

THE Freethinker

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Systems save trouble—the trouble of thinking.

ARTHUR HELPS.

The Cant of Dr. Clifford.

"DR. CLIFFORD'S Protest against Cant" was a headline in last week's *Christian World*. Speaking at the annual meeting of the Baptist Union, the reverend gentleman hoped that the people of London would take their stand as Passive Resisters, and that they would never yield. "He wished," we are told, "that they could have done with hypocrisy, and could get rid of all cant with regard to 'Christian union,' and so on." It would be absurd, therefore, if Dr. Clifford objected to the title of our own article. He accuses others of canting, and we accuse him of the same offence. We have no hesitation, indeed, in saying that he is the champion canter of the whole Passive Resistance movement; which, in spite of Mr. Holyoake, is regarded by the vast majority of Freethinkers as the most colossal cant of the present day.

This reverend gentleman has been asked again and again to explain himself. On what ground of principle does he oppose the Education Act? It is easy enough to see that he is fighting for the interests of Nonconformity; and if he said so plainly, and stuck to it, we should have no quarrel with him, except the general quarrel we have with all who aim at using national resources for sectarian ends. But the Passive Resistance leader does not avow this object. He uses the language of pure disinterestedness. He talks of civil and religious liberty, of political and social justice, and the indefeasible rights of citizenship. He mouths all the time-honored shibboleths of the Nonconformist Conscience. And he utters them with such vehemence and pertinacity that he has perhaps imposed upon himself as well as upon others. It is possible that he really considers himself a champion of religious freedom and civic equality. But the truth is that he is nothing of the kind. And this would be promptly demonstrated if he would only have the honesty to stop his hectic splutterings for a moment and make a clear statement of his principles in regard to religious education. We say *religious education* advisedly; for it is perfectly obvious that everything else is accidental. It is simply the presence of religious teaching in the public schools that turns a matter of ordinary business into a tangled problem. Take the religious teaching away and peace would fall upon the distracted scene. Church parsons and Nonconformist ministers would cease fighting each other—at least on *this* question; and the education of the nation's children would naturally fall into the hands of those who cared for it on honest grounds. The present quarrel, in short, like that of Cain and Abel, is about religion; and one side will knock the other's brains out unless the State has the sense to separate them by taking away the bone of contention.

While the Passive Resistance leader talks to Nonconformists, and to Nonconformists only, he can go on evading the discussion of principles. If he sat on a composite committee, or in the House of Commons, he would have to show his hand. And if he stood up in parliament, and talked the absurdities which

he now gives vent to on Dissenting platforms, and in letters to the *Daily News*, he would find many a dialectical rapier piercing him through and through. Not even against Mr. Balfour, whom he affects to despise, could the reverend gentleman stand up for five minutes. Mr. Balfour has already shown the illogicality of Dr. Clifford's position; and the feeblest, the most puerile, section of Dr. Clifford's reply was that in which he pretended to deal with the Churchman's attempt to turn the Dissenter's face towards the rights of Jews, Sectularists, Positivists, and Ethicists.

But if Dr. Clifford will not face those rights the only resource left to us is to try to shame him into a better frame of mind.

Dr. Clifford's latest joke is a letter (he beats the late Mr. Gladstone at letters) to the Rev. S. A. Latham, of Sandford, in Devonshire. Mr. Latham is one of the few Passive Resisters in that part of England; his goods have been seized for the Education rate, and he has received "an inspiring message" from Dr. Clifford. We make the following extract from the "inspiring message":—

"Hold the fort. You are defending the real interests of your country, of the children and of the teachers, and of the whole of our fellow-countrymen. It is a great service you are rendering in the greatest of causes; the cause of liberty of conscience, of freedom from the tyranny of oppressing priests, and of equal opportunities for citizens in the service of the State, where they have character and capacity, without regard to their theological opinions and ecclesiastical relationships."

Words, words, words! as Hamlet says. And poor at that. Only a "religious" leader would be pardoned for using such verbiage. Dr. Clifford must (for instance) have a big mouthful; so "our countrymen" is not good enough for him, he must stick a "fellow" in the middle. This vice of composition runs through the whole of the present letter, and is indeed only too characteristic of the Dissenting tabernacle.

Dr. Clifford's talk of "liberty of conscience," "equal opportunities for citizens," and so forth, is the veriest cant. He reminds us of the American gentleman, who said that liberty was the right to do as he pleased, and the right to make everybody else do so too. Dr. Clifford means by "liberty of conscience" the right to have the form of Christianity which he chooses taught in the public schools, and the right to make everybody else pay for it. When he speaks of "equal opportunities" he means a fair division of privilege amongst Christians—at the expense of Non-Christians. He has no desire to do justice to Non-Christian parents or Non-Christian teachers. He knows that the teachers who do not like Nonconformist religion in public schools will be (and have been) kept down as rigorously as Nonconformist teachers are kept down in public schools controlled by the Church of England. He has frequently been challenged on this point, but "Mum's" his only answer. And at the recent meeting of the Liberation Society it was this very Dr. Clifford who smothered the protests against State religion in the public schools, and jockeyed the Conference into carrying a resolution in favor of Bible teaching; that is to say, in favor of just the quantity and quality of religious instruction which suits the Nonconformists' book.

G. W. FOOTE.

The May Meetings.

THE May Meetings, lasting from the early part of April until the end of June, are now in full swing, and the oratory makes up in variety what it lacks in edification. All the hundred and one sects meet during this period to compliment themselves, eulogise their disinterestedness, their services to the community, and dilate upon their being the moral backbone of the community, with a solemnity that proves either a complete absence or an abnormal command of their sense of humor. Clergymen foregather from all parts of the country and from all parts of the globe. They impress the audiences by wearing Chinese and Indian dresses, and the wonderful stories of the success of missionaries in securing converts is only tempered by the consideration that unless they leave a sufficient number unconverted the subscriptions are likely to fall off.

Taking the stories from abroad first, we note the meetings of the Church Missionary Society, which has had, according to the secretary, one of its most successful years. In all parts of the world during the past year 9,433 agents have been at work, and these announce 11,000 baptisms. Baptisms, be it noted, not conversions; and as these include baptisms of those already connected with the missions, and as nothing is said of the losses during this period, we shall probably be erring on the side of liberality if we say the average is one convert per missionary per year. And this is the most successful year the Society has ever had!

A missionary from China, Archdeacon Bannister, objected to people talking of the Chinese as a "Yellow Peril." He believes the Chinaman is a "praise to the earth"—when he is converted. The Archdeacon has evidently a good business head on his shoulders, and probably fears that if the worthlessness of the Chinaman is overdone people may decline to subscribe for his conversion. The real peril, continued the Archdeacon, is "the combination of the higher education with paganism by heathen leaders, who regard Western civilisation as the panacea for China's needs. The speaker did not say whom this "peril" menaced. He probably means that it threatens Christianity; the truth being that those "heathen leaders" who have revolutionised Japan, and who may yet revolutionise China, are clear-headed enough to see that the West owes its superiority, not to its religion, but to its applied science. Anyway, Japan has not suffered by its accepting the latter and contemptuously ignoring the former; and when China does move one can safely depend upon it following the same lines. China is not likely to forget how much of its past humiliation it owes to missionary activity.

Another interesting statement in this connection was made by Miss Dunnill, at a meeting of the Sunday School Union. She told her audience that fifty years ago there was only one brewery in India. Now there are twenty four—for which the Hindoos are doubtless truly and duly thankful.

At this meeting the Rev. J. Mursell brought forward one more proof of the "Wonderfulness of the Bible." There is an International Bible Reading Association, and Mr. Mursell said that, great and wonderful as Plato is, the mere idea of an International Plato Reading Association excites amusement. *Q. E. D.* Still, one feels that if there were several hundreds of thousands of people financially interested in people reading Plato—or pretending to—the idea would not seem quite so absurd as it does now. And, after all, people *do* read Plato in every country where they have brains enough for the task. He is international, although there are not hundreds of thousands of advertising agents booming his writings, and although every copy sold has to pay the cost of production. We wonder what kind of an audience the Bible would have to-day if it had had to win recognition under the same conditions?

It almost goes without saying that among the

Nonconformists Passive Resistance and the Education Acts bulked very prominently. And Dr. Clifford was, of course, well to the front. He wished "they could have done with hypocrisy and could get rid of all cant." To which one says, "Hear, hear." But then what would Dr. Clifford do? If cant and hypocrisy were abolished, what would become of the man who takes State money for his own chapel while denouncing the State patronage of religion; who denounces religious instruction in schools while fighting for Biblical instruction and fundamental Christian doctrines; and who, while desirous of compelling non-Christians to pay for this instruction, protests he would rather go to prison than pay a rate part of which is spent in teaching the doctrines of the Church of England? In wishing for the abolition of cant and hypocrisy Dr. Clifford is really self-sacrificing. He is praying for his own annihilation; and if the historic setting were present it would remind one of the famous scene during the French Revolution when the nobles surrendered their privileges for the benefit of the State.

Another remarkable utterance came from the Presbyterian Moderator, the Rev. W. Murray. What we wanted, he said, was another John Knox. What, he asked, would Knox have said to the Education Acts by which the religious liberty of half the population had been openly assailed. Really these men can persuade themselves of anything; but to parade John Knox who assisted in the State enforcement of the reformed religion, and by whose influence the use of the Mass was punished with death, is taking a dangerous liberty with the credulity of one's readers. It is quite probable that if Knox were here he would be without the sickening cant of present-day Nonconformists, but to assume that he would be against the principle of a State Church, or that he would trouble about the conscientious convictions of people who did not teach *his* Christianity, is to create a John Knox unknown to history.

The wiliness of Dr. Clifford came out strongly in the discussion of a resolution before the meeting of the Liberation Society. A resolution was proposed which maintained that an Education Act should provide for (1) full control by the local authority; (2) abolition of theological tests for teachers; (3) no sectarian teaching during school hours. On this being proposed a quarrel arose over the last section. Mr. Swaffield, of Hackney, proposed to substitute "religious" for "sectarian." The amendment was a sensible one, only it was too inclusive. *Religious* instruction includes all, and would bar out the Nonconformists equally with the Churchman and the Catholic. So Dr. Clifford the conscientious objected. No dozen men, he said, could give the same definition of religious, and he suggested "theological" or "ecclesiastical," which was a subterfuge as dishonest as it was transparent. No religious doctrine can be taught without it involving theological teaching, and the rule of the Nonconformist preacher is, for all practical purposes, as ecclesiastical as that of a Church of England parson. The game of Dr. Clifford, however, has been to use both terms as synonymous with priestly aggression, and thus utilise the bad odor of his religious rivals to get his own religion taught at the public expense. Eventually he had his way, and "theological and ecclesiastical" took the place of sectarian in the resolution, and so the Nonconformist leaders will still claim that they are opposing theological instruction while teaching the existence of God, the divinity of Jesus and the inspiration of the Bible.

