause in a public school against Church parsons or Nonconformist ministers? Both sets of religionists are "Parliamentary clergy" as far as they use an Act of Parliament to have their own religion taught at the public expense. And this is what the Nonconformists do as well as the Churchmen. To reply that they only want the Bible read and explained in the public schools is the veriest hypocrisy. The Bible *is* their religion.

Mr. Holyoake (we *must* say it) abuses the great name of Emerson. He quotes that noble thinker as saying "whoso would be a man must be a Nonconformist." But this is not what Emerson said. The capital N makes all the difference. Emerson meant by a "nonconformist" one who asserts his own individuality in opposition, if necessary, to customs and conventions. But a "Nonconformist," with a capital N, simply means a member of one of the so-called Free Churches.

The concluding sentence of Mr. Holyoake's *Daily News* letter bears out all that we suggested. "I am," he says, "a discretionary Nonconformist, notwithstanding the non-concurrence of superior people." He is a *discretionary* Nonconformist. Precisely so. That is the unpleasant aspect of his case.

The Rev. Silas K. Hocking is, of course, a Passive Resister. He is too good a Christian to be anything else. Well, they have just distrained upon his goods at Hornsey; and at the sale his name was identified with Lot 35—"case containing 6 silver serviette rings." Fancy the Lord Jesus Christ with silver serviette rings! Or serviettes either! It is *too* great a stretch of imagination. But we are far from saying that the Rev. Silas K. Hocking does not follow Jesus Christ—at a respectful distance.

Rev. W. H. Higgins, of Coventry, is a Passive Resistance "martyr." He was committed to Warwick Prison for refusing to pay his rates. They were paid for him anonymously, however, and he was released. The hardest part of his prison experience was being "shut up in a cell from 5.30 at night and with lights turned out at night. He got little sleep." The editor of the *Freethinker* had three hundred and sixty-five such nights, and the dear liberty-loving Nonconformists never turned a hair. It did not trouble them whether he slept or not.

Mr. Higgins—perhaps with an eye to his anonymous rescuer—says that he is prepared, like John Bunyan, to lie in prison till moss grows on his eyebrows. He need not fear such a catastrophe. The prison barber will see to that.

Magistrates who are sworn to administer the law, and simply try to do their duty, are having a lively time in some places with the Passive Resisters. One magistrate at Hastings got off the bench and harangued his fellow magistrates on the iniquity of the Education Act until they had to warn him that the Chief Constable was present. After trying to justify his resistance to the law, this gentleman resumed his seat on the bench to administer the law; and the Deputy Mayor naturally told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself. At Chester a gang of Nonconformist ministers treated the magistrates with great rudeness. The Rev. Daniel Hughes, secretary to the local Passive Resistance Association, told them that "they were as incompetent in legal matters as in conscientious matters." This polite remark was greeted by the mob of Passive Resisters in court with "loud applause." Then the long

suffering chairman put his back up and threatened to sweep the mob into the street if they continued to hold a public meeting under his nose.

A clerical Passive Resister at Crews, the Rev. W. Howe, has the silliness to say that the Education Act is not the law of the land, but only an Act of Parliament. This gentleman should write a book on the English Constitution. It would be very amusing.

Protestants are trying hard again to upset the "free, compulsory, and secular" basis of the State schools in Victoria. The Melbourne correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle* prophesies, however, that they will once more be defeated. The Catholics, who maintain their own schools, are naturally against the re-establishment of Protestantism (for that is what it would come to) at the public expense; and, in the circumstances, they may be depended upon to uphold "Secular Education."

The *Daily News* cannot forgive the Rev. R. J. Campbell for paying a visit to Mr. Joseph Chamberlain at High-bury. Perhaps the organ of the Nonconformist Conscience is jealous. We dare say if Mr. Chamberlain called at the *Daily News* office he would be received with bows and smirks. Mr. Campbell, of course, is nothing to us; but we imagine he has the same right as other men to choose his own personal friends.

The Rev. R. J. Campbell is a courageous individual. Quite recently, with barely a tremor of the eyelid, he braved the majesty of the law in the interest of the Passive Resistance movement. One naturally admired the courage that could run so fearful a risk, even though one did not believe in the occasion of its expression. And now he has still further demonstrated his pluck by announcing to a City Temple audience that he has actually had the experience of "supping with actors." And he went on to say, "I think I would sup with the devil and all his angels if I thought there would be anything gained for Christ by so doing." Brave Mr. Campbell! No doubt actors will feel pleased at being lumped in with the devil and all his angels; and we are sure that Sir Henry Irving or Mr. Tree will be gratified to learn that for "Christ's sake" Mr. Campbell is willing to risk the contamination of even their company.

In the same speech Mr. Campbell remarked on the changed attitude of Agnosticism. "It used to be contemptuous, even hostile; the Agnostics who are here this morning....are neither contemptuous nor hostile, but wistfully they look at Christ and his cross.....They look to Jesus with a new and yearning gaze." We do not know what kind of Agnostics Mr. Campbell gets among his audience, but the species that cast "yearning" and "wistful" looks at the cross are, we confess, quite new to us. Mr. Campbell, it will be remembered, regards the advice "Don't say more than you know to be true" as a counsel of pessimism, and so we hardly like to say that he is drawing upon his imagination for his facts. But it looks as though Mr. Campbell were about to enter into competition with Torrey in the converted infidel business.

Mr. Campbell also addressed a solemn warning to the Liberal Party. If the Nonconformists get them into power "I would like to warn them before they go to the House of Commons that there must be no compromise upon this education question. Other questions can wait, but this cannot.....We will stand no nonsense." We hope C. B. will take this warning seriously to heart. Mr. Campbell has warned him that he will stand no nonsense. If he does not please the City Temple, out he goes. Anything else can wait, the Nonconformist claim must be attended to right off. It sounds like a very bad attack of swelled head. The only pleasant thing about it is that Mr. Campbell lacks the power to put into practice the intolerance that rings through all such expressions.

Mr. T. P. O'Connor has the following in the new journal, *London Opinion*: "The late Mr. Bradlaugh was one of the greatest orators and one of the most powerful members of Parliament I have ever known. With the one exception of his speech at the Bar of the House, I do not think he ever got a single real report of one of his thousands of speeches." What a comment upon our boasted freedom and enlightenment of the press! One of the greatest orators and most powerful parliamentarians goes unreported, while columns upon columns of space are wasted upon nonentities of every description. Of course, the reason is that Bradlaugh was an Atheist, and said so. Other members of the House of Commons are substantially in the same position, but they keep their heresy under cover, while posing as liberal thinkers and ardent reformers. The plaudits of the crowd

and the praise of the press have a terrible fascination for some people; but the man who remains quiet on the subject of Freethought, when he believes in it, is never doing his duty either to himself or his fellows. Bradlaugh paid for his outspokenness while he lived, but his name will survive when those of fair-weather Freethinkers are forgotten.

