

# THE Freethinker

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*How can one make so much fuss about one's petty faults, as these pious little people do! Nobody cares a straw for them; God least of all.*—NEITZSCHE.

## Some Defenders of the Faith.—II.

“BLATCHFORD ANSWERED.”

IT is not our intention to track Mr. Spurr through the whole of his “reply” to Mr. Blatchford. That would be an endless task, for he raises more questions than he “answers.” Besides, a good deal of Mr. Spurr’s criticism is of so personal a character that it could only be properly dealt with by Mr. Blatchford himself. Nor is that all. Mr. Spurr calls Mr. Blatchford “a shifty and rambling opponent” who must be “followed wherever he goes and pinned down.” We need not apologise, therefore, for saying that Mr. Spurr hops about like a flea. It would be too tiresome to “follow” him in every saltation. We shall just put our thumb upon him here and there.

Mr. Spurr sets out with a very curious statement. “Let it be understood,” he says, “that it is Mr. Blatchford, and not the Christian religion, that is on trial.” Could anything be more absurd? Narrowing the controversy down to Mr. Blatchford, and discussing whether he is an impeccable disputant, is positively grotesque. It is not even clever. For the simplest believer can easily see that if Mr. Blatchford were dead and buried, and beyond the reach of praise or insult, the question of the truth or falsehood of Christianity would still remain; and that this is, after all, the only proper question, because it is the only important one. Mr. Spurr himself has a glimpse of this. He feels it is necessary to give a special reason for his remarkable limitation of the scope of the debate. Accordingly he goes for Mr. Blatchford in the spirit of a policeman chasing a stray dog off a racecourse. “He puts himself forward,” Mr. Spurr says, “as a great Know-all; the Lord Oracle, whose dictum is worth more than the opinions of all other people put together.” Now on the supposition that Mr. Spurr says this honestly, we are bound to say that he has read Mr. Blatchford’s book with jaundiced eyes. Mr. Blatchford does not pose as a “Know-all” or a “Sir Oracle.” His fault, if we may say so, is an affectation of novelty. If he had mentioned *all* the books to which he is indebted he would have had to advertise some of his popular predecessors in the field of Freethought criticism. But this is a very different thing from the monstrous charge which his Christian opponent brings against him. And when one remembers the tone of Mr. Spurr’s “reply,” one is prompted to ask whether he is not something like the man in the story, who called his enemy a scoundrel because he did not wish to be called one first.

It may be true, as Mr. Spurr alleges, that all Mr. Blatchford’s objections to the Christian faith have been “answered a thousand times” before he “was born.” We admit the chronology just for the sake of argument. But what does it prove? Simply nothing. While a system stands, the objections to it stand. To say that they have been “answered” is begging the question. It is clear that they have not been disposed of. And if Christian ministers go

on preaching “the old, old story,” they must expect to hear the “old, old” objections.

We venture to make Mr. Spurr a suggestion. A lie must always be older than its contradiction. This simple sentence contains a very important truth, and we leave Mr. Spurr to work out its applications for himself.

But before leaving this aspect of *Blatchford Answered* we may as well give our readers an idea of how Mr. Spurr believes his faith should be discussed. He prints some examples of Mr. Blatchford’s “tall talk.” The first is “There was no fall.” But this is admitted by thousands of ministers. The second is “Science has made belief in miracles impossible.” But this was practically said by David Hume, and explicitly said thirty years ago by Matthew Arnold, who set down *all* the Bible miracles as “fairy tales.” The third is “The evidence for Christ’s death is unsatisfactory.” But is not this fairly a matter of opinion? And what milder word than “unsatisfactory” could Mr. Blatchford possibly use? Evidently you must criticise Christianity with “bated breath and whispering humbleness” to satisfy Mr. Spurr; indeed, he does not quite allow that you have any right to criticise it at all. It was a temper like his that set up the Blasphemy Laws—and still maintains them.

We are not sure that “infidels” would be permitted to live if Mr. Spurr ruled the roost. Even when he makes “allowances” for them he does it malignantly. Mr. Blatchford charged Christians with thinking “it is *wicked* to deny what they believe”—which is perfectly true, for the statute law of England, apart from the common law, makes it a penal offence to deny the truth of Christianity. Mr. Spurr replies:—

“Not always. Christians make greater allowances for people than you imagine. Want of information, stupidity, vanity, want of thought, and many other things account for unbelief.”