The meeting did come into something like a reasonable atmosphere for a period when there ensued a "lively discussion" as to whether Liberationists could consistently support Bible instruction in schools. The Rev. T. Phillips, for instance, argued that justice had to be done to the Jew, the Agnostic, and others as well as to Free Churchmen. But this was a view that did not appeal to the meeting. The few consistent ones were overruled, and the Liberation Society which does not believe in the State teaching religion in Churches

voted in favor of the State teaching it in schools, and Dr. Clifford, who is anxious that we should clear our minds of cant and hypocrisy, was, we presume, satisfied. Still, it is pleasant to observe that Secular Education could not be suppressed even here. This will show itself, and the number of times it has cropped up lately in the camp of the enemy are straws showing which way the stream flows.

The most thoughtful contribution to the May Meetings I have come across is the report of an address by Mr. W. H. Robinson, a Baptist minister, on "The Ethics of the Pulpit." Mr. Robinson believed that the minister should always be sincere and honest to his congregation—advice which, if followed, would empty a great many of the pulpits. In this connection he made a few noticeable remarks on the usual custom of clergymen ignoring in the pulpit facts they were bound to admit elsewhere. Nothing is more common than to find clergymen in their sermons referring to what Moses did or said, to Jonah's feelings or beliefs, etc., when they know full well that criticism has demonstrated their recorded doings and sayings to be pure myth. Of course, the reason for this is plain. So long as mythical Biblical characters and incidents are referred to as though they are actual historic facts the results of criticism will be confined to a few, while the illusion of their veracity will be sustained among the many. One can, therefore, welcome Mr. Robinson's opinion that a minister who believes the Song of Songs to be a collection of erotic Eastern love songs has no right to quote passages therefrom as though they had direct reference to incidents in the life of Jesus. It is time that some stand was made against this dishonesty of the pulpit, although we are not very sanguine as to the result of Mr. Robinson's protest.

One minister asked Mr. Robinson what a man was to do with regard to Biblical criticism when his congregation was suspicious concerning it? Was he to preach his church empty? There's the rub, especially for Nonconformists; for they, more than other religious bodies, are dependent upon their congregations. And what these ask for is, for the most part, not the results of the latest criticism and scholarship, but for renewed doses of the doctrines they have always listened to. And there is, after all, no greater delusion than that of thinking that the work of the clergyman is to develop the understanding of his congregation. It is nothing of the kind. The last place in the world to get truth is in church or chapel. The principles of uniformity in geology and of natural selection in biology were never referred to in churches as true until they had long been commonplaces in the educated world outside. And this holds with greater force still of religious matters. How much would any church or chapel-goer know of Biblical criticism if he had to depend upon what he heard in his place of worship? Hardly anything; and the little he does learn there is only put before him because not even a parson has the hardihood to quite ignore all that is now known on this and kindred topics. The real aim of the clergy is to perpetuate a body of doctrines in the face of all proof of their falsity, and to that end keep their congregations secluded from contact with all that makes against them. Unfortunately, people have got into the habit of regarding the clergy as a body of high-minded but rather stupid individuals, devoted to principle, and ready to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the nation. When we can rid ourselves of this delusion we shall begin to move forward more rapidly.

C. COHEN.

The Religious Point of View.

It would be the height of folly to deny the existence of the religious point of view. We are surrounded by a steadily diminishing number of people who firmly believe in and constantly use it. But Free-thinkers declare that the existence of the religious point of view is purely imaginary and insusceptible

of verification. In Christendom the religious point of view is the God of the Bible. Christians are solemnly exhorted to look at and judge everything in its relation to the Supreme Being. It is their bounden duty to see all things through God's eyes. But the existence of God is a groundless assumption which has never found justification at the bar of reason. The supernatural world is a dreamland that vanishes the moment we are intellectually awake. Therefore, the religious point of view is a mischievous fiction, and those who employ it put the facts of life in a false perspective. From the religious point of view man is seen as a creature who is responsible for his actions, not to society, but to an invisible Being whose Judgment Day is postponed till the end of the world.

Such is the teaching of the Bible and the Christian Church. Again and again are we told by theologians that on earth man's life is one of probation merely, the results of which will be reaped in eternity. This earthly life is my opportunity to accept Christ as my Savior, and to make my peace with heaven. If I improve the opportunity thus graciously afforded me, I shall after death inherit bliss unending; but if I reject Christ here, yonder, irrespective of my moral character, I shall be visited with everlasting punishment. That is the religious point of view, and I must pronounce it positively immoral. And yet the Rev. Canon Hicks, M.A., in his Manchester Lecture on the subject, calls it the pre-eminently ethical point of view, which is a contradiction in terms. To accept Christ as the Divine Savior is not an ethical but a solely religious duty.

Canon Hicks enumerates the different points of view from which we may look at man, such as the astronomical, the chemical, and the biological, and then says:—

"But we have not yet exhausted all the phenomena of human nature. Man is also a moral being: he has a conscience, affections, a will. The moral phenomena are as much facts of human nature as his powers of speech or of locomotion. And this higher order of things cannot be appreciated or understood by the methods and measures applicable to a lower order. New conceptions, a new way of looking at things, will be needed. We must step upwards, and adopt the ethical or spiritual point of view."

What does the Canon mean by the words *or spiritual* in that passage? I assert that *ethical* and *spiritual* are by no means synonymous terms. That Canon Hicks regards them as such is evident from his next paragraph:—

"Now, the ethical point of view is the exclusive view of Scripture and of Christianity. Take that point of view, and you will begin to be in a position to understand the claims of the gospel, the meaning and beauty of religion. Refuse to come and stand at the ethical point of view and to look at humanity in that particular way, and it is impossible to appreciate Christianity."

It would be supremely difficult to pen a more utterly illogical and absurd passage than that. One would have thought that the veriest literary tyro would know that some of our greatest and most reliable ethical teachers are yet non-believers in Christianity, and that their unbelief carries with it no disqualification for a lucid and elucidating discussion of ethical problems. Professor Huxley, Augustus Comte, and Herbert Spencer looked at man from a distinctively ethical point of view; but not one of them adopted the Christian Religion. To them the ethical point of view was neither spiritual nor religious. Canon Hicks seems to hint that their non-recognition of the spiritual or religious in man was the penalty of their lacking the religious faculty or instinct. "We cannot see more than we have the power of seeing," he tells us. "When somebody said to John Ruskin, 'A cat may look at a king,' you remember how Ruskin replied—'Yes, but she cannot see a king.'" So, likewise, our lecturer would infer that when many of our modern scientists look at man they have not the power of seeing him as a son of God and an heir to immortal glory. But the point is that these men do look at man and carefully study him from the ethical point of view, although they

cannot find any trace of a loving Heavenly Father, nor any promise of immortality.

Canon Hicks is correct in saying that "at the present time there is a remarkable spread, especially among working men, of the merely naturalistic view of man"; but he is radically wrong when he asserts that Naturalism excludes ethics, and that those who listen to what the chemist, biologist, and astronomer have to say are in no humor to listen to the moralist. He makes the silly mistake of imagining that only the divine can be a moralist. "I am here to-day," he says, "merely to plead for a hearing for the moralist: merely to ask my friends, working men and others, to be willing—in the name of common sense and of common fairness—to survey man from the ethical point of view." What a needless, meaningless appeal! To Naturalism man is a member of society, and no member of society can afford to ignore ethics, for ethics is the science of social behavior. Freethinkers are more than willing to survey man from the ethical point of view in that they actually and continually *do* so survey him; but they vehemently object to the identification of the moralist with the theologian as both illogical and pernicious. And yet Canon Hicks assumes that only the theologian can be a genuine moralist.

But Canon Hicks falls into a more serious blunder still when he refers to the biologist's claim that he has discovered the *origin* of man's moral nature. Strangely enough, he admits that the biologist may be able to trace how the conscience was gradually evolved, how the social sentiments grew into what they are, how the power of will came to be; but having made that admission, he delivers himself of this absurd observation:—"Only I must be permitted to remind the biologist, or any other interlocutor at this point, that the discovery of the mode and the stages by which man has come to be what he is, involves no denial of the fact that he is what he is, and is not anything out of which he has emerged. Man is man, and is a moral agent, and as such is unique." That observation is so subtle that ordinary mortals cannot tell what it means. Who in his senses would ever dream of denying that man is what he is, or that he is not that out of which he has emerged. The meaning of evolution in relation to man is that by slow growth and development he has become what he was not at any of the lower stages. At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that the acorn contains all the elements to be found in the full grown oak. But what conceivable connection has all this with the religious point of view? Canon Hicks adds: "Ascend, we say to our critics, ascend with us to the level where man actually stands today as a moral being, a responsible agent." But we do not need to ascend, we are on that lofty and solid platform already; but we can discern no trace of a spiritual horizon, nor the slightest vestige of a religious point of view.

When will Christian Apologists learn that Naturalism is neither immoral or unmoral, that Atheism does not breed gross materialists, and that Freethought is as deeply concerned with ethical problems as the most orthodox theology? Ethics means the theory of human conduct, and is entirely independent of Supernaturalism. All ethical sanctions are rooted in human nature itself, and can be scientifically analysed and explained. The moral sense is an inheritance into which we have slowly come through innumerable millenniums and which even to-day is by no means a fixed quantity. Ethics regards man both as an individual and as a member of society, and lays down rules, suggested by experience, for his conduct. Religion is a something in addition to and beyond ethics, although theologians have hopelessly confused the two. Religion is not "ethics heightened, enkindled, lit up by feeling," not "morality touched by emotion," as Matthew Arnold used to say, but the unverified supernatural invading and endeavoring to annex the natural, and so holding human life in a false perspective and creating false issues. The object of religion is to set people right with God and give

them a clear title to blessedness beyond the tomb; but the object of ethics is to set people right with themselves and with one another, or to make them good and useful citizens. Ethics knows of no other world than this, and of no higher standard of conduct than is dictated by the present condition of the race. Hence there is no such thing as "absolute ethics," and there can be no "perfect conduct." Ethics is relative and progressive, as Dr. Fowler so clearly shows in his valuable work, *Progressive Morality*, and all conduct is realised in conflict.