In four charges of robbing churches in and about Sydney lately, the charge-sheet said nothing about "sacrilege." And the court found the thief guilty of "larceny." A few years ago the theft of a knee-pad out of a church was called "sacrilege," and involved a ten years sentence—one year for the theft and nine years for desecrating Parson Howler's edifice.—*Sydney Bulletin*.

What a profitable thing to the clergy is that old fable of Jesus Christ. But what a long way off they keep in following "the master." Here is the new Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, for instance, whose friends have just remembered him on his birthday. They presented him with a carriage and pair. And the horses are reported to be valuable animals, each over sixteen hands high. Such a present should lighten Archbishop Bourne's pilgrimage through this vale of tears.

Jesus Christ never had a carriage and pair. According to tradition, he rode when a baby into Egypt; and, according to the Gospels, he rode when an adult into Jerusalem; but each time it was on a jackass.

Our statesmen have an elastic kind of theology. Not long ago, in Congress, Representative Grosvenor, of Ohio, declared his belief that if the Almighty had wanted horses docked he would have made them that way. Congress was deeply impressed with the argument. Over in Montclair, N.J., the other night, Senator Dolliver, of Iowa, discussing the Panama Canal, said that his theology made him believe that "when the Lord made that fifty-mile wide strip between the continents of North and South America he made it knowing that some day somebody would come along with money and brains and energy enough to cut a ditch through it." According to Grosvenor's doctrine, if the Lord wanted a ditch across the isthmus he would have dug one. According to Dolliver's theology, when the Lord put a long tail on the horse he knew that some day somebody would come along with brains enough to cut it off.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Sir Edwin Arnold's death at the age of seventy-two removes a well-known figure from Fleet-street, and an industrious writer from the office of the *Daily Telegraph*. Does it do anything else? We think not. It is really impossible to say that he made any serious contribution to English literature. His *Light of Asia* was his best work, and it had an immense vogue. But the subject was made to his hand; he simply put some of the best features of Buddhism before the British public in a way that commanded attention; and he stuck to the Buddhist stories as he found them. His own share of the book was the rather cheap Tennysonian blank-verse. As we said of it at the time, in reviewing his *Light of the World*, his style was "something like the Master's on its general level, but we miss the flashing felicities, the exquisite sentence or image, that makes us breathless with sudden pleasure." It was a three-mile-an-hour style, and it never went faster.

The *Light of Asia* was in praise of Buddha. The *Light of the World* was in praise of Christ. Now if Sir Edwin Arnold believed that person to be God his poem was a piece of impudent blasphemy. We presume, therefore, that he was a Theist, a Unitarian, or something of that kind. With the eye of a courtier and a man of business, he dedicated his poetical Life of Christ to Queen Victoria. Then he went on murdering the New Testament. And lots of people thought it piety! So much is actual Christianity played-out, and an easy sentimentalism reigning in its stead.

Even from a literary point of view, the Gospel writers were better artists than Sir Edwin Arnold; probably because they were sincere superstitionists as well as able writers. Who does not remember the exquisite English in which the Authorised Version renders the lament of Christ over the city of Jerusalem? Sir Edwin Arnold could not leave that beautiful little prose poem alone. He had to render it again into his English. And here is a sample of how he did it:—

How oft  
I would have gathered all thy children in  
As a hen clucks her chickens to her wings.

What a shocking instance of literary assassination! It is only the pious and pushing who are equal to such things.

Sir Edwin Arnold wrote a little book on *After Death*. He seemed to regard it as a sort of revelation. As a matter of fact, there was nothing in it. He merely put forward the time-honoured fallacies of faith once more in *Daily Telegraph* English. He was good enough to talk of the "wisdom and benignity of the cosmic process." Had he been a poor devil out of work, with a starving wife and family, he might have been less optimistic. How much, indeed, of the pious optimism of some people is simply an expression of their own personal satisfaction. They live on the sunny side of the hedge—and God is good. The cold shade, in which so many others dwell, only gives these pious optimists the added pleasure of a thrilling contrast. A feeling, by the way, which is very much akin to that of the old Puritan preachers, who taught that a part of the pleasure of the saved in heaven would consist in witnessing the tortures of the damned in hell—since every pleasure is heightened by the view of its opposite.

According to the report of a recent trial at the Clerkenwell Sessions, a missionary who was written to for a reference said that the prisoner was "religiously minded, but had entirely erroneous ideas on the subject of private property." Not bad, is it? Unfortunately there are a good many persons who have more religion than morality.

"We have no infidels and sceptics." So said the Chairman of the Committee of investigation at the Anthracite Coal region in Pennsylvania. Not unnaturally, however, there was "a lamentably low standard of morality." You often find that where "no sceptics need apply."

The *Daily Chronicle* came out one morning with the statement that Crossman, the supposed murderer of the woman in the box of concrete, had always been a ne'er-do-well and an atheist. The next day it came out with the statement that he went to church every Sunday with his wife when he was at home, and never missed prayers in the morning. Such is modern journalism!

We have been asked to look into Crossman's antecedents, with a view to finding out whether he had any leanings towards atheism or otherwise. We beg to say that we have no time for such investigations; and, if possible, still less inclination. How can it matter what opinions Crossman patronised? He appears to have been a moral freak. When you have said that you have said all that is necessary. As a matter of fact, however, his piety seems to hold the field. His various marriages appear to have taken place in church.

Scene: The Christian Endeavour Society of a well-known Sheffield church, the Vicar presiding. Present: A number of adult members, including one pious brother who is moved to pray. Prayer: "Lord, Thou knowest the acuteness of the distress now prevailing in our city. Thou knowest also that two nations have drawn the sword against each other and are at war. Lord, we would ask that the war may soon be ended, that Russia may be vanquished, but that Japanese ships may be sunk, so that fresh orders will come to Sheffield." The above is a true incident.—*Sheffield Independent* (March 26).

Reuter's correspondent at Salonika reports shocking outrages perpetrated by Bulgarian bands on their fellow Christians. They think nothing of cutting a few of them in pieces just to terrify "the others" into taking "the right side" in the political quarrels of the locality.

"May God have mercy on my soul," wrote W. A. Knight, of Rochester-square, London, N.W., before poisoning himself with cyanide of potassium. "I believe there is a God," he said in a letter to a friend. Not an Atheist this, anyway; although the great Talmage declared that it was Atheism which filled suicides' graves.

The Rev. Conrad Noel points out in the *Daily News* that Mr. Harold Johnson's pertinent questions to Nonconformists have waited a fortnight for an answer, and none appears to be forthcoming. "Progressive Anglicans," Mr. Noel says, "are beginning to ask, Do Nonconformist leaders wish for all-round justice, or are they endeavoring, under cover of talk about justice, to bolster up privilege for themselves? Do they want a settlement that would give freedom to Jews, Churchmen of all shades of opinion, Secularists, Roman Catholics, Quakers, Agnostics, etc., etc., or for the establishment of a "Bible only" creed—or, to put it plainly, a Bibliolatry, which many of us would regard as an intolerable injustice? If the Bible is taught in State schools, it should be taught simply as literature; and if that is impossible, it should not be taught at all."