What grace! What charity! Fancy a man of Mr. Spurr’s size accounting by *such* causes for the unbelief of a Hume, a Voltaire, a Paine, a Shelley, a Byron, a Huxley, a Clifford, a Darwin, and a Haeckel!

Now let us see what Mr. Spurr has to say in defence of his faith; for, after all, he *does* defend it, instead of merely “trying” Mr. Blatchford.

In reply to the objection against the doctrine of a Heavenly Father, based upon the terrible evils of this world, Mr. Spurr says:—

“War, slavery, and slums represent man’s injustice—not God’s ‘indifference.’ Leprosy, cancer, cholera represent man’s ignorance of or disobedience to the laws of Nature, *not* God’s ‘indifference.’”

What beautiful logic! Man’s ignorance, and all his other qualities, depend upon the brains in his head. And who put them there? Mr. Spurr must reply “God.” Very well, then; God is responsible for all man’s defects. To set up man’s action as something beyond the control and responsibility of Omniscient Omnipotence is simply childish. And if Mr. Spurr talks about “free will” we refer him to that distinguished American Christian, Dr. Jonathan Edwards, and to that famous German Christian, Dr. Martin Luther.

In his twelfth chapter on “Sin, Free Will, and the Atonement” Mr. Spurr recurs to this subject; and as

he censures Mr. Blatchford for "writing such remarkable drivel" upon it, he has no right to complain of any censure that we may pass upon himself.

Mr. Blatchford denied that man could sin against God. We agree with him. We have said it ourselves a countless number of times in articles and lectures. God made man *what* he is, and cannot wisely or justly complain of his *being* what he is. To this Mr. Spurr makes the following reply:—

"The principle you enunciate is that the *maker* of man is responsible for all his acts. Very well. Now, all parents are mediately responsible for the existence of the beings born of them. So that, according to your logic, we reach this conclusion: Every parent is responsible for the existence of his children, therefore every parent is responsible for all his children's acts."

This was deliberately written, and deliberately published, by a Christian minister. Not a boy preacher, but a grown-up apostle. And if Mr. Blatchford wrote "remarkable drivel" how shall the English dictionary supply nouns and adjectives to describe Mr. Spurr's performance? Surely a child might see the difference between the divine and the human parents in this argument. God creates in certainty; man begets but in hope. God foresees all; man foresees very little—practically nothing. Man cannot tell what his son will be; God knows exactly what will come of every being he creates. He has the foreknowledge of what will happen, and the power to create otherwise if he chooses; and it is this foreknowledge and power that involve his absolute and universal responsibility. Man *is* responsible for his offspring to a certain extent, and law and morality remind him of the fact if he forgets it; but his responsibility is of a limited character, because his foreknowledge and power are limited. If he could make his children precisely what he pleased, he would be just as responsible as God. If they failed to please him, it would be because he did not please that they should please him. There is, in short, an infinite difference between the knowledge and power of God and the knowledge and power of man; and the relationship between God and man is, therefore, infinitely different from the relationship between man and his fellow men. This ought to be obvious even to the intelligence of Mr. Spurr.

Mr. Blatchford cannot believe that God "hears and answers prayer." Mr. Spurr replies:—

"To your disbelief in prayer I oppose my own *knowledge* that God does answer prayer. My experience is more weighty than your disbelief."

Mr. Spurr imagines that emphasis is evidence, and that printing "knowledge" in italics is as good as proof. He says that he *knows*. But how is the reader to *know* that he *knows*? Many a man who "knows all about it" looks a great fool in the witness-box.

It is not discreet of Mr. Spurr to "oppose" also to Mr. Blatchford's disbelief in prayer "a mass of Christian experience, reiterated thousands of times, that God answers prayer." We regret to say it, but the attitude of most Christians on this subject is shockingly hypocritical. They will go to St. Paul's Cathedral and thank God for saving the life of their King, although he was tended by the first physicians in the land, and by the best nursing skill that love or money could procure. And they will give a poor sincere Christian four months' hard labor for really trusting to prayer in a time of sickness. Mr. Spurr has no right to talk about the "mass of Christian experience" if he has not protested against the infamous persecution of the Peculiar People. And we are not aware that he has even whispered a remonstrance.