The object of the Manchester Lectures is to prove that Christianity is true; but Canon Hicks, by attempting to treat the ethical and religious points of view as one, has considerably weakened the case for Christianity. Everybody knows that the essence of Christianity is the surrender of self to God as he is revealed in Christ; but everybody knows also that such a religious act does not invariably heighten and enkindle ethics, because it is a notorious fact that some of the devoutest Christians are ethically exceptionally weak and ineffective. Their worship is full of enthusiasm and rapture; but they cannot boast of their conduct. The mission of our modern moralists is to eliminate religion from human life, to banish the religious point of view, in order to concentrate attention upon moral goodness, or upon man's duty to man as man. Religion perverts men's opinions and distorts their judgment. We have a striking illustration of this in so great and good a man as Tennyson. In a conversation reported by Mr. Symonds, he said: "I cannot but think that moral good is the crown of man. But what is it without immortality? Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. If I knew the world were coming to an end in six hours, would I give my money to a starving beggar? No, if I did not believe myself immortal." His religious faith warped Tennyson's humanity. He put the same sentiment into verse:—

A voice spake out of the skies
To a just man and a wise—
The world and all within it
Will only last a minute.
And a beggar began to cry
"Food, food, or I die!"
Is it worth his while to eat,
Or mine to give him meat,
If the world and all within it
Were nothing the next minute?

That is the purely religious point of view, and the sooner it is got rid of the better. Let us now listen to the voice of the Freethinker from an exquisite poem by Matthew Arnold:—

Hath man no second life?
Pitch this one high.
Sits there no Judge in heaven our sin to see?
More strictly then the inward Judge obey.

That is the ethical point of view, and the sooner we all stand at it the better for our race.

JOHN LLOYD.

Jottings by the Way.

THE less orthodox Christians have now transformed Jehovah into a vague abstraction which is really the equivalent of the algebraic "x," but which saves the faces of the worshippers, and the stipends of the priests. As for poor old Paul, he would quite fail to recognise his teachings as "interpreted" by these top-hatted, frock-coated, cultured congregations.

He would have to betake himself to the Salvation Army "horficer," who has "fahnd Gord" so effectually that he has quite neglected to discover anything else.

The worst forms of persecution have disappeared with the heyday of Christian faith. The old bigots have had their turn. Philip of Spain, Louis of France, Mary of England, the Torquemadas, the Alvas, the Borgias—these were the natural offspring of an active and living faith.

Christianity is shamefaced now. It makes efforts

to explain itself, not knowing how thoroughly it is explained already. Perhaps in other lands, among other peoples, the missionary's teaching may fructify, and the whole sad tragedy be played anew. Who can tell?

The *Clarion* readers are paying dearly for the Editor's laudable desire to give the other side a show. God, what a show it is! After this, the C. E. orators may throw their tongues to the dogs. Those three columns weekly of clerical humor give me the headache. A strange weird thing, this clerical humor! It resembles nothing so much as the frantic endeavors of a rheumatic nonogenarian to execute the cake-walk. But still worse is the clerical attempt to imitate Mr. Blatchford's own spontaneous urbanity. It is like a fox trying to look honest.

These cornered clerics try to dissemble their wrath with insincere and clumsy compliments. The recipient must feel very much like Samuel Weller in the unwelcome embraces of the sanctimonious Job.

There was once an old lady with a simple faith, who knew naught of the Higher Criticism, or the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, or Mr. G. K. Chesterton.

The old lady lived quietly at home, and read her old-fashioned Bible, and believed it. In the world without, the bishops and the canons struggled with the critics, and avoided the necessity of reconciling discrepancies by openly admitting them.

And they came to the old lady and said, "Rejoice, the difficulties are removed!"

Upon which she answered: "Difficulties! What difficulties?"

And they fled straightway.

The church parson was a meek and humble saint with the visage of a dug-up corpse. His only claim to distinction was his "haw-haw," which was immense. But the ladies would have none of him.

So there came a full-blooded parson from America, with a Teutonic name and a Yankee accent. The congregation was enthusiastic. He smoked strong cigars in the open street, rode a bicycle to church, talked slang, and was so fearfully unorthodox that he regarded the first chapter of Genesis as allegory. The congregation could not suppress its joy, and the parson discovered himself to be a genius. He had suspected it for years.

The moral of which is that the more parsons resemble men, the more easily are they tolerated.

E. R. WOODWARD.

Vassili V. Verestchagin.

ART to a great extent founded Religion. God was created when a dead chief's skull was stuck on a stump and decked out with the trophies of his prowess. With civilised peoples Art was the sycophant of the Church and of authority until the draughtsmen of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries attacked the Papacy with their gravers and produced the wood-cuts which spread the Protestant Reformation among the people. Since then it may be said that Art has not exerted itself in the cause of Progress—not even during the great French Revolution. It has pandered to reaction of all kinds, and been guided by a mere commercialism, which has sold it to advertise war, slavery, superstition, and the brothel. In Western Europe no artist ventured to attack existing conventions—to do so would be certain starvation; but the restraint was intolerable, and at last forced one man to revolt to the opposite extreme, and sent a Russian (Verestchagin) out of civilisation to paint the realities of an unglamoured world.

Verestchagin devoted his life to depicting for mankind the utter ruthlessness of man and of nature. He did for Art what Winwood Reade, in "The

Martyrdom of Man," did for literature: brought it seriously and calmly to manifest the under-abiding general horror and atrocity which exists in man and nature towards man. But he not only dwelt on this theme, which he painted in every aspect of public life—in the martyrdom of the religious founder, in his picture of the Crucifixion, in the slaughter of the patrol, in the extraordinary picture of Indian Brahmins being shot from guns, and in other works—but he had, and is the only artist of the present age who had, a vein of silent and profound satire which betrayed him as a Freethinker—and a most scornful one. Du Maurier, also a Freethinker, allowed his contempt at times to peep out in his pictures; but no artist since the fifteenth century has had the courage to paint pictures which are in fact graphic essays against, and impeachments of, religion and the order of nature.

Verestchagin painted with this express object; he did not paint on impulse or under social pressure, and afterwards discover his "purpose"; he started to do this at the outset, and went wherever the awful or atrocious was enacted. Thus he painted an immense mountain of snow, showing no life but a solitary vulture in the air and the road over which a Russian army had passed, with corpses of the men who had fallen out and died lying thickly together on the grass on both sides of the length of the way. His satire, so to speak, of actual fact was shown in such pictures as that of Alexander II. sitting watching the murderous attack on Plevna, which was made in his honor as a mode of celebrating his birthday—and which failed; and in that of the Prince of Wales entering Jeypore in a procession of elephants.

These attacks on War and "Authority" are obvious, but it is when he touched Religion that he was deepest. He painted the funeral service performed over the slain after a great battle, and showed the Russians the regard they were had in as dead heroes. The whole landscape is covered thick by the dead; and one common-looking priest in a shabby old cope, attended by but one other person, performs the service with a book and a censer. The picture is incredible by its awful omissions; except these two figures there is nothing living to be seen, no one searching for the wounded, no preparations to bury the dead, no ceremony of regard for fallen comrades—nothing but a shabby mystery-man muttering perfunctory charms.

I saw the celebrated "religious" pictures at the Grosvenor Gallery, and have now to speak of them merely from recollection. It appears to me that the deeper point of the picture of Christ at Nazareth has been carefully ignored. At the Grosvenor it was merely called "A Syrian Home," or some similar title. It represented the squalid back yard of a peasant's house. Everywhere was filth, with a number of dirty children occupied among the refuse thrown everywhere for a number of fowls. The Virgin was drawn as a commonplace, ignorant, and careworn villager; but the virus of the thing was the figure of Christ, who was represented as a lazy, loafing youth, lolling against the doorpost, making a transparent pretence of being occupied in whittling a piece of wood—presumably the leg of a table or stool. Now this is the indisputable truth of the dreaming bastard who throws up work for the pulpit; but Verestchagin is the only man who has had either the sense or the courage to tax Jeshua Benmirian with the common characteristics of his type. The other picture, "Christ and John the Baptist," represented the backs of two Arabs who were seated in a desert looking over an immense sheet of water. Except that Jesus was represented with long, greasy, red hair, hanging like a cape down to his girdle, this was all to note in the picture. But the picture expressly affirmed what Christians by implication emphatically deny, and that is that the two cousins acted in concert.

It is impossible not to perceive that the picture, "The Home at Nazareth," was painted in derision of Holman Hunt's preposterous nonsense, "The

Shadow of the Cross." It will be remembered that this, instead of giving a grimy sluggard, represents an athlete stretching himself after a hard day's work in a beautifully clean workshop, attended by a barbaric princess got up with wonderful jewellery, as his mother, the carpenter's wife. Verestchagin stamped on the very dubious spurious glamor which Hunt has thrown around the legend of Jesus, as archeological realism, and painted for the world the fact, which no one but Hunt could know better, considering he made Palestine his home for a very considerable number of years. He had the courage of an untrammelled thinker, and brought the heroism of a philosopher and a soldier into the miasma of superstition, and sat amid the fetid corruptions of a putrescent and barbarous general hypocrisy, with the same unmoved repose as that which he retained, when seen at his last moment, sketching calmly amid the awful explosions he knew were to instantly engulf him in the ocean.

Verestchagin as a painter was unique. He will not remain so, but be the founder of a great school. Verestchagin as a man was a hero. May his followers be also heroic; but it is hoped they may find other material on which to exercise their genius, and seek other occasions in which to utilise their heroism.

GEORGE TREBELLS.

Acid Drops.

Sir Oliver Lodge is doing his best to prop up the rotten old edifice of faith. Once upon a time the defenders of faith squelched any friend of science who opened his mouth too widely; now they squirm with delight when a scientific man condescends to pat them on the back. Hence the invitation of the Nonconformist ministers at Birmingham to Sir Oliver Lodge to address them on "The Relation of Science to Faith." In the absence of a full report we do not care to criticise this address, but the account before us does give an apparently verbatim report of Sir Oliver Lodge's reply to a certain question. The Rev. J. H. Jowett asked him for a definition of the "Universe," and in answering he said: "The miracles of healing I can accept. I say nothing of the raising of Lazarus. Were they miracles? The facts may have been so; and yet in accordance with the *real* course of nature though not the *ordinary* course."

Here is language for a scientist! Does Sir Oliver Lodge really mean to say that nature has two courses, the ordinary and the extraordinary? If so, will he kindly explain why this doctrine, which seems good enough for a ministers' meeting, is not taught to scientific students at college? Then a word as to Lazarus. What right has any man, even Sir Oliver Lodge, to go picking and choosing New Testament miracles? The miracles must all stand or fall together. They belong to the same mental atmosphere—the same general view of things. Moreover, if the New Testament wonders were *not* miracles, but natural occurrences more or less misconceived and misrepresented, they lose all their evidential power. The miracles were meant to prove that the worker of them was inspired. As he *acted* by divine power so he *spoke* by divine wisdom. This may have been a mistake. We think it was. But it was at least logical—and honest; which is more than we can say of the intellectual thimble-rigging which now goes on in the fold of faith.

There is another aspect of this matter which we wish to present. Sir Oliver Lodge says that he believes in the miracles of healing. Why then does he not denounce the imprisonment of the Peculiar People for believing the same thing? They believe it practically—and their fellow-believers put them in prison. Sir Oliver Lodge believes it theoretically—and his fellow-believers give him their applause.