The Guild of St. Matthew, to which Mr. Noel belongs, and of which he is honorary secretary, puts forward its own solution of the religious difficulty; namely, that children shall be taught the religion desired for them by their parents, but not by the school teachers, and not in school hours. Religious bodies would have to see to the matter themselves; and perhaps they would have to rent the school buildings for the purpose. Of course this is far fairer than Dr. Clifford's solution. But the Nonconformists will not accept it. Why? Because they don't want the job of giving the religious instruction. Simply this, and nothing more.

"Let reason and the will of God prevail." This is the heading of the pamphlet issued by the Bath and District Passive Resistance League. Probably it is well meant. But reason and the will of God—about which we know nothing except what the clergy tell us—have never gone very amicably together. Moreover, if there be a God, his will is pretty certain to prevail, with or without the help, or even the good wishes, of the Bath and District Passive Resisters. The way in which these people patronise God Almighty is decidedly amusing.

Speaking of the large supply of charms and amulets which the Russian commander has got together to take to the front with him, the *New York Globe* remarks that such an exhibition of superstition "is a strange thing at this late day." Not so very strange. It is only some six years ago that the Government of the United States purchased from a religious furnishing house in an Ohio city—Cleveland, we believe—a large quantity of rosaries for the Catholic soldiers in the army that went to Cuba and Porto Rico. A *Truthseeker* reader in Porto Rico sent us a copy of a prayer carried by a soldier, the repetition of which several times a day was regarded by its bearer as proof against drowning or sudden death. Roman Catholicism, as well as Greek Catholicism, has scores of different talismans, charms, icons, and fetiches, the most conspicuous of which is the crucifix.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

A bachelor clergyman advertises in the *Daily Mail* for "secular work," the reason being that he is "unable to hold office in the Church owing to growing leanings to Agnostic views." We wish we could supply him with what he requires, for he appears to be an honest man with too much intelligence to believe the popular superstition. Probably there are others like him in the Church—not bachelors, but men tied up with families, who are not able to begin a new career; and the lot of such men is really pitiable.

See the utter futility of Christianity in America, where the race war between whites and blacks is going steadily forward. Both races profess Christianity, but that does not prevent their hating each other in this world—however they may have to agree in the next. There is not a Young Men's Christian Association in the whole of the United States that will admit a colored member. Think of it! And then ask yourself what is the real value of the Christian religion.

The Abbé Loisy has just made his third submission to Rome. Why doesn't he go right in the Church or right out of it? Following reason is one thing; following faith is another; and combining both is only wobbling.

Old Dowie got into hot water at Melbourne, where the inhabitants seem to be even more loyal than those of Great Britain. Dowie said that nobody imagined that King Edward had much religion to spare; which seems a fairly accurate observation. He also said that King Edward will only get to heaven "by the skin of his teeth"; which, we believe, according to the Christian religion, is perfectly true of everybody. Yet for saying these things Dowie has been refused halls to speak in, denied accommodation at hotels and chivvied round the city by the mob. He has our sympathy.

HIS YEARN.—Poor Feeble (about to be operated on for appendicitis): "Doctor, before you begin, I wish you would send and have our pastor, the Rev. Mr. Harps, come over." Dr. Cutter: "Certainly, if you wish it, but—ah—" "I'd like to be opened with prayer."—*Life*.

IMPROVING NATURE.—Scene: Girls' class in Sunday school. Teacher has given a lesson on the blessings of Christianity. Teacher: "What is it that binds us together and makes us better than we are by nature?" Little Girl (blushing): "Please, teacher, it is our stays!"—*Sketchy Bits*.

## Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

April 10, West Ham.

### To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.—April 3, Stratford Town Hall; 10, Camberwell.
- J. LLOYD'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—April 3, Sheffield; 10, Manchester; 17, Merthyr Tydvil; 24, Failsworth.
- A. ONLEY.—You probably refer to the first book of Samuel, xviii., 25, 27, and the second book of Samuel, iii., 14. Genesis xvii., 11 refers to the covenant with Abraham. We cannot print these disreputable texts. You can hunt them up in the Bible yourself.
- G. VIGGARS.—Pleased to see your letter on the Crewe Passive Resisters in the local *Chronicle*. The check and hypocrisy of these men should be shown up at every opportunity. With regard to your question, it is not true that Heine was converted to Christianity on his death-bed. Thanks for your personal good wishes.
- J. P.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."
- F. ROGERS.—Pleased to hear from you. It is something to retain a reader's interest in our paper for twenty years. You did a good work in circulating copies of the N. S. S. manifesto on education, and it is evidently bearing fruit at Kettering.
- V. ROGER.—See paragraph. Thanks.
- CEPHAS.—It is quite true that some of the monks did redeem captives from servitude, but the action of a few does not make a character for all. As to the monks preventing the total extinction of letters, it might as well be said that burglars and receivers prevent the total extinction of stolen property.
- W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always very welcome.
- A. CARNE.—You say you attended a discussion class in a school-room connected with a Bermondsey church, and found to your disgust that "only Christians" were allowed to speak. But what else could you expect? When churches welcome free discussion the end of the world may be expected. The Rev. F. D. Robinson's address is hardly worth criticism at this time of day.
- J. NEIL.—Thanks for your trouble in copying out the passage; but you will see that the reverend author does not expressly approve as a man what he did as a boy, although he does not expressly condemn it. We want to be fair—even to parsons.
- A. G. LYE.—Statement to hand. Thanks.
- G. DAVEY.—See our paragraphs on the subject.
- OLD FREETHINKER.—Slavery, or anything like it, is a bad thing everywhere, including South Africa. But the danger of the present protest against Chinese labor is the rousing of racial prejudice against the Chinese people, who are being villainously misrepresented by some of the more eager and pious spirits. Freethinkers, of all men, should be on guard against this danger. Man for man, the Chinese are quite as moral as the English.
- 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.
- SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS: Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

## Sugar Plums.

London Freethinkers will remember that Mr. Foote begins Sunday evening lecturing on April 17 at the Printers' Hall, Bartlett's-passage, Holborn, right behind the famous furnishing establishment of Wallis and Co. The place was formerly a Christian chapel, but is now devoted to better uses. Mr. Foote intends dealing with quite up-to-date topics at these meetings, and it is hoped that the "saints" will assist in giving them the greatest possible publicity. Neat announcement cards for distribution can be obtained, post free, from Miss Vance, at 2, Newcastle-street, E.C.