Let us be clearly understood on this point. We are not discussing what should be the attitude of Freethinkers towards honest superstitionists who will not give their sick children the benefit of medical science. We are simply pointing out the hypocrisy of professing Christians who send their earnest fellow Christians to prison for actually following the commands, and relying upon the promises, of that "Holy Scripture" which the present writer was indicted and imprisoned for

"bringing into disbelief and contempt." Surely it is the professing Christians, like Mr. Spurr, who bring the Bible into disbelief and contempt, by imprisoning men for attacking it, and imprisoning men for believing it. Indeed, it is difficult to see how callous hypocrisy could be carried further.

Defenders of the Faith nowadays seem like Voltaire's "Habakkuk," *capable de tout*—capable of anything. Mr. Spurr rebukes Mr. Blatchford for treating a miracle as a *suspension* of law. But this is precisely how miracles were described by the older apologists of Christianity. The late Canon Liddon even went to the length of saying that he overcame the law of gravitation every time he lifted his hand to his head! Science, however, has shown two things; first, that the so-called laws of nature are *never* suspended; and, second, what would happen if they *were* suspended. Consequently the modern apologists start a new theory. "We who believe in miracles," Mr. Spurr says, "believe that they were wrought by *natural* agencies, of which, however, we do not at present hold the secret." Now the sufficient answer to this is, that a "miracle" is *not* a miracle unless it is *supernatural*. Some call it *superhuman*, but that is only another word for the same thing. Take the miracle of turning water into wine. Unless it was *supernatural*, it was simply a piece of hanky-panky, like the show trick of boiling a kettle on ice. Jesus knew some *natural* way, did he, of introducing various foreign elements into water, and chemically combining the whole into excellent wine? If Mr. Spurr does not mean this, his language is misleading; if he does mean it, he will perhaps tell us how he obtained the information.

We should also like to know why Mr. Blatchford is reproved for speaking of sin as "entering" the world. Mr. Spurr calls this "grotesque." Possibly it is, but it is Biblical all the same. The Epistle to the Romans (v. 12) says that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Are we to believe, then, that Mr. Spurr is wiser than St. Paul?

(To be concluded.) G. W. FOOTE.

### Christianity and Morals.

THE way in which the Christian clergy pose as moral doctors—ethical specialists—at the side of whom all others are unlicensed practitioners, is amusing, if at times a little irritating. Their own conduct is certainly not higher than that of other people of a similar social rank, while in many instances it is actually lower. Certainly, if the ethics of the pulpit, with all its wild assertions and baseless slanders on individuals and classes, were applied to ordinary affairs, anyone who did so would find himself subjected to a social boycott, if not figuring in a law court. And the influence of the clergy on either ethics as a science or on the conduct of the people has always been of the slightest possible character. Periods of moral degeneration have ministered to, rather than taken away from, their influence; while times of regeneration, days that have developed men and women with a keen sense of right and wrong, have been the occasions when the power of the clergy has been at its lowest.

Still, the clergy are bound to make a stand in defence of their position as teachers of morals. It is the only ground on which they can now hope to appeal to educated people. As teachers of science their position is hopeless. So, also, is their standing as teachers on matters sociological. Even as authorities on some problematical life beyond they appeal to the people in a constantly decreasing measure. People listen respectfully; but there is a growing tendency for the left eyelid to droop and for the corners of the mouth to rise. To exert an influence the clergy must appeal to some vital, practical influence; and morals offers them the one subject that appeals to all classes alike. There is, therefore, a certain pathetic air about the complaint of a

*Christian World* writer, "J. B.," that "Modern society offers us the sinister spectacle of a religion that too often dispenses with morality, and of a morality which is seeking to dispense with religion." So far as the latter portion is concerned, the "sinister" aspect of the phenomenon is a wholly professional one. It is sinister to the parson, but to no one else. The student who recognises how much religion does, and has always done, to distort the moral sense by creating fictitious virtues and vices, and how little it has done to draw attention to the real factors and conditions of a healthy morality, will view the spectacle without any serious misgivings. If morality is a normal expression of human life under social conditions, the disappearance of religious belief cannot affect it; and if it is not, the imposition of artificial restraints and unwarrantable beliefs can never be anything more than a temporary expedient to avert what is bound to happen sooner or later.