We have already referred to the case of Mr. J. Rhind, of Manchester, who offers to give ten pounds and join the Christian Scientists if they will cure him of the effects of an attack of paralysis. We now see that "G. S." goes one better in the *City News*. He says he has no money to offer, but would be "very thankful for relief after forty years' affliction." "If the Christian Scientists," he says, "can accomplish what professors of pathology declare impossible, I am willing to serve the cause for the rest of my life. I have no money reward to offer, but in the streets, the slums, the hospitals, or any place where suffering and pain exist, I will

go and show the sufferers the result of Christian Science. The one condition is that I must be converted from a half-helpless man to one capable of walking unassisted." Ah, that *one* condition! It is just one condition too many, we fear.

Mr. Ritter, Reader at the Christian Science Church, Oneonta, New York, being taken ill, refused all medicine; but he grew worse and exclaimed "I see it all now, but it is too late." Then he hanged himself—probably to get the business over. Mrs. Ritter's faith in Christian Science is still unshaken. We presume she is "well left."

Nine members of the Charlton Board of Guardians were in favor of questioning candidates for appointments as to their religious belief. Fortunately eleven members, including Dr. Rhodes and Dr. Worswick, were against such an inquisition. A resolution, moved by Mr. Ramsden, and carried by the majority, went to the full length of declaring that candidates were *not* to state their religion. This is the proper way to deal with bigots and fanatics.

Revivalist Torrey has been telling the Bristol people that Colonel Ingersoll, who wrote an able and eloquent essay on Suicide, was responsible for a large part of the suicides that occurred in America. Could anything be more ridiculous? Was there ever a man who cut his throat because he had read Donne, Hume, or Ingersoll on suicide? Men kill themselves, not for abstract but for personal reasons. And, as a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority of those who commit suicide would think it a great insult if they were called "infidels." It is the Christians, rather than the Freethinkers, who die in a way that gives trouble to coroners and juries. Now and then we note a case in the *Freethinker*—just to show the absurdity of the idea that "infidels" are always rushing to self-destruction. The latest case we see in the newspapers is that of a clergyman, the Rev. Alfred Teed, of Puddicombe, who threw himself over the cliffs at Welcombe. The jury brought in the usual verdict.

Lord Roberts, in a friendly letter about the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, mentions that it has befriended nearly a million children in fifteen years. "What a tale of suffering and misery alleviated," he says, "these figures suggest." True. And to think that a Society for saving children from all this suffering and misery should be necessary in a country that prides itself on its Christianity! No wonder the Japanese decided that the state of Christian countries justified them in declining such a religion.

The Trust system is to be applied to the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational Churches in Canada. Christian business is conducted wastefully at present through overlapping. Sometimes three churches are supported where one would do. By changing this state of things the Trust system will be a good thing for the subscribers. But how about the poor men of God, a lot of whom will be thrown out of employment?

Liverpool ratepayers of the Dingle and neighborhood have petitioned the Lord Mayor against religious processions through the streets on Saturday night. These processions do no good to anyone except the promoters. On the other hand, they are a nuisance and a danger to law-abiding citizens. There is too much "Christian charity" about them.

Science, in the person of Mr. S. R. Atkins, President of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, met Religion the other day in the person of the Rev. G. Litten. Mr. Atkins, as Chairman of the Salisbury Petty Sessions, had the painful duty of sending Mr. Litten to prison for seven days as a Passive Resister.

Mr. Lloyd George, being a lawyer, argues according to his brief. Listening to him you would fancy that Wales is the classic land of religious freedom. According to the rector of Flint, however, Wales is simply ruled by Calvinists. He denounces "the appointment of Calvinists, often without regard to fitness or character, to most of the salaried posts under Boards of Guardians and County Councils." If this be true we can understand what Mr. Lloyd George's pious friends are fighting for.

After all the noise of the Passive Resisters it is rather odd to see one of them referred to as "the nineteenth prisoner for conscience sake." Only nineteen martyrs up to date! What a pitiful record! Number nineteen is a Godstone schoolmaster, named J. F. B. McOwan, who has been "incarcerated for seven days" for refusing to pay "the sectarian portion of the education rate." It sounds terrible. But when

you look into it the "incarcerated" is a lot too big for the "seven days."

The London City Mission's expenditure for the past year exceeded the receipts by £1,700. But the work must go on. According to the Rev. Venerable T. J. Madden, Archdeacon of Warrington, the Mission is doing the grandest work on earth. It carries Christianity into the people's homes. This is a fact which is overlooked by Mr. Charles Booth and the authors of the late Church Census. "Not one person in ten," the Archdeacon says, "who is talked and prayed with comes to church in my parish. They cannot; they have not the clothes." Well, if this be true, it is a shocking confession. After nearly two thousand years of Christianity, and in what is so often called the most Christian country in the world, nine out of ten people do not possess a decent suit of clothes. Anybody can see from this fact alone what an astonishing blessing the Christian religion has been to the masses of mankind.

The Women's Total Abstinence Union, whose members (in spite of Jesus's wine miracle) are mostly Christians, has passed a resolution on the barmaid question; according to which a certificate should be given to barmaids now engaged so that they may not be deprived of their situations, but no new barmaids should be employed. This is all very well in its way. The position of a barmaid is not an ideal one. It is often a degrading one. But women must live somehow as well as men, and shutting them forcibly out of certain employments, without affording them other occupations, is a very cheap form of Christian charity. Enforcing morality on other people is the easiest form of virtue.

The World's Sunday School Convention at Jerusalem was attended by 1,330 "pilgrims," brought by two steamers from England and America. Amongst them were no less than 250 Christian ministers, who probably enjoyed their first visit to Jerusalem a great deal more than their Master did his last one. The total cost of the Convention is said to have been about £200,000; a sum which would have appeared to Jesus and his Apostles as wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

The *Freethinker* has always kept itself to itself, and declined to take any part in the game of log-rolling, which is the disgrace of the public press in England. There are rings of writers who steadily practise the good old maxim of "You scratch me, and I'll scratch you." Mr. A., writing anonymously, puffs his wonderful friend Mr. B.; and Mr. B., writing anonymously, puffs his wonderful friend Mr. A. And the game is kept up as far through the alphabet as the ring of mutual puffers happens to run.

Some such motive must be assumed to explain a recent reference in the "Religious World" column of the *Daily News* to the editor of the *Clarion*. A distinguished theologian, who need not be named here, was mentioned as having written many learned works, including "an account of the Stoic philosophy of Mr. Blatchford's friend, Marcus Aurelius." It is just conceivable, of course, that this was intended for wit, but it looks a good deal more like something else. Mr. Blatchford is an able writer in his way, but the reduction of one of the greatest of men to the position of "Mr. Blatchford's friend" is a bad bit of literary hooliganism.

The stonemason and the leatherseller praised their respective materials sky-high in the besieged city. On the same principle the Rev. T. C. Collings advises the Edmonton Board of Guardians, of which he is a member, to open its proceedings with prayer. This was a matter in which the Free Churchmen could join him, and they did; which reminds one of the line in the play, that when they do agree their unanimity is wonderful. Fortunately the Chairman intervened to save the reputation of the Board. By his casting vote the parson's proposal was rejected.

Mr. Collings admits that the Edmonton Board of Guardians "has often been the laughing stock of the Kingdom." Apparently he wanted to deprive it of the last chance of retrieving its character.

General Sassulitch, a Russian and a Christian, despises the heathen Japanese as cowards. He says that they "could not make up their minds to come down from the crest which they occupied, and to face the fire of our batteries." Instead of doing so, they meanly stole round the hill, turned his flank, and defeated him with great slaughter. Very cowardly, of course! But the Japs are only "heathen," and what can you expect?

General Kuropatkin's report to the Czar of General Sassulitch's great defeat tells a curious story about one

Russian regiment. "In front of the regiment," he says, "was the chaplain bearing a cross. He was struck by two bullets." This story ought to be of great use to Christian Evidence lecturers.

The *Daily News* has discovered a new poet—who seems to us of the "Spring Onions" order. His name is not stated, but he is an inmate of the Marylebone Workhouse; where Jesus would probably be if he lived nowadays and in that parish. Here is one magnificent verse of this pious poet's composition:—

Oh, hear ye not the cry of pain,
As on the Cross our Lord is slain?
The mingled blood and sorrow show
The Love of Christ to those below.

We are not quite certain whether "those below" refers to the spectators on earth or the devils in hell. But "mingled blood and sorrow" is beyond question masterly. None of our *Freethinker* poets could equal it if they tried.

Right on the heels of the *Daily News* advertisement of this pious pauper poet came its obituary notice of Edgar Fawcett, the American poet, novelist, and critic, who died at Chelsea on Monday, May 2, after some years' residence in England. Edgar Fawcett's work was rather candidly praised, but there was no allusion whatever to his Free-thought. Some of his Agnostic epigrams and shorter poems have been reproduced from time to time in our own columns. When we met the late Colonel Ingersoll, some seven years ago, he spoke highly of Edgar Fawcett's poetry, and said that some of his verses were as graceful as the best of Tennyson's.

The ex-Empress Eugénie is still very pious, and probably wonders why "Providence" does not restore her to her old position in France. Fortunately there seems no disposition on the part of "Providence" to do this. When she led the fashionable and extravagant world at Paris her wardrobe is said to have cost £200,000 a year, and her household expenses £2,000 a day.

Renan's statue at Tréguier, his birthplace, continues to be a terrible eyesore to the clerical faction, who still call it an "insult to Christ" as well as a "dis-grace to the town." On May 19 a great Catholic demonstration is to be held near it, in order to consecrate an opposition monument, which is apparently to be called "Calvary." The chief speakers are to be Cardinal Laboure and M. Brunetière, who has just experienced a bitter disappointment at the *Collège de France*, where he was defeated in his candidature for the vacant chair by a pupil and disciple of Renan.

Liverpool, after refusing to let the public meeting of the National Secular Society's Conference take place in the Picton Hall, has since refused to allow Sunday music in the public parks. There is a gleam of hope, however, in the fact that the minority in favor of Sunday freedom was a very respectable one. A vote of 50 to 43 is not exactly disheartening. It may be reversed some day.

Blackburn (John Morley's town) has also disgraced itself by refusing, for the fifth time, to open the Free Library and Museum on Sunday. We are glad to know that the Labor Party was strongly on the right side.

The Bishop of London is at it again. After talking for a year or two as though Free-thought were practically annihilated, he now sees it all over the shop. Speaking in St. Paul's Cathedral, at a recent consecration service, he "deplored the infidelity which was manifest on all sides." His lordship seems to regard the conversion of London at present as the "triumph of the impossible." Yet he advertises himself as the hundred and sixth Bishop of London. Fancy a hundred and six of them in unbroken succession, and London still unconverted! What a change since Peter's missionary eloquence converted three thousand in a single day! The figures have to be reversed nowadays.