There was an excellent afternoon audience in the Birmingham Town Hall on Sunday, when Mr. Foote lectured on "Holy Russia and Heathen Japan." Mr. Cohen occupied the chair. In the evening a fine audience assembled, and listened first for three-quarters of an hour to selections played by the Town Orangist, whose splendid execution was loudly applauded. At seven o'clock Mr. Foote, Mr. Cohen, and Mr. John Lloyd walked on the platform, with some members of the committee of the local N. S. S. Branch. When the applause died away, and business began, Mr. Foote, occupying the chair, announced that the religious part of the proceedings would take place; and, while Mr. Perkins obliged with another selection on the organ, a number of ladies and gentlemen went round and took up the collection. That being disposed of, the chairman introduced Mr. Cohen, who met with a very hearty reception, and greatly pleased the audience with his well thought out and effective address. Mr. Lloyd was then introduced, and the greater part of the meeting heard him then for the first time, and were evidently much impressed by his earnestness and eloquence. Mr. Foote's speech closed the proceedings. It was enthusiastically applauded.

Friends came into Birmingham, to attend the Town Hall meetings, from many surrounding places, including Wolverhampton and Coventry; and were delighted to see such assemblies, as well as to hear the addresses of three leading Freethought speakers. We must not forget to add that the use of the Town Hall was granted by the Mayor of Birmingham, who should be thanked for his kindness and courtesy. When others are defaming and persecuting the local Secularists it is pleasant to remember that the head of the great municipality is true to an older and better tradition.

The Birmingham Branch continues to fight bravely in the face of many difficulties. The chief of these, and a very big one, is the bigotry of those who have command of the School Board buildings. Some three years ago the Branch was turned out of the Bristol-street Board school, where it was holding very successful Sunday meetings; in fact, they were too successful. Lying charges were trumped up to excuse this act of bigotry, so that the local press was obliged to admit that the Secularists were badly treated. And now that the Branch is in this position of disadvantage all the bigots have to do is to keep it there; and this they manage by simply refusing to listen to any further application. Probably some of our readers will remember that the Bishop of Coventry—the blackguard Bishop, as we called him at the time—was the ringleader in this infamous persecution of a body of men whose only real offence was their disbelieving his religion.

The course of lectures at Stratford Town Hall, under the auspices of the Secular Society, Limited, begins this evening (April 8), when Mr. Cohen will give "An Easter Address to Liberal Believers and Passive Resisters." The lecture begins at 7.30, the admission is free, and opportunity will be afforded for discussion. There should be a large meeting.

Mr. John Lloyd has many friends now among the readers of this journal, who will be sorry not to see any article from his pen this week. Mr. Lloyd wrote his usual weekly article, but we regret to say that it is in the Post Office instead of in the *Freethinker*. Whereabouts it is in the Post Office we shall probably never know. We have long given up all hope of ever learning anything from that establishment. Mr. Lloyd posted his article, but it has not reached our office; and we suppose, as Hamlet says, the rest is silence.

The Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, has just issued a new Catalogue, and will be happy to send copies of same free by post to any applicant.

The Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, has a number of shop-soiled books and pamphlets of all descriptions. Not much soiled, but just enough to prevent their being sold as quite new. These books and pamphlets ought not to be destroyed, as they are good enough for distribution. Friends who would like to purchase them very cheaply, in order to give them away judiciously, should send for a parcel at 1s. 6d. or 2s. 6d. A generous supply will be forwarded on receipt of remittance and instructions. Address: E. M. Vance, Secretary, 2 Newcastle-street, London, E.C.

Mr. T. P. O'Connor, in the first number of *London Opinion*, refers to Charles Bradlaugh as one of the most

powerful orators and ablest statesmen he ever knew. How much better it would have been to say this when Bradlaugh was living! Still, it is better late than never.

Mr. O'Connor pays this tribute to Bradlaugh by way of introduction to the statement that the press never reported his speeches—except in the one case of his speech at the bar of the House of Commons. One of the worst sinners in this respect was the dear *Daily News*, though Mr. O'Connor does not say so. It ignored Bradlaugh until its silence became *too* comical. Bradlaugh's great struggle made his name almost a household word; then the *Daily News* had to give in, and recognise his existence.

Gladstone, by the way, greatly admired Bradlaugh's speech at the bar of the House of Commons. In his letter from the House to the Queen on the day's business—as we see by John Morley's *Life of Gladstone*—he described Bradlaugh's effort as "the address of a consummate speaker."

Sir William Collins, the first Chairman of the London County Council's Education Committee, is, we believe the doctor who attended Charles Bradlaugh in his fatal illness, and gave such a flattering account of his patient to one of the newspapers—we think the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which was then a Radical organ.

Sir Edwin Arnold set, or followed, a good example by ordering that his body should be cremated. It is gratifying to see how this wholesome and sensible method of disposing of the dead is surely if slowly gaining ground.

The March number of *Open Court* (Chicago) has for frontispiece a reproduction of a remarkable picture called "Primitive Man" by Gabriel Max, who presented it to Professor Ernst Haeckel. The man has a semi-gorilla appearance, minus the dense hair; he stands upright on his ungainly legs, his huge shoulders seeming almost to bear up the great branch of a tree, against which one hand-paw rests, and round which the other arm is entwined. His brute forehead is beginning to take on a human suggestion, and so is the mouth, which still reveals immense animal power. Not an ideal creature, by any means; but he has already the essential part of a home, and you can see that he provides for his mate and their bantling, and will fight to the death to protect them. The soul of the picture, however, is the primitive woman. She sits asquat, but her body is more human, and her face is more human, looking out strangely prophetic of yet higher things from its framing wealth of long flowing hair. And lying in her lap, tugging at her breast, is the secret of all human progress; the baby, which looks already human, with its chubby hands and arms, and its long bald head. The artist who painted this picture has the root of the matter in him. He has recreated the past by an effort of scientific imagination. His work is indeed a "revelation," and here we have the true meaning of "inspired."

Mr. Foote's *God at Chicago* is reproduced in the *Boston Investigator*. Mr. Derfel's article on Jesus is extensively quoted from our columns in the *Searchlight* (Waco, Texas). We also note that Editor Shaw's reference in the *Searchlight* to Mr. Foote's article as "the most appropriate reference to the providential phase of that awful calamity," the fire at the Iroquois Theatre, has provoked a reply from G. C. Robinson, the editor of the *Chicago Times-Herald*, which is a journal of standing and importance. Mr. Robinson argues that if man has no soul, as Mr. Shaw teaches, the "manner of his taking off" ought not to concern anyone very much. But the answer to this is that believers try hard to die on their own feather-beds. "We do not consult the ox," Mr. Robinson says, "as to the time of his slaughter." But does not humanity bid us be considerate as to the *method* of his slaughter? The editor of the *Chicago Times-Herald* should think the matter over again. In the meanwhile, we cheerfully allow that he sets an example of toleration and courtesy to the general press of Christian countries.