And so far as a religion that dispenses with morality is concerned, this is nothing new in human history. Or, to put it in less extravagant language (for no religion ever has dispensed with morality), religion, while keeping to certain of the elementary virtues in theory, in practice has prevented them being carried out as they might otherwise have been. And, in addition, the existence of immorality has never militated against the growth of religion. "J. B." confesses that while "the patriarchs were sincerely religious, their morals, if practised here to-day, would land them in gaol inside of a week"—which is only what Freethinkers have been saying for many years, and have been heartily cursed by the religious world for saying it. "J. B." also confesses that the history of Christianity in relation to morals has been "a very mixed one"—a mild way of putting a very unpleasant fact—and cites the immorality of Roman Catholic priests on the one hand, and the attitude of certain Protestants in relation to monogamy on the other hand, as cases in point. The case is really put much too mildly. Of the conduct of the early Christians we have not, and perhaps never shall have, *very* exact information. But we do know enough to be sure that the picture drawn of them as a society of pure living people in the midst of a wholly corrupt non-Christian population is wholly imaginary. The claim that the "elect" were released from all moral obligations is one of the earliest that meets us in Christian history. Sexual extravagances and aberrations were common, as the charges brought by one Christian body against another, as well as the statements made by Pagan writers prove. And it is tolerably certain that both Stoicism and Epicureanism had a far healthier influence on conduct than had Christianity.

The subject of monogamy, too, is so mildly put as to evoke the charge of its being slurred. And there is nothing that acts so well as a *suggestio falsi* as a half statement of an unpleasant truth. The whole truth is that the monogamic ideal is quite foreign to Christianity. It is a Pagan, chiefly a Greek and Roman, ideal. There is nothing in the Old or New Testaments to prevent anyone having as many wives as they care to take. Polygamy, as a matter of fact, was openly preached as admissible by many of the Protestant leaders, no less a one than Martin Luther advising both Philip of Hesse and our own "Defender of the Faith," Henry the Eighth, to take two wives at once, if they felt so inclined, as being permissible on grounds of both policy and religion. And a greater man than Luther, John Milton, declared that to declare polygamy wrong would be to fly in the face of both the teaching and the practice of the Bible. These are extremely unpleasant facts for Christians to have to face; but the truth is that, what with the teaching of celibacy, the tendency towards polygamy, and antinomianism, Christianity came within a fair distance of wrecking altogether the higher forms of family life.

There are also other aspects of the relations between Christianity and morals which, as "J. B." says, "offer us difficulties rather than solutions,"

although they are for the Christian, not for the Freethinker. Says "J. B.":—

"Take, for instance, the matter of truthfulness. Pascal's maxim that the first of Christian truths is that truth should be loved above all, has never yet taken real hold of the religious consciousness. We are suffering endless perplexities to-day simply because the earlier Christian writers did not esteem truth as a virtue. They thought nothing of a forgery.....The modern scholar, as he works upon early Christian literature, is perpetually conscious that in his search for the exact truth of things, he is in contact with writers who had no vivid sense themselves of the value of accuracy and of the simple unadorned fact. And to-day there are numbers of religious people.....who will refuse to open their minds to a truth, however well it has been established, which seems to contradict some earlier prepossession."

Again the case is anything but exaggerated, although it is a pleasing picture of the early generations of pure-minded, ultra-virtuous Christians, and a fine commentary upon the moralising influence of Christianity. Far from them esteeming truth a virtue, to "lie for the glory of God" became one of the most commendable of practices. Interpolation of passages in classical writings, forging of letters, fabrication of gospels and epistles, manufactured records of miracles, all became recognised methods of bolstering up the faith. It is, indeed, not too much to say that hardly a document the manipulating of which would advantage Christianity, and which has passed through Christian hands, can be viewed by students without suspicion. And it need hardly be said that with so much to gain from credulity and ignorance, the very last thing taught by Christians, from Jesus downward, has been the duty of examination, criticism, and careful and accurate speech. And with this history behind them—centuries of fraud, imposture, and stupidity, their faith cradled in lies, which when disproved often only made room for another lie or another piece of stupidity, is it any wonder that the love of truth has "never taken hold of the religious consciousness," or that present-day believers "refuse to open their minds to a truth, however well it has been established," when it runs counter to their creed? None of us can reverse our heredity to order or at express speed. And when a religion like Christianity has been toiling for so many centuries to manufacture intellectual cowards and hypocrites, it would be strange indeed if it had not met with considerable success.