The Religious Tract Society boasts of having issued no less than 29,936,260 separate publications during the past year. Of this number 11,563,900 were tracts. These tracts are said to "go forth to the uttermost ends of the earth"—to "the millions of China, Japan, India, and Africa." Yes, but what use are they put to? That is the question. How many a pious tract might have exclaimed with Hamlet, "To what base uses we may return."

The Jew Conversion Society has spent some £40,000 during the past year—God alone knows on what except the salaries of its officials. Will this Society produce a single

bona fide converted Jew? We mean one brought to Christ in 1903-4. We don't ask for the stock convert who has found Jesus in every capital in Europe.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton is to appear in a new rôle next October. At the Church Congress, in Liverpool, he will cooperate with the Rev. John Wakeford in discussing "Aggressive Infidelity." This is what the public announcement says; but "discussing" is a strange word to use when the speakers are all on one side. We hope Mr. Chesterton will have enough sense and manliness to protest against the word "infidelity." He might also ask why "infidels," if they must be called so, should not be "aggressive" as well as believers.

Bear-baiting went on when England was undoubtedly a Christian country; and when the Puritans abolished it they did so (as Macaulay said) not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators. Cock-fighting was also a general sport in Christian England. So was prize-fighting. But both have been put down by the law. Now the public go to see troupes of lions perform on music-hall stages. Somehow or other the morbid taste of the mob (of all classes) must be satisfied. For our own part, we think the lion-performing is worse than the prize-fighting. The latter was at least fair and square. The two bruisers gave blows and received them. But the lion-performing is terribly one-sided. The poor brutes generally look sleepy—some would say drugged. Anyhow, they seem to regard the performance as a terrible bore, and occasionally as a beastly nuisance. The worst brutes are the spectators who delight in such spectacles. Some of them probably feel that if the lions should snap, and the tamer be torn to pieces, it would be the treat of a lifetime. The truth is that such exhibitions are debasing; far more so than the glass of beer which such a crowd of men of God are now so desperately bent on keeping away from the lips of the working-man.

Mr. Kelley, a local brewer, speaking at Sheffield, said that: "Some clergymen seemed to think brewers were not as good as they ought to be, and as there were several clergymen present he would tell them it was the business of the clergy to make them good." But is this really the business of the clergy? We always thought their business was to save souls; that is, to keep them out of hell, and get them through to heaven. It is absurd to pay the clergy to make us good. Other people are as good as they are already. If they have actually given up the soul-saving business they should retire gracefully—and leave their salaries behind them.

There is heartburning at Little Canfield, Essex, because the rector would not allow the usual church service at the burial of an old lady who was not a communicant. But the man of God acted within his legal rights; and, after all, what on earth does it matter? We mean to the old lady. We dare say she will lie just as comfortably in her narrow bed whatever religious squabbles go on in the parish.

Dr. Guinness Rogers, the venerable Nonconformist, imagines that he has replied to Canon Hensley Henson's recent critical article on the Bible. And so he has if panegyric is an answer to criticism. "The Bible," he exclaims, "has had more influence over the thought and feeling and action of the world than any other book." Well, that is easily said, but not so easily proved. It seems to us that the people whose action is really guided by the Bible are only a handful. The Peculiar People, for instance, try to obey the Bible. And what is the result? They are sent to prison with hard labor by their fellow-Christians.

Anyone who wants to see a splendid specimen of pious impudence should procure the *Methodist Times* for May 5 and read "A. B. C.'s" review of Herbert Spencer's *Autobiography*. With its "Ah, well's," and its verdict on Spencer as an "insufferable prig," this review quite takes the cake. The writer is evidently a minister. He says that if a man like Herbert Spencer (what a supposition!) came under him, he should "set him to make the plan, to fill the schedules, to collect subscriptions, and to go to sewing meetings." This is how a Methodist scribe permits himself to write of a man of stainless character, whose genius is acknowledged by the whole civilised world. And the cream of the joke is that the Methodist scribe has clearly not read the *Autobiography*. Probably he never read any other book of Spencer's. He doesn't even appear to have read some parts of his own Bible—for instance, the thirteenth of the first of Corinthians.

The Bishops have had a confabulation over the Athanasian Creed, and the result they arrived at was most

edifying. Proposals were made for the omission of certain clauses (the damnation ones) from the Prayer Book; but the business instinct of the Bishops told them that it was better not to tamper with old documents; the best plan being to interpret them in a new way, or to put them as far as possible out of sight. Accordingly they decided that steps should be taken to have the Athanasian creed removed from general use, and used only specially "as a doctrine for the instruction of the faithful in such manner as may most fully safeguard the reverent treatment of the documents of the faith." A most astute decision!

Prebendary Webb-Peploe is disgusted with the Sabbath breaking that goes on in England, and says it will prove the ruin of the country if it continues. One branch of this growing evil seems to be particularly offensive to the reverend gentleman. Ten thousand people, in connection with the theatrical profession, travel in a hundred and eighty-one trains on Sunday. This is a disgrace to the country, he says, and ought not to be permitted. But what about the interests and wishes of the ten thousand actors and actresses? Are theatrical travelling companies to come to grief to satisfy the prejudices of pious people who will not mind their own business?

The Oracle of the City Temple is back from Rome. Some of his Nonconformist brethren seem to wish that he had stayed there. Mr. Campbell, however, smiles or frowns (we don't know which it is) at their displeasure. "I wish people to understand," he says, "that I want to live my own life in my own way, and to do what I think to be right." Quite so. But as a public man Mr. Campbell cannot evade criticism; and, if he cannot stand it, he should retire into privacy. What the latest fuss is about is simply this. While at Rome the reverend gentleman had an audience of the Pope, and kissed his Holiness's ring, which was better, from a sanitary point of view, than kissing his Holiness's big toe. But even this has stirred up all the "No Pepery" spirit in the Free Churches of England, and there is talk of demanding Mr. Campbell's head on a charger. Which shows that the Christians are still a happy family.

Canon Hensley Henson follows up his objection to the indiscriminate reading of the Bible by supplying the *Spectator* with a list of "lessons" which he would omit from the Church lectionary. Here it is:—

Gen. ii. 4.....	The creation of woman
Gen. iii.	The Fall of man
Gen. vi., viii.....	The Flood
Gen. ix. 1-20	Origin of the Rainbow
Gen. xii.	Abraham in Egypt
Gen. xix. 12-30	Lot's wife
Gen. xxii. 1-20	Sacrifice of Isaac
Gen. xxvii. 1-41.....	Death of Isaac
Gen. xxxii.	Jacob's wrestling with the angel
Gen. xxxix.....	Potiphar's wife
Exodus ix., x., xi....	Plagues of Egypt
Exodus xii., xiv. ...	The exodus
Num. xvi.	The destruction of Korah, etc.
Num. xvii.	Aaron's rod that budded
Num. xx.....	Moses smites the rock
Num. xxi.	The brazen serpent
Num. xxii.	Balaam's ass
Gen. xxxiii.	Visit of the three men to Abraham
Joshua iii. iv.	The passage of the Jordan
Joshua v.....	Capture of Jericho
Judges iv., v.....	History of Jael
Judges vi.	History of Gideon
1 Sam. ii.	The sons of Eli
1 Sam xv.	History of Agag
1 Chron. xxi.	David's census
1 Chron. xxviii.....	David's preparation for the Temple
1 Kings iii.	Judgment of Solomon
1 Kings xi.	Solomon's harem
1 Kings xiii.	Story of the old prophet
2 Kings ii. 1-16	Ascension of Elijah
2 Kings ix. x	Jehu's exploits
2 Kings xiii.	Elisha's posthumous miracles

These lessons, the Canon says, are "more often than not, disturbing rather than edifying." We think so too. We said so years ago in our *Bible Heroes* and *Bible Romances*—which we may yet live to see recommended by the most "advanced" clergy. Anyhow a sixpenny edition of *Bible Romances* is being got ready for the Christian population of Great Britain.

"Vino Sacro" (Holy Wine) is still advertised, we see, in the *Christian World*, and is editorially announced to be "the very thing thousands of people are wanting to obtain." Very likely.

If every malefactor in the church were known by his face it would be necessary to prohibit the secular tongue from crying "stop thief." Otherwise the church bells could not be heard of a pleasant Sunday.—*Dod Grile*.

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

Sunday, May 15, Printers' Hall, Bartlett's-passage, Holborn, E.C., 7.30, "The Disappearance of the Supernatural Christ."

To Correspondents.

- F. S.—Many thanks for cuttings.
- A. K. D.—Cuttings welcome; see "Acid Drops."
- E. J. JONES.—Thanks for cuttings, which are useful. So the P.S.A. people and the Wiseites have combined against Sunday freedom in Liverpool, have they? Well, we hope the rest of the citizens will not tamely submit to such a crew. You say that these pious obstructionists make Sunday a terror themselves by their own bands and howlings; and, with the Salvationists, refuse to keep quiet even in the near neighborhood of the sick and dying. Your own experience, during your child's dangerous illness, must have been shocking. It seems a pity that such noisy pietists don't hurry up above to join the Hallelujah Chorus.
- J. L. G. MACKINNON.—Thanks for the cutting, though we don't find a quotable bit in it. Your second will serve for our next.
- W. ADAMSON.—See paragraph.
- HOMAGE MAXTED.—We do not find your letter quite intelligible. You speak of our admitting "the divinity of nature." Kindly tell us where we have done so.
- LEADS AGNOSTIC.—See paragraph. Thanks. Mr. Foote's health, about which you inquire, is steadily improving. He ought to be his old self again after a comparative rest and change during the summer. Getting away from work altogether is a thing he cannot easily manage. Platform work may be dropped for a while, but the pen must be fairly busy.
- G. J.—Thanks for cuttings, though they arrive too late for use this week.
- BRIGHTON FREETHINKER.—It may be true, as Evangelist F. Chapman says, that shoemakers are often Freethinkers; but there seems very little truth in the rest of your report of this gentleman's observations. Gentlemen in that line of business usually take about with them an imaginary converted infidel.
- N. D.—No room this week; will deal with it in our next. Thanks.
- A. G. LYE.—A paragraph was already in type. Glad to hear Mr. Cohen had good meetings at Coventry, and that Messrs. Partridge, Pitt, and other friends came over from Birmingham to render assistance. See "Sugar Plums."
- H. PERCY WARD's new address is 4 Redgrave-street, Kensington, Liverpool. Branch secretaries, etc., will please note.
- J. SHEARSTY.—You may rely upon it that the Christian speaker on Clerkenwell Green was as accurate as usual in stating that Mrs. Besant is in a convent in the United States. She is still a Theosophist, and is in India.
- R. E. HOLDING.—Must postpone paragraph till next week.
- D. S. CURRIE.—We gave the name of the American paper from which we reproduced the account of Isaac Selby's imprisonment for cruelty to his wife. Since then we have seen the case referred to in other American papers.
- C. A. H.—What you say may be true, but we can hardly deal with the matter here on such a slender foundation. Thanks, all the same, for your trouble.
- G. A. RAWSON (New Zealand).—The Twentieth Century reprint of Paine's *Age of Reason* is strictly accurate. The passage on Satan (p. 88) is left as Paine wrote it. Paine's statement, as it stands, is apparently incorrect; but no one pretends that he was infallible, even on matters of fact. Probably what he had in mind—for he is referring to Spinoza and another Hebrew critic—was the truth, now fully admitted, that Satan was not known to the Jews before the Babylonish captivity. The references to Satan in 1 Chronicles xxi. 1, etc., are parts of the later additions of the Jewish priesthood. In the original story of David's census it is the Lord who moves him to number Israel; in the later priestly version of the story it is Satan.
- A. Y.—We will answer your question next week.
- 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.