Mr. Shaw writes a long and interesting rejoinder to the editor of the *Times-Herald*. We quote what he says about the Christians feeling that they have "a friend" in God:—"It is true, as you intimate, that in the face of dangers we often feel the need of a friend, but why should we turn to a God who never heeds our prayers? In the Iroquois Theatre fire there were several ministers, and no doubt hundreds who called upon the Lord; but what good came of it? So it was, no doubt, at Galveston and at Johnstown. My observation is that, in trouble one will succeed as often by calling on the

devil as upon the Deity, and that the man who curses is as often blessed and favored as the one who prays. I was once addicted to calling upon the 'Great Unseen,' as you put it, but in no instance did he ever heed my calls. For twenty years now, I have treated God with the same indifference that he has always treated me with, and I cannot see that the results have been different, except that I am far more content with my surroundings than I was then."

Our good friend, the *Boston Investigator*, reproduces some verses as "from *Secular Thought*." The first verse begins, "Money! O Money! Thy praises I sing!" And the last verse ends, "Then be first on my legs to make a collection." We beg to assure our Boston contemporary that these verses are not really "from" Editor Ellis's paper. Under the title of "The Parson's Idol" they were printed as one of our "*Freethinker Tracts*" twenty years ago. Nor were they original then. They first appeared in an old, long-extinct Freethought journal, some thirty years before that.

*La Raison* is now published daily at a halfpenny. The Sunday edition will continue to be exclusively devoted to Freethought, and sold at a penny. We wish our French-Belgian contemporary all success.

We are glad to see that one man, at least, tells the truth about religious education at Kettering. Mr. Palmer, speaking at a meeting after several Nonconformist men of God, said that "if the electors were wise they would keep the black army out of the schools entirely. Parsons of all kinds really wanted the schools to be nurseries for their churches and chapels. Their motto seemed to be: 'We are losing the grown-ups; let's capture the kids.'" Of course the Nonconformist men of God cried "No, no." But it was true all the same—and they know it.

The Glasgow Branch has arranged a Rambling Club for the summer months, open to all, and the membership is only sixpence. The objects are the study of biology, botany, geology, etc., and where places are visited it is intended to do a little propagandist work, possibly holding a meeting and explaining the objects of Secularism. The second Ramble of the session takes place on Monday, April 4 (the Glasgow Spring Holiday) to "The Whangie," a place of interest to geologists. Members and friends are invited to meet at Sir Walter Scott's Monument, George-square, at 10 a.m., and proceed by train to Bearsden. Trains leave Queen-street Station at 10.24 and 11.8 a.m. Fare 6d. single and 9d. return. Ramblers will please provide themselves with refreshments.

At the further request of the secretary of the Peel Institute, Woodbridge-street, Clerkenwell, another address was delivered on Friday evening last by a member of the N.S.S., Miss Lovell, the subject chosen being "Why I am a Secularist." The speaker traced her own mental development and the successive study by which she had reached her present standpoint. A mild debate followed. At the close the hope was expressed that Miss Lovell would again visit the Institute.

#### THE RELIGIOUS LIE.

When religious and ethical formulæ become so obsolete that no man of strong mind can believe them, they have also reached the point at which no man of high character will profess them; and from that moment until they are formally disestablished, they stand at the door of every profession and every public office to keep out every able man who is not a sophist or a liar. A nation which revises its parish councils once in three years, but will not revise its articles of religion once in three hundred, even when those articles avowedly began as a political compromise dictated by Mr. Facing-Both-Ways, is a nation that needs remarking.—George Bernard Shaw, in "*The Revolutionist's Handbook*," *Man and Superman*.

#### DREAMS OF THE DEAD.

Yet with some fancy, yet with some desire,  
 Dreams pursue death as winds a flying fire,  
 Our dreams pursue our dead and do not find;  
 Still, and more swift than they, the thin flame flies,  
 The low light fails us in elusive skies,  
 Still the foiled earnest ear is deaf, and blind  
 Arc still the eluded eyes. —Swinburne.

## Soul-Photography.

ENGLISH CLERGYMAN INTERVIEWED.

[Advance-proof of an interview to be published in the New York Truthseeker in 1930.—Vide Moore's Almanack.]

CALLING upon the Rev. Tertullus by appointment, I was shown into the library; and, while the maid was taking my card upstairs, had a few minutes to glance over the reverend gentleman's well-lined bookshelves. The volumes were all carefully classified; and I was admiring the methodical arrangement by which any particular work on any particular subject could be got at in the twinkling of an eye, when, to my surprise, on one of the shelves devoted to FICTION, I discovered (O, Lord!)—THE HOLY BIBLE!

More than a little astonished, I was standing staring at the book—guessing whether it had been placed among the other volumes of romance and stirring tales of flood and field by misadventure, or whether some silly wag was now wearing the winter-garment of repentance for his practical joke on the parson—when the Rev. Tertullus entered.

"Ah!" said he, cordially shaking my hand, "wondering how it got there, are you? All my American visitors do at first sight. But they generally wonder more when I tell them I placed it deliberately on that shelf—of set purpose, and malice aforethought." And the reverend gentleman chuckled, and rubbed his hands.

"Seems a rather bold action for a clergyman," I suggested. "Not at all," said he. "Not now, you know. The amateur gentlemen, old-fashioned evangelists and so forth, still use the Bible as part of their stock-in-trade, I believe. But we of the regular profession never need it. Why, I haven't had recourse to 'divine inspiration' to distinguish between good and evil for—oh, quite twenty-five years, at least. Ever since soul-photography revolutionised our business, in fact."

"And your congregation?"

"My congregation, my dear sir, would laugh at me if I quoted—ha! ha!—'Scripture' in support of my ethical teaching, or conjured up for their edification the vengeance of an implacable God."

"Shade of Calvin!" I muttered.

"H'm! Calvin was a scorcher," reflected Tertullus. "But nothing remains of his creed now. The fire of hell is a moth-eaten joke, and the doctrine of rewards and punishments never mentioned in modern society. My people won't have religious jargon on any account."

"Church-attenders are evidently taking to thinking."

"Slowly but surely. They remodel their gods and devils in circumstances warrant, and in a dim sort of way are coming to understand that their conception of good or evil varies according to their degree of intelligence. They know morality has nothing to do with religion or Bibles. But still they cling tenaciously to their 'conscience,' and stoutly refuse to throw up their 'immortal soul.' Of course, the more advanced know that 'soul' is an absurd illusion. But you know, my friend, illusions are attractive, and almost necessary to the average man and woman. Illusions appeal to man's passions and emotions. They rouse his interest as realities never do. Man fancies he understands an illusion, and will work and fight for it strenuously. And, after all, it's illusions more than anything else that make the world go round, isn't it?"

"Schopenhauer hinted as much," I observed, "when he insisted so persistently that young men and young women do not attract each other as they really are."

"I remember his remarks," said Tertullus, with a smile.

"Women marry only heroes, and men mate with none but angels." Well, 'tis a sweet illusion! And, as a very happily married man myself, I may perhaps be pardoned—however, to come to the purpose of your visit. Will you come to the church with me?"

I hesitated.

"No cause for alarm," jested the clergyman. "The church holds no horrors now. It is merely a studio."

We walked towards the church.

"Perhaps you will remember," said my guide, "about thirty years ago an attempt was made to cater for the religious sense (pardon the term) by what was called the New Thought Movement. A new religion—from your country, I believe—formed of shreds and patches of the older, clipped, cut, and shaped by clever quacks, and fitted to the minds of sentimental women of both sexes. Soul-illumination, Super-consciousness, Zoism, Spirit-emanations were some of the catch-words used. And those phrases tickled the ears of the groundlings to some purpose, too. People took up the backward New Thought Movement wholesale. Earnest reformers were unable to combat the quackery. And times looked black indeed for the rational movement inside the Church, when the opportune discovery of a French scientist changed the whole current of thought."

"And this scientist?"

"Was M. Baraduc. You will doubtless recollect how he succeeded in 1904 in photographing thought by the aid of the N-rays. Well, that revolutionised the soul-saving trade, and killed the New Thought Movement."

"It was a novel discovery—photographing thought."

"Therein lay its strong point for us. I was the first to see its possibilities, and ran over to Paris, interviewed M. Baraduc, enlisted his sympathies, and secured for the Church the English patents on most advantageous terms.

"My plan was to photograph the—ahem!—the souls of our adherents at regular intervals, keep a record of the moral rise and fall of the soul of each member of the church, introduce in place of family worship a family soul-album, and stimulate by various means a healthy spirit of emulation in soul-culture. We engaged an experienced and up-to-date ad-writer, got out a first-rate pamphlet, circularised the nation;—and the idea boomed! Simply boomed, my dear fellow! The novelty of the thing caught on like wildfire. Nothing succeeds like novelty.

"Unfortunately, the comic papers parodied our circulars, and issued a series of skits which did us some harm for a time. They would appear with mock advertisements, such as:—

'WHY WAIT TILL YOU DIE TO LEARN IF YOUR SOUL IS STAINLESS? GET IT PHOTOGRAPHED AND LEARN NOW. NOW IS THE ACCEPTED TIME.

SOULS TAKEN WHILE YOU WAIT.

Pigeon-souls, 6s. per doz. The "Marcus Aurelius" or great-soul, 10s. per doz. Family soul-groups, special rates.

Club Terms to Dorcas Societies.'

"But we lived down that sort of thing."

By this time we had reached the church. The inside of the building resembled nothing so much as a photographer's studio—as the parson had described it. Ranged round the walls were framed pictures which appeared to be specimen photos. of the moon. And mighty poor photos. of Luna they were! The mountains of the planet showed up too strong in the majority, and were invisible in one or two. The mountains had no form either; mere splashes of dirty black on the pale moon's face. No delicate drifting of shade into light; no tone effects.

"Those are photos. of the souls of some of our old Bishops and dignitaries of the Church," explained the parson.

"WHAT?" I exclaimed.

"All dead and gone now. The publication of their soul-photographs shamed them to death. But the congregations insisted on it; and from that time, let me observe, officials of our Church have looked very carefully to their moral character."

"Then these are not photos. of the moon and her mountains?"

"Moon! No. Those are soul-photos.; and what you take to be mountains is sin. This"—taking up a large album—"is what we call the Book of Common Souls. It contains photos. of the souls of our poor parishioners, and is of little interest to —"

"Excuse me, Sir," I interrupted. "But I fear I don't quite catch the hang of this scheme of yours."

"Oh, pardon me, friend," said Tertullus. "I forgot for the moment you were American, and unfamiliar with soul-photography. Let me explain briefly. When unto us a child is born, the parents, instead of bringing it to the church for baptism, bring it to have it's soul photographed. (My curate will show you the N-rays in operation presently). Every year a fresh photo is taken; and the development of the child's soul carefully watched. As a record of the annual photos. is kept for comparative purposes, the character of the child is immediately under our eyes. And should signs of sin appear on any negative, steps are at once taken to discover the causes of the lapse, and have them removed. For instance, here is a record of a boy-soul for twenty-five years.—Yes: a pure white disc is always the form we give—I mean is generally the form an infant's soul takes on the sensitised plates. Now, note the spotlessness of the disc for the first seven years. On the eighth photo. you observe a faint curved line or streak running from the circumference to the centre. That is a mild attack of sin. And, coming from the outer to the inner part of the soul, the streak shows the soul has been attacked from the outside. Had the curved line ran from the centre outwards, that would have been a symptom of original or inherited sin. Regarding this case, I learned on inquiry the lad had been bird-nesting, orchard-robbing, and indulging in a little false-swearing with some strange boys. A short friendly talk with himself. and a hint to his parents, weaned the youngster from those practices; and on the ninth photo. you see the pristine purity of his soul is regained. And, with an occasional lapse of little importance, this purity is

retained till we come to the twenty-second photo. That year's plate you observe shows a very strange marking—like the dappled figure in a piece of Austrian oak. It puzzled me to account for those blemishes until I discovered the young man had fallen in love. Marriage disposed of those marks the following year; and here are the last two photos taken, showing a soul as spotless and sweet as one could desire."

"I notice in these collections you show me," I pointed out, "all the records start virgin white. Are all the children here born free of blemish? What of hereditary influences on the—ahem!—the soul?"

"Oh, we often get such cases as you refer to," replied Tertullus. "Here is one for instance. Note the progress. In a case of this kind careful treatment is necessary. Both parents and child are treated. Sympathetic advice and instruction in moral conduct are given. No sermons. No preaching. Only man to man talks, and occasional lectures on physiology and sociology. But with healthy physical conditions provided for our patients, we really trust more to the natural swing round towards healthy moral life than to any set system of treatment. Before our system of soul-photography was perfected, we never knew what was in the underground caves of human nature; and were always at a loss how to deal with certain types of men and women. But now we are able not only to check the growth of sin as soon as it appears in the patient; but from experience we can tell by the shape, size, and position of the spots on the disc the exact nature of the evil thought or action; and we treat it accordingly."

"Will you sell me a few of these photos?"

"Very sorry to have to refuse. But I have always discouraged morbid curiosity. And, apart from the soul-photos of the officials of the church, whose characters all the members are empowered to investigate, none but the immediate relations and intimate associates of the person interested see or possess copies of his soul-photos: except, of course, in the case of marriage. Bride and groom are entitled, and are always advised, to search the records for the soul-history of her and his intended."

FRED. L. GREIG.