Mr. Foote's lecture at Printers' Hall on "Herbert Spencer as Man and Freethinker" was evidently much enjoyed. Mr. Roberts, the chairman, said he was sorry it was not longer, and the audience endorsed the regret. Mr. Foote lectures there again this evening (May 15), his subject being "The Disappearance of the Supernatural Christ."

Mr. Cohen had two good meetings at Coventry on Sunday last, the hall being comfortably filled on each occasion. Several Birmingham friends came over and assisted the Coventry "saints." A great many questions and a little discussion followed each lecture. A report of the meetings appeared in the *Midland Daily Telegraph*. To-day (May 15) Mr. Cohen lectures at Kingsland, corner of Ridley-road, at 11.30, and Victoria Park at 3.15.

We have already referred to the Rev. M. Bainton, of Coventry, who has been stirred up by Mr. Foote's recent visit to the town, and is delivering a course of addresses in his own chapel on Sunday evenings upon "subjects relating to the recent attacks upon the religion of Jesus." The Coventry Branch of the N.S.S. has sent Mr. Bainton an invitation to meet a representative Freethinker in public debate. The reverend gentleman has replied that he would have "little hope of any useful result"—and perhaps he is right from his own point of view. He therefore begs "respectfully to decline" the offer.

Whit-Sunday is now nearly at hand. It is the date of the National Secular Society's Annual Conference, which takes place this year at Leeds. The Theatre Royal has been secured for the evening public meeting, and we dare say it will be filled by a big crowd, who will be addressed by Messrs. Foote, Cohen, Lloyd, Ward, Grange, and perhaps other speakers. The morning and afternoon sittings of the Conference itself will take place in a more private part of the same building. Lunch will be provided for delegates and visitors at the Victoria Hotel at one o'clock. Those who are likely to want tickets for this function should communicate as early as possible with the General Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, at 2 Newcastle-street, London, E.C.

Conference stewards will meet trains all day at Leeds on Saturday next (May 21). They will wear the mauve, green, and white badge. Delegates and visitors requiring hotel accommodation or apartments would do well to communicate beforehand with Mr. George Weir, 61 Portland-crescent, Leeds. If they also state the trains they will arrive by they will be met at the station for certain.

The reception of delegates and visitors on Saturday will be held at the Victoria Hall, adjoining the Town Hall, from 7 to 10.30 p.m.

During the week preceding the Conference—or rather, to be quite precise, from May 16 to May 20 inclusive—Mr. H. Percy Ward will deliver open-air addresses on Woodhouse Moor every evening at 7.30. Handbills announcing his lectures have been widely circulated, and there will be an extensive distribution of literature at the meetings, which will also serve to advertise the big Demonstration in the Theatre Royal on Whit-Sunday evening. Mr. Ward's meetings are under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive.

This is practically the last time that we shall be able to call attention to the Leeds Conference. We hope it will be numerously attended by members and friends of the N.S.S. from all parts of the country. The occasion is one for the foregathering of scattered "saints" who would otherwise hardly ever meet each other. And there is something in seeing in the flesh the soldiers of Freethought of whom one may have heard and thought. Personal contact is always the best means of kindling enthusiasm.

The *Yarmouth Mercury* still opens its columns to letters on religious topics from a Freethought point of view. Of course the other side is also allowed an innings. Last week's issue contained a capital letter on "Agnosticism" by Mr. J. W. de Caux. Another letter on the same subject by "A Natural Religionist" is not too intelligible. He seems to be poking rather laborious fun at somebody or other. We confess we do not understand an Agnosticism which is religious and includes a number of Church clergymen.

Mr. J. Churton Collins has an article in the *Contemporary Review* on "The Nestor of Living English Poets"—Mr. Gerald Massey. Mr. Massey is a survivor of the old Chartist

times, and is of course of a ripe old age. His later works belong to the literature of critical Freethought. *Natural Genesis*, for instance, a perfect mine of scholarship, is an explanation of Christianity on mythological grounds. Mr. Massey, we understand, was the model whence George Eliot drew Felix Holt. Of Mr. Massey's poems Mr. Collins says that they appeal to "all that belongs to what is most virtuous, most pure, and most generous in man. In some he kindles sympathy for the wrongs and miseries of the poor by giving pathetic voice to them; in others he pleads for the victims of injustice and oppression in his own and in foreign lands."

Believing that "the friends of the late Sir Leslie Stephen would wish to give some outward expression of their affection and regard for him," Messrs. George Meredith, James Bryce, Frederic Harrison, Henry James, A. C. Lyall, and John Morley have issued an appeal for "subscriptions and communications," which should be forwarded to Mr. Sidney Lee, 108, Lexham-gardens, Kensington, London, W. It has been suggested that in the first instance an engraving should be made of the portrait by Mr. G. F. Watts, R.A., and that copies should be presented to the London Library, to the Athenæum Club, to Harvard University, to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and to other institutions with which Sir Leslie Stephen was closely associated. Mr. Sidney Colvin has undertaken to superintend the execution of the work.

Mr. Foote will begin in next week's *Freethinker* a careful review of Herbert Spencer's *Autobiography*, which should be of the highest interest to our readers.

Ruskin's Diversions.

The *Manchester Guardian* revives the memory of some vitriolic absurdities penned by Ruskin in 1886, and published in a *Pall Mall Gazette* "extra." The question was that rather silly one of "The Best Hundred Books," and Ruskin struck out from a list sent him three great names—all Freethinkers. This is what he said:—

"Darwin.—Because it is every man's duty to know what he is, and not to think of the embryo he was nor the skeleton that he shall be. Because, also, Darwin has a mortal fascination for all vainly curious and idly speculative persons, and has collected in the train of him every impudent imbecility in Europe, like a dim comet wagging its useless tail of phosphorescent nothing across the steadfast stars."

"Gibbon.—Primarily, none but the malignant and the weak study the Decline and Fall either of State or organism. Dissolution and putrescence are alike common and unclean in all things; any wretch or simpleton may observe for himself and experience himself the processes of ruin; but good men study and wise men describe only the growth and standing of things—not their decay. For the rest, Gibbon's is the worst English that was ever written by an educated Englishman. Having no imagination and little logic, he is alike incapable either of picturesqueness or wit; his epithets are malicious without point, sonorous without weight, and have no office but to make a flat sentence turgid."

"Voltaire.—His work is, in comparison with good literature, what nitric acid is to wine and sulphuretted hydrogen to air. Literary chemists cannot but take account of the sting and stench of him, but he has no place in the library of a thoughtful scholar. Every man of sense knows more of the world than Voltaire can tell him, and what he wishes to express of such knowledge he will say without a snarl."

Ruskin's style did not forsake him even when he remembered that he was a Christian and wrote accordingly. When a man of genius plays the fool the world at least gets some amusement.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE.

Our toil from thought all glorious forms shall cull,
To make this earth, our home, more beautiful,
And Science, and her sister Poesy,
Shall clothe in light the fields and cities of the free.

—Shelley.

There's not a blessing individuals find
But some way leans and harkens to the kind:
No bandit fierce, no tyrant mad with pride,
No cavern'd hermit, rests self-satisfied:
Who most to shun or hate mankind pretend,
Seek an admirer, or would fix a friend:
Abstract what others feel, what others think,
All pleasures sicken, and all glories sink:
Each has his share; and who would more obtain,
Shall find the pleasure pays not half the pain.

—Pope.

A Jesuit on "Modern Priestcraft."

THE Roman Catholic organ for the Glasgow district—to accord to the *Glasgow Observer* the designation it claims for itself—is at present publishing a series of weekly articles which are by way of dealing with non-Catholic objections to Roman Catholicism. In the main these articles are of little interest to Freethinkers, as they are devoted chiefly to elucidating the peculiar teaching and practice of the Church of Rome for the benefit of the various sections of Theists who are not within the fold of the true Church.

Secularists in general can afford to regard the disputes between the Churches in the matter of doctrine with some approach to philosophical indifference. We can say with Mercutio, "A plague o' both the houses!" So far as regards the falsity of their teaching, the inconsistency of their beliefs, and their ignorant bigotry, there is not much to choose between the warring sects. The difference is largely one of degree, not of kind; and many Rationalists hold that the Churches may safely be left to thrash the matter out amongst them, as their fate is likely to resemble that of the Kilkenny cats. When they get really finished there is not likely to be much left of any of them. Meanwhile we mass them all together in a general condemnation.

The sixth article of the above-mentioned series seems, however, to deserve the attention of Freethinkers. It is headed "Modern Priestcraft," and we have some notion that it was suggested by a lecture given in Glasgow recently under the auspices of the local Branch of the N. S. S.—the title of the lecture being identical with that of the article.

We have always remarked that a distinguishing characteristic of Roman Catholic controversial methods is the tendency to indulge in personal reflections. When anyone who has left the Church of Rome gives utterance to some damaging criticism of her system, dark insinuations are usually made regarding his private character, or he is asked how long he had ceased to approach the Sacrament prior to his abandonment of the Church.

Roman Catholics are very reluctant to accept the hypothesis that a man may be actuated by conscientious motives both in his abstention from the Sacrament and in his ultimate break-away from their communion. In the case of someone who forsakes another form of religion to enter the Church of Rome, his motives are presumably of an irreproachable nature. The underlying assumption seems to be that no adherent of the Church of Rome would dream of leaving that safe haven of the soul unless through sheer perversity of intellect, or innate rascality—the latter for preference.

Now, we submit that such aspersions of an opponent are almost invariably associated with poverty of argument or the consciousness of a weak position. It suggests the old story of the endorsement on the lawyer's brief: No case; abuse the plaintiff's attorney. We grant that where one's opponent is a man of notoriously evil character, or when he has been guilty of a grave breach of the amenities of discussion, we are not bound to extend the same courtesy to such a person as we would render to an honorable antagonist. There are some creatures to whom we cannot be polite. But the imputation of motives is a controversial weapon that should be used with considerable caution. So much for the general question.

In the particular article to which we now turn there are no names mentioned, but the following passage illustrates the tendency we have referred to above. Alluding to the "lectures by ex-priests," the reverend writer says—"it would often conduce to impartial judgment if the lecturer would be more precise as to the details of his own career." Possibly this sentence was penned without any afterthought, but it has a nasty sound.

When "Father" Wolferstan goes on to reflect upon the use of the phrase "Modern Priestcraft" he becomes distinctly disingenuous, not to say Jesuitical. He says that to prefix the word "modern" to the word "priestcraft" is to insinuate that priestcraft is of recent growth. We ask in amazement, does he imagine for a moment that any—we will not say Freethought lecturer—but any ordinary intelligent reader of history thinks, or desires to insinuate, that priestcraft is a modern product? So far from this being the case, we know too thoroughly that priestcraft is as old as religion itself, which indeed could not continue to exist without it.

We should have thought that it would be plain to even a common understanding that when a Secularist writer or speaker uses the title "Modern Priestcraft" he does not wish to suggest that priestcraft is new, but to intimate that he intends dealing with the subject in its modern phases.

The reverend Jesuit, to show that the priesthood is no new thing (nobody said it was), tells us that its establishment followed close upon the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. If this defender of the priesthood can find no traces of the existence and influence of a sacerdotal caste earlier than the reputed Biblical date of its institution, his information is scarcely up to date. The proverbial schoolboy of Macaulay could give him a little enlightenment on that point.

But possibly we may be told that he refers, of course, to the *true* priesthood. For that matter every single brood of priests that have fattened on the credulity of the people of all ages and nationalities have claimed to be the *true* priesthood. What would you expect? To quote a homely Scotch saying, "No fishwoman calls stinking fish." They are always fresh. So also every priest—be he Babylonish, Egyptian, Buddhist, or Popish—maintains the divinity of his avocation. It is essential to the stability of the business.

At any rate, this Jesuit tells us that the Jewish priesthood was instituted by God, and that the Roman Catholic priesthood is but the expanded and perfected form of that sacred body that was organised by Moses and Aaron to the direct instructions of the Deity, down to the smallest detail.

The reflection is here forced upon us that a great amount of controversy with religious people would be obviated if we could get them to accept that wholesome maxim of science that there is no necessity for seeking a *supernatural* explanation for anything so long as a *natural* one is available. The human race as a whole is only creeping very slowly towards that intellectual standpoint. When it has been reached by the great body of the people, the puerile attempts of theology and religion to interpret for us the problems of human life will be definitely put on one side.

Applying the scientific maxim quoted above to the question of the institution of the Jewish priesthood, it will be found that there is really no need to postulate the intervention of a God in the matter at all. As Father Wolferstan says, it was *after* the Jewish captivity in Egypt that an organised priesthood emerged amongst the Israelites. We are aware that some scholars have maintained that the captivity in Egypt never happened; but let us, for the moment, give the Biblical narrative the benefit of any doubt there may be on the subject. Now, long before that date there was no scarcity of priests in Egypt, and the other nations of antiquity that had evolved some approach to a religious system, however crude and absurd, had also inevitably evolved the priest; so that anyone who has examined the subject, even cursorily, recognises that the rise of the Jewish priesthood can be accounted for quite naturally, and without calling in any super-mundane cause whatever.

The establishment of a priesthood seems to be the normal form of development in the evolution of every religion, and the Jews with their Levitical priestly caste simply followed the example of the Egyptians and other ancient nations, with modifications and adaptations of their own devising. Therefore, when

we speak of *Modern Priestcraft*, it is not with any idea of conveying the impression that it is a noxious weed of latter-day growth. We are convinced that it is much older even than our Jesuit critic seems willing to admit. We are not limited in our investigations—as, presumably, *he* is—by the absurd chronology of the Bible. We can trace back the existence of the human race and of religious worship many centuries previous to the entry of the "chosen people" on the stage of history. And, as we have said, wherever there is religion there is priestcraft.

As for the special institution of the Jewish priesthood by God, we can only hope that when the reverend writer refers us to Exodus and Leviticus he does not fancy he is quoting contemporary records. Perhaps he *is* still in that stage of Biblical knowledge. We think it well, therefore, to point out that modern scholars place the composition of these books several hundred years subsequent to the reputed Mosaic period, and that the credibility of the Old Testament as a veracious record of historical events has been long since exploded.

This Jesuit father is concerned lest the public should take its views regarding the Roman Catholic priesthood from works of fiction. Freethinkers would be highly pleased if the general public—including the Roman Catholic laity—*would* only turn their attention to *history*, before forming their conclusions as to the methods and practice of the Church of Rome. It is a consummation devoutly to be wished. To that end we heartily recommend the Rev. Dr. Barry's recent excellent work on the Papal Monarchy. It contains a candid summary of about a thousand years of the history of the Papacy, and it is a volume such as we never expected to see coming from the hands of a Roman Catholic cleric. We should rejoice if a copy of it could be placed before every intelligent Roman Catholic. It would be a revelation to most of them.

In this country, where she is in a minority, we probably see the Church of Rome at her best. Most religions are very tolerant where they are hopelessly outnumbered. But however amiable and admirable individual members of that church may be with whom we come in contact at the present day, we cannot afford to forget that—to adapt a striking phrase used by W. H. Mallock in another connection—whatever the present and future of the Church may be, there still remains her *past*. We cannot afford to forget the Inquisition, or the St. Bartholomew massacre, or any of the other pleasant little episodes in her history that are too numerous to detail here. So we, too, hope that the public will not take their ideas of the priesthood from works of fiction, but will resort to the hard facts of the historian. We venture to quote the following instructive passage from the article we are criticising:—

"Catholics do not consider whether they like to be ministered unto by their priests, or decide what the duties of their priests ought to be. Both these questions have been long since set at rest by God and his Church. *And this being so, so far as they are concerned the matter ends.*"

We have italicised the last sentence because it admirably indicates the priestly attitude towards the commonalty in all ages. We seem to hear the voice of ecclesiastical arrogance reverberating down the centuries. In effect the priests say to the vulgar herd, "You have nothing to do with Church matters; we and God arrange all these things for you; your share of the business is to bow down and adore—and pay." Yet our reverend friend wonders why we lecture against modern priestcraft.

At the close of his article he tells us that Catholics are "grateful for God's provision for their spiritual needs." We suppose he means they are grateful for an inexhaustible supply of priests. Some people might consider it an open question whether the spiritual needs of humanity have led to the demand for priests, or the supply of priests created the spiritual needs. For ourselves we have no doubts on the matter. As regards the thousand and one circumstances in the life of a Roman

Catholic, from the cradle to the grave, in each of which the intervention or the ministrations of the priest is deemed to be indispensable, we have little hesitation in saying that in every case the Church has invented the theory of the priest's utility. We think this is the view of every man and woman on the Freethought platform to-day, so that they are likely to continue attacking priestcraft—both ancient and modern—for some time to come.

G. SCOTT.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

THEATRE ROYAL, LANDS-LANE, LEEDS—
WHIT-SUNDAY, MAY 22, 1904.

AGENDA.

1. Minutes of last Conference.
2. Executive's Annual Report. By PRESIDENT.
3. Reception of Report.
4. Financial Report.
5. Election of President.
Motion by Finsbury Branch: "That Mr. G. W. Foote be re-elected President."
6. Election of Vice-Presidents.
(a) The following are nominated by the Executive for re-election: J. G. Bartram, Victor Charbonnel, R. Chapman, C. Cohen, W. W. Collins, F. A. Davies, J. F. Dewar, R. G. Fathers, Léon Furnémont, T. Gorniot, John Grange, W. Leat, W. C. Middleton, J. Neate, Dr. R. T. Nichols, J. Partridge, S. M. Peacock, C. Pegg, William Pratt, C. G. Quinton, J. H. Ridgway, Thomas Robertson, Victor Rogers, F. Schaller, W. H. Spivey, H. J. Stace, Charles Steptoe, Joseph Symes, S. R. Thompson, W. B. Thompson, T. J. Thurlow, John H. Turnbull, J. Umpleby, E. M. Vance, Frederick Wood, W. H. Wood.
(b) The following are nominated by the Executive for election: J. Barry and H. Cowell (London); J. Ross and J. Hammond (Liverpool).
7. Election of Auditors.
8. Motion by the Birmingham Branch:—
"That all Branches paying the Annual Subscription to Headquarters, as fixed by the Society's rules, shall be exempted from making Collections for the General and Benevolent Funds."
9. Motion by the Liverpool Branch:—
"That the capitation payment to the Central Fund be abolished, and that an annual affiliation fee of ten shillings be paid by each Branch."
10. Motion by the Manchester Branch:—
"That the Individual Members' minimum subscription to the National Secular Society be four shillings a year instead of two shillings as at present."
11. Motion by the Liverpool Branch:—
"That whenever funds are at the disposal of the Executive for propagandist purposes the same should be utilised in the endeavor to establish new Branches in the provinces; money so expended being more likely to result in permanent good to the Society than if spent on lectures in already existing centres."
12. Motion by T. J. Thurlow (London):—
"That we the members of the National Secular Society in Annual Conference assembled do most strenuously protest against the employment of alien laborers in the Transvaal under other conditions than those which apply to other laborers who voluntarily engage in the same work; and also against the mine-owners of the Transvaal being endowed with any privilege of employing alien labor that may not be lawfully exercised by all other employers located in any British crown colony."
13. Motion by Mr. C. Cohen:—
"That in view of the widespread nature of the Passive Resistance movement, and of the repeated declarations of the Nonconformist leaders, officially endorsed by the Free Church Congress, in favor of Christian teaching in the State schools; this Conference is of opinion that the whole dispute is one between rival Churches desiring to control education in their own interests; this conference therefore regards the dispute as one in which Freethinkers have no special reason for concerning themselves; and the Conference further desires to warn all lovers of true

religious and political liberty against being led away by plausible appeals to the very principles that are being outraged, and begs them to remember that the only policy which should command their support is the policy of complete secular education.

14. Motion by the South Shields Branch:—
"That Branches of the N. S. S. should appoint deputations to wait upon their local members of parliament in reference to the Education question, and urge upon them the importance of Secular Education as the only permanent solution of the problem on its political side."
15. Motion by the Executive:—
"That the N. S. S., as the one national Freethought organisation in Great Britain, should be strongly represented at the International Freethought Congress to be held at Rome in September; that a Special Fund should be raised for this purpose; and that the Continental officials of the International Freethought Federation should be apprised of the practical determination of the N. S. S. to contribute as fully as possible towards rendering the Rome Congress a splendid demonstration of the Freethought forces of the world."