### Book Chat.

SOME booksellers look upon the things they sell as grocers look upon soap or sugar; the only difference being that books are not sold by the pound—though we have heard of their being sold by the yard, to fill the shelves in a rich illiterate man's library. But there is a bookseller now and then who is also a bibliophile, who knows the insides of books as well as their outsides, and sometimes sells a rare volume with painful regret; his poverty, and not his will, consenting to the sacrifice. We read of a few such booksellers in the past, and there is certainly one living at the present day. His name is Bertram Dobell, and his business haunt is in Charing-cross-road, which has more than taken the place of the old Booksellers'-row (alias Holywell-street), that was recently pulled down to make room for the great Strand improvement.

\* \* \*

Mr. Dobell is even something more than a bookseller who loves books. He has edited some good books himself; notably the poems, and some of the prose, of James Thomson ("B. V."). All admirers of Thomson's genius must, indeed, be under a debt of gratitude to Mr. Dobell, who acted as publisher as well as editor, and risked his money to give Thomson access to whatever public he might find. Not that Mr. Dobell would *desire* thanks for this. His motive was not exactly philanthropy; except, perhaps, in a higher than the usual sense of the word. Being himself a passionate admirer of Thomson's genius, he took a pleasure in rescuing its productions from a most unhappy neglect. A neglect, by the way, that was not altogether the fault of the readers of poetry; for who can read what is inaccessible? Fine things, no less than rubbish, must be made procurable before they can be appreciated.

Collecting books, and editing books, do not cover the extent of Mr. Dobell's active literary interests. He can now claim to be an author. Some three years ago he issued a privately printed volume of his own verses, and favored us with a copy, which we mentioned rather casually. He now publishes the volume in the usual way; acting, of course, as his own publisher. The price of the volume is three shillings.

This published volume of Mr. Dobell's verse contains several pieces not previously printed, and some of those that were printed have undergone a good deal of revision. The

title is *Rosemary and Pansies*. It was suggested by the pathetic words of poor Ophelia, which Mr. Dobell quotes on his title-page:—

"There's rosemary for you, that's for remembrance:  
pray, love, remember: and there's pansies, that's for thoughts."

Only one man in the world could write like that, and his name is William Shakespeare. How simple it seems, yet it is almost a miracle. The great Magician's sign-manual is over it all, and especially in the central clause. Three simple words, but the absolutely right words; perfectly fitting the speaker, and going like a stab to the heart of the hearers. A smaller genius would have made another thing of it. Shakespeare had the genius to be natural. And this is the secret of his faultless felicity.

Yes, Mr. Dobell's title-page shows that he knows a good thing when he sees it. Let us add that he is too sound in head and heart to waver in his allegiance to Shakespeare. He yearns for but "a spark of his immortal fire." He derides Mr. Bernard Shaw's derision of Shakespeare in a cutting epigram. And one of his best sonnets—with real insight and imagination and fine expression—was suggested by the seventy-first of Shakespeare's. Who can read that sonnet, understanding it, without feeling womanish? And it is high praise that Mr. Dobell has caught something of its pathetic tenderness. For it is a distinguished honor to be anywhere in Shakespeare's retinue.

Some of Mr. Dobell's other sonnets are capital. We like the one on James Thomson all but the final couplet, and we think the one on Shelley is entirely admirable. The conclusion voices the real pity of Shelley's untimely end.

Alas! that death should then his victim claim,  
Even in that hour when he *himself* became!

On the whole, we believe the Bach sonnet is Mr. Dobell's finest. Here it is for the reader's judgment.

#### BACH'S SECOND CONCERTO.

What fresh and breezy joyousness is here,  
What youthful spirit, what rapture of delight,  
What scorn of baseness, what contempt of fear!  
How doth it put all sombre thoughts to flight!  
Once more the world is full of old romance,  
Once more the jarring keys are all in tune,  
Once more in woodland scenes the fairies dance,  
And desolate winter turns to glorious June!  
Ah, could man's life to such a tune be set,  
Its dull beat changed for these exultant strains,  
What room were there for sorrow or regret,  
Or who could doubt that God exists and reigns?

The music dies—and I am sad again,  
But with a tenderer grief, a milder pain.

We appeal to all lovers of poetry to say whether this is not a beautiful sonnet.

A capital bit of work in a very different vein is "A Poet's Grievance." It is excellent comedy, with a slight under-current of tragedy. A Fleet-street poet, called Milton, holds forth on his own unappreciated genius, and winds up by borrowing half-a-crown, which he is sure to repay! His great dramas, which no publisher will print, and no manager will produce, would place him on a level with Shakespeare.

You smile, sir! but I mean just what I say,  
In fact I know not if I'm not too modest,  
And should not claim a higher place than Shakespeare:  
For what says Bernard Shaw?—"Excepting Homer,  
There is no famous writer I despise  
So much as I despise the vaunted Shakespeare,  
When I compare my intellect with his;"  
(And that is just what I should say of Shaw,  
Were I—but modesty restrains my speech).

Delightful fun! And is not the Fleet-street poet's reference to his great namesake colossal?—"He had his special talent, I have mine."

We are not sure that the very best piece in this volume is not the "Haikais," a Japanese form of verse. We mean from a purely poetical point of view. But this poem cannot be sampled; it must be quoted altogether or not at all. From a longer poem, "The Dream of Life" we select the following:—

As in a swiftly-moving train  
We motionless seem to remain,  
While the receding landscape flies  
So fast it mocks our straining eyes—  
So are we hurried on our way,  
No time to think, no power to stay;  
With swifter and yet swifter pace,  
Onward, we know not where, we race  
Until, amazed and out of breath,  
We reach the final station—Death.

This leads us to say that Mr. Dobell, as might be expected, is a most earnest Freethinker. Here is a passage in exemplification:—

The Gods we pray to and adore  
Are shadows of our dreams—no more;  
Heaven is a dream of yearning born.  
And hell the dream of the forlorn;  
Angels are born from sunny skies;  
Devils from night and storm arise.

Here again is an epigram on "The Religion of the Poets":—

Poets, you say, are irreligious. No!  
Their creed is Love. Can you a better show?

Another poem, called "A Reply," is a noble answer to those who warn the poet to flee from the wrath to come, and tell him that it is safest to believe. Such a doctrine is for bond-slaves, not for free-men. The poet says he will go in quest of Truth. She may not attract rogues, cowards, and fools; she does not clamor for recognition and attention; and some may think her repellent.

Though she may seem to wear a frowning face,  
Shrink not, but dare approach her and embrace,  
And then her veil falls off and you behold  
Imperial beauty and celestial grace.

Space does not permit us to give more specimens of Mr. Dobell's work. We hope we have succeeded in commending it to our readers' attention. We shall value *Rosemary and Pansies* for its own sake, as well as for a certain association it has with the memory of James Thomson. Mr. Dobell has done quite right in publishing his poems, and we hope he will live to supplement the present volume. Assiduous attention to business may leave him little time to cultivate the muse, but he has within him a true gleam of "the vision and the faculty divine." What he says of "the poet" is not without truth of himself.