The Conference will sit in the Theatre Royal, Lands-lane, Leeds; the morning session lasting from 10.30 to 12.30, and the afternoon session from 2.30 to 4.30. Both are business meetings for members of the N. S. S. Only members of the N. S. S. can speak and vote. A public meeting will be held in the evening at 7 o'clock in the Theatre Royal. The President of the N. S. S. will occupy the chair on each occasion. A Luncheon for delegates and visitors will be provided at the Victoria Hotel, at 1 o'clock.

By order of the Executive,
G. W. FOOTE, *President*.
E. M. VANCE, *Secretary*.

What is an Atheist?

[A reader of the *Freethinker* wrote to Mr. J. W. de Caux, of Great Yarmouth, asking him the meaning of "Freethinkers of all shades," and desiring him to say "Yes" or "No" to the question "Are you an Atheist?" Mr. de Caux sent the following reply.]

You ask me two questions—"What is the meaning of 'Freethinkers of all shades?'" and "Am I an Atheist?" The first you should have asked of the editor of the *Freethinker*, who employed the quoted phrase; and the second, to which you require an answer of "Yes" or "No," should have been accompanied by your definition of the word "Atheist." Nevertheless, I will readily give you my views.

That there are Freethinkers of different "shades"—that is, that Freethinkers differ somewhat from one another on certain points of belief or unbelief—goes without saying. No two men are exactly alike, and I opine that no two men think—of course, I mean only those who *do think*—exactly alike. Thomas Paine was a genuine Freethinker, and yet was a Deist. A Freethinker, as I understand the term, is one who thinks fearlessly, and such an one has usually the courage of his opinions, and agrees to differ with those who do not think as he does. This is an important point, for it eliminates from his creed all intolerance and persecution.

As to the personal question, I can answer it as you have put it—Yes and No! I am an Atheist as regards the God of the Bible. My feelings of justice and kindness revolt against the horrid idea of an omnipotent and omniscient being instructing the Jews to perpetrate the atrocities which are placed to their credit. I do not believe that a supreme intelligent being determined from all eternity to produce at a certain epoch on this earth Jack the Ripper and his victims, which he must have done if he be the being that he is represented to be. If such a being exists he must be an incarnate fiend, and not a God of justice and mercy. The Bible says such a being does exist. I do not believe it—more, I deny it. To me such a being is as impossible as that two cubes of exactly the same size can occupy the same space at the same moment. I believe in Fatalism but not in Predestination in the controlling power of circumstances, but not that the circumstances and their necessary results were "ordained before the foundation of the world." (1 Peter i. 20).

Apart from the Bible God I am an Agnostic—that is, I say with Colonel Ingersoll that there *may be* such a being, but I do *not know* that there is. And I thus conclude for the unanswerable reason made use of by Whately in his book on Logic that "on those mysterious points which are inscrutable to man the learned can have no advantage over the ignorant and the simple because in utter darkness the strongest sight and the weakest are on a level."

Correspondence.

THE LATE SIR HENRY THOMPSON, F.R.C.S., ON DEATH CERTIFICATION, PREMATURE BURIAL, ETC.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

Sir,—Referring to the appreciative notice, in the *Freethinker* of May 1, of the late Sir Henry Thompson's work in the cause of progress, may I venture to point out that amongst the reforms he advocated during his long and strenuous life in the service of humanity were the highly important ones of death certification and registration? At a meeting of the Metropolitan Counties Branch of the British Medical Association on May 22, 1896, this distinguished surgeon showed from the returns of the Registrar-General for 1892 that in England and Wales alone there were no less than 15,000 cases of death in which no inquiry was made as to the cause of death and no certificate of any kind obtained; also that 25,000 additional deaths "were so inadequately certified as to be unclassifiable," making together a class of 7½ per cent. in which no evidence as to the cause of death existed. Sir Henry Thompson recommended cremation as a means for preventing premature burial, because of the dual medical inspection required by the regulations of the cremation societies. But this, although to a great extent a preventive, cannot be said to be an absolute safeguard; seeing that cases are on record where several doctors have been deceived and pronounced dead a patient who has afterwards recovered.

In the fourth (and last) edition of his able and instructive work on "Cremation," Sir Henry Thompson admits that "there is but one really trustworthy proof that death has occurred in any given instance, viz., the presence of a manifest sign of commencing decomposition," and he adds that "it should always be verified before a certificate of death is signed." All the leading medical journals now affirm that under the present lax system of death certification there is danger of burial alive, and that reform is necessary. That being so, whether premature burial be frequent or rare—and, from the nature of the case, it cannot be proved either way, though, judging by the number of narrow escapes, the danger cannot be infinitesimal—all will agree that the people should be effectually safeguarded against any possibility of the occurrence of these terrible tragedies. This can be done by Parliamentary enactment of the provisions contained in the carefully prepared draft Bill of the London Association for the Prevention of Premature Burial, and should not longer be delayed. Will any M.P. undertake to introduce this Bill in the interests of humanity? Sincerely thanking you for your kind assistance in the philanthropic cause, and urgently-needed reform,

JAS. R. WILLIAMSON.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

Sir,—Will you kindly allow me a little of your valuable space to review a section of Mr. Gould's article in the *Freethinker* for May 1, on "Before and After the French Revolution." Your able contributor's remarks concerning his strictures upon Voltaire, Rousseau, and Paine because of their not having founded a "new religious life," being likely to rouse the resentment of those who think that nothing is required after the "achievements of Voltaire," may be allowed to remain in abeyance until he, Mr. Gould, gives us proof of the existence of persons who regard Voltaire's services to mankind as the grand terminus of human progress.

Mr. Gould asserts that the French Revolution did not grant the claims of the poor. "The mass of the people are still awaiting the new birth of society. They are under-fed, under-paid, under-educated. Their cry of distress was heard at the French Revolution; but they are not yet saved." I opine that it would be as reasonable to complain of a volcanic eruption that it utterly failed to fertilise the soil for a hundred miles around, as to complain, as Mr. Gould does, that that great political outburst did not once and for ever give to the proletariat all it desired.

Will Mr. Gould deny that the "Code Napoleon," which has blessed, and still blesses, France with the richest peasantry in the world, could never have been established but for the Revolution?

And now for a word about the poverty-stricken, hungry, ignorant masses, who, Mr. Gould thinks, fail to get their just share of the profits gained by the use of modern machinery in the industrial world. Were Mr. Gould to embark upon some business enterprise involving on his part the employment of, say, a dozen skilled mechanics and half as many laborers, I venture to say that in less than one

month he would find that these supposed victims of capitalism would prove themselves quite capable of taking care of themselves. Or to keep in line with his profession as a teacher, let your contributor go and inspect the books of any large employer of labor and see if he can define the exact amount to which each employee is honestly entitled.

The Taff Valley, the Denaby Main, and other legal financial decisions, together with the anxiety of the great labor organisations to get their funds protected by special legal enactments, prove the utter absurdity of all this hubbub anent the supposed hungry masses. Let "Nunquam" be read in this connection (*Merrie England*, p. 196). Speaking of these oppressed ones, he says: "He has money for beer, he has money for betting, he has money for parsons, he has money for missionaries, he has money for party politics." May we not assume, then, that his supposed hunger and ignorance are his own fault, in as far as they are real?

Will Mr. Gould pardon me when I go so far as to suggest that the vast accumulations of modern machine-produced wealth are as much at the service of the masses as of the classes, and that in the event of any catastrophe occurring that should destroy them at one fell swoop, the working classes would be the greatest sufferers by the calamity? Hence the reason why such genuine friends as the late Robert Ingersoll, and Charles Bradlaugh felt it their duty to oppose the exaggerated ideas of the condition of the vast army of industry that seem to me to dominate Mr. Gould's mind in this connection.

T. J. THURLOW.

A DESECRATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

Sir,—May I be permitted to offer a mild protest against the use of such names as that of Charles Bradlaugh in advertisements? I notice that friend Gott, in his advertisement in the *Freethinker*, notifies to us that he is selling what he terms "Bradlaugh Boots." I do not doubt that Gott's boots are very excellent things, but surely it is not necessary for our friend to "desecrate" the name of such a man by using it as a medium for advertising wares, however good they may be. I feel sure that we need only point out to Gott the incongruity of the thing for him to see it as others do, and mend his ways.

HAROLD ELLIOT.
Kelmscott, Claude-road, Chorlton-cum-Hardy.

May 6, 1904.

Passive Resisters.

MYSTERY-MISTERS

Threaten with blisters

Passive resisters of Scriptural snares,

Readers, reflectors,

Rubbish rejectors,

Anti-respecters of Jesus of theirs.

Christ "our Redeemer"—

O what a screamer!

Every "blasphemer" laughs loud at the phrase—

Said (see St. Matthew)

"Lucifer hath you

If in my path you don't walk all your days."

Teachings like these are

Plain as plane trees are:

"Render to Cæsar his own £ s. d."

"Brothers and sisters,

Flee from the blisters,

Be not resisters of evil," said he.

Scorned are his said words,

Treated as dead words,

Our Cæsar, Edward's deprived of his cash.

School Board Rates? pest 'em!

Christians detest 'em,

Sternly resist 'em. How wicked and rash!

Evil are taxes,

Bleed you like axes,

Waxy one waxes when called on to pay.

Jesus says "Whoso

Loves me will do so."

Robinson Crusoe! He's hated to-day.

Where will they go to

If they're so slow to

Pay what they owe to the Rulers who tax?

Scripture says "Blisters";

Passive Resisters

Twist it like twisters of noses of wax!

ESS JAY BEE.

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.

PRINTER'S HALL (Bartlett's passage, Holborn, London) at 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The Disappearance of the Supernatural Christ."

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (61 New Church-road, Camberwell): 7.30, *Conversazione* for members and friends.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7. Charles Watts, "The Ethics of Christ's Teaching."

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

WOOD GREEN ETHICAL SOCIETY (Fairfax Hall, Portland-gardens, Haringay): 7.15, Miss McMillan, "Education and Heredity."

OUTDOOR.

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

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Station-road, 11.30, R. P. Edwards; Brockwell Park, 3.15, R. P. Edwards; 6, R. P. Edwards.

EAST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Mile End Waste): 11.30, W. J. Ramsey.

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

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (The Grove, Stratford): 7, G. Parsons.

COUNTRY.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (110 Brunswick-street). Open-air Meeting (Glasgow Green, Jail-square): 4, Mr. Howat and Mr. Brown.

LEEDS (Armley Park): 11, George Weir, "Bible and Beer"; Woodhouse Moor: 3, "Christ's Resurrection"; Town Hall Square: 7.30, "The *Clarion* Discussion."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): Outdoor Propaganda: Islington Square, 3, H. Percy Ward; 7, (in the Hall), "The Holy Bible: With Reference to Canon Henson's Articles."

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): J. M. Robertson, 3, "Recent Christian Apologetics"; 6.30, "The Sermon on the Mount." Tea at 5.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7.30, Conference, Agenda, etc.

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