He is an alchemist whose art indeed  
Transmutes base metal into shining gold,  
And in his brain's laboratory turns  
Thought's star-dust into worlds of light and splendor.

#### TESTING THE GODS.

A poor man, in our day, has many gods foisted on him; and his voices bid him "Worship, or be—!" in a menacing and confusing manner. What shall he do? By far the greater part of said gods, current in the public, whether canonised by Pope or Populus, are mere dumb Apises and beaified Prize-oxen;—nay some of them, who have articulate faculty, are devils instead of gods. A poor man that would save his soul alive is reduced to the sad necessity of sharply trying his gods whether they are divine or not; which is a terrible pass for mankind, and lays an awful problem upon each man. The man must do it, however. At his own peril he will have to do this problem too, which is one of the awfulest; and his neighbors, all but a most select portion of them, portion generally not clad in official tiaras, can be of next to no help to him in it, nay rather will infinitely hinder him in it, as matters go.—*Carlyle*.

#### WAR AGAINST EFFETE THOUGHT.

I am now convinced that no great improvements in the lot of mankind are possible until a great change takes place in the fundamental constitution of their modes of thought. The old opinions in religion, morals, and politics, are so much discredited in the more intellectual minds as to have lost the greater part of their efficacy for good, while they have still life enough in them to be a powerful obstacle to the growing up of any better opinions on those subjects.—*John Stuart Mill*.

Swedenborg did one thing for which I feel almost grateful. He gave an account of having met John Calvin in Hell. Nothing connected with the supernatural could be more perfectly natural than this. The only thing detracting from the value of the report is, that if there is a hell, we know without visiting the place that John Calvin must be there.—*Ingersoll*.

It is to be feared that to most men the sky is but a concave mirror, showing nothing behind, and in looking into which they see only their own distorted images, like the reflection of a face in a spoon. Hence it needs not surprise that they are not very devout worshippers; it is a great wonder they do not openly scoff.—*Dod Grile*.

#### ON DEATH.

I have often thought upon death, and I find it the least of all evils. All that which is past is as a dream; and he that hopes or depends upon time coming, dreams waking. So much of our life as we have discovered is already dead; and all those hours which we share, even from the breasts of our mothers, until we return to our grandmother the earth, are part of our dying days, whereof even this is one, and those that succeed are of the same nature, for we die daily; and as others have given place to us, so we must in the end give way to others. Physicians in the name of death include all sorrow, anguish, disease, calamity, or whatsoever can fall in the life of man either grievous or unwelcome. But these things are familiar unto us, and we suffer them every hour; therefore we die daily, and I am older since I affirmed it. I know many wise men that fear to die; for the change is bitter, and flesh would refuse to prove it; besides the expectation brings terror, and that exceeds the evil. But I do not believe that any man fears to be dead, but only the stroke of death.—*Lord Bacon*.

#### MORALITY INDEPENDENT OF THEOLOGY.

To place anything in God, or to derive anything from God, is nothing more than to withdraw it from the test of reason, to institute it as indubitable, unassailable, sacred, without rendering an account *why*. Hence self-delusion, if not wicked, insidious design, is at the root of all efforts to establish morality, right, on theology. When we are in earnest about the right we need no incitement or support from above. We need no Christian rule of political right: we need only one which is rational, just, human. The right, the true, the good, has always its ground of sacredness in itself, in its quality. Where man is in earnest about ethics, they have in themselves the validity of a divine power.—*Ludwig Feuerbach*.

#### DROWNING THE HEATHEN.

It was at Blagovestchensk that the ghastliest act of the European anti-Boxer campaign took place. The Russian Governor ordered every Chinaman in the town to cross the river into Chinese territory within twenty-four hours. At the end of that time the Chinese still remained; there was not a boat to be had, and no bridge existed. On that morning, therefore, and throughout that day, the Cossacks of the garrison marched the whole of the Chinese population, numbering hundreds, in parties down to the river's bank. They were driven into the river at the bayonet's point, and practically every soul perished. For many days the Amur was blocked with corpses, and men with poles were busy day and night clearing the bodies away from the landing stages and promontories of the bank in the neighborhood of the town. Such were the noyades of Blagovestchensk, the crime that will long remain the shame of the white race in the Far East.—*Daily News*.

#### "MULTIPLE PERSONALITY."

"Multiple personality" was the subject recently treated before the members of the Society for Psychical Research at 20, Hanover-square by Dr. Albert Wilson, former President of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh.

The case in point was that of a patient, a girl, 12½ years of age, who suffered from influenza, followed by meningitis. Dr. Wilson watched her for over four years. Normally she was a well-behaved, intelligent child, and of good heredity.

At about the sixth week of her illness she developed into a new personality. She became subject to attacks of catalepsy, changed both in facial expression and in manner, became childish, quite ignorant of the meaning of words, and had to be re-educated.

From that point Dr. Wilson noticed numerous abnormal developments and variations. The girl went through a series of experiences, she became deaf and dumb, then recovered and learnt French, then acted as a baby, became blind and resembled an imbecile. In some of her "states" she would draw beautifully, whereas in the normal condition she could not draw at all.

What was the meaning of it all? Dr. Wilson's explanation was that the mind or character, the "ego" which is the sum total of our personality and individuality, is composed of several minor "egos." These minor egos, subject to the laws of health, heredity, and environment, must vary, and, said Dr. Wilson, this opens up the great question of the day as to individual responsibility.

This case, insisted Dr. Wilson, illustrated how the instability of the normal "ego" may destroy the original and true personality.

**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, Conversazione for Members and Friends.—Good Friday, April 1: Ball for Members and Friends, to celebrate 20th Anniversary of Opening of Hall, 8.30 p.m. to 2 a.m.

**SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY** (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, Joseph McCabe, "Ethics in Japan."

**STRATFORD TOWN HALL**.—7.30, C. Cohen, "Christianity's Last Stand": An Easter Address to Liberal Believers and Passive Resisters.

**WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S.** (The Grove, Stratford): 11.30, W. J. Ramsey.

**COUNTRY.**

**GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY** (110 Brunswick-street): No meeting.

**LEEDS** (Covered Market, Vicar's Croft): 11, George Weir, "Priests"; Woodhouse Moor: 3, "The Bible." Town Hall Square, 7.30, W. Woolham, "Socialism."

**LIVERPOOL** (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 3 and 7, H. Percy Ward.

**MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL** (Rusholme-road, All Saints): No meeting.

**NEWCASTLE DEBATING SOCIETY** (Lockhart's Cathedral Cafe): Thursday, April 7, at 8, A. L. Coates, "The Country of the White Tsar."

**SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY** (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street) 3, J. T. Lloyd, "Our New Bible"; 7, "Why I Have Renounced the Christian Religion." Tea at 5.

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