"J. B." himself is not a bad illustration of the "wobbley" type of mind produced by Christian culture when, with the history of Christianity before him, he yet asserts that morality cannot get on without it. "Where the gospel is really understood and felt it has always uplifted morals," he tells us. The old cant! The old bluff! When and where was the gospel properly understood? And if it was not properly understood by the supposed immediate followers of Jesus, how can we expect it to be better understood later? The truth of the whole matter is that Christianity has ever been pretty much what any person cared to make it. Autocrat and democrat, sensualist and ascetic, good and bad, have each interpreted it as they thought fit. History shows pretty conclusively that people have never found it inconsistent with their dominant passion, whether that passion was heretic-burning or gold-hunting. And it is only in line with its previous history that Christianity should now ape a humanitarianism it has done nothing to encourage, but much to obstruct.

C. COHEN.

### The Non-Religious Trend of Fiction.

AS a literary critic and reviewer of books, Dr. W. Robertson Nicoll has few equals. His knowledge of general literature is marvellously extensive and thorough, and his notices of new works are, as a rule, exceptionally reliable. His judgment may not invariably commend itself to us, but it is always dangerous to challenge his facts. He is an enormous reader, and possesses a most retentive memory.

The number of subjects in which he seems to be at home is amazingly large. His *forte*, however, appears to be theology. Nearly all the books he has written are of a distinctly religious character, and show him to be a decidedly orthodox divine. In Biblical criticism his sympathies are with such moderately advanced scholars as Canon Driver and Professor George Adam Smith rather than with the extreme school represented by Professors Manen and Schmiedel and Canon Cheyne. All his writings impress us with the fact that he is intensely religious, and looks at all subjects from a religious point of view.

The leading articles in the *British Weekly* are generally from his pen. In the issue of that journal for September 8 the leader is entitled "The Teaching of Recent Fiction," and is, presumably, contributed by himself. It is really a review of four recent novels from the religious point of view. The works selected are *The Last Hope*, by Henry Seton Merriman; *Double Harness*, by Anthony Hope; *Lindley Kays*, by Barry Pain; and *Tommy and Co.*, by Jerome K. Jerome. These books, although "not of highest absolute rank, are all clever and entertaining." That by the late Mr. Seton Merriman is said to be "scarcely on the level of the writer's best achievement. It seems as if the pencil frequently swerves." It is "the story of a pretender, or one who would have been a pretender if the chance had been given him," and the tale "moves in a squalid atmosphere." *Double Harness* is "a study of marriage as it is worked out in actual life by several couples. In nearly every case there is heart-wreck and home-wreck. But Mr. Hope is not willing that the ruin should be final, and he builds up again what he has seemed hopelessly to overthrow." In spite of this serious drawback, we are told that "there is more power in (this novel) than in any other of his books." The other two novels "contain brilliant chapters, but neither is a unity." Mr. Jerome and Mr. Pain "are genuine humorists. Like all humorists, they are tragically serious in their serious hours. Mr. Pain, in particular, is even morbid in his view of life when he ceases to smile." "In Mr. Jerome's book one reads with interest his views on journalism." "When Mr. Jerome writes about journalism we are content, for he knows the subject. When he philosophises we are not so sure of him." *Lindley Kays* is declared to be unworthy of its gifted author. "Mr. Pain's admirers will not be satisfied with his latest work, and will continue to wish that a man with so many endowments should write something worthy of his genius."

The above criticisms are doubtless just. I have no fault whatever to find with them. My object in referring to them is to call attention to the significant fact that, according to Dr. Nicoll's frank admission, the teaching of these four books is entirely non-religious. They contain not a single word *against* religion; they simply ignore it. These are Dr. Nicoll's own words:—

"What impresses us in all these books is the total absence of religion. There is scarcely a reference to religious aims, motives, or consolations. If our novelists are truly describing the English life of to-day, then Christianity has disappeared from our country. Mr. Hope has much to say of men and women in the greatest tribulation, deceived and deceiving, sinning and suffering, driven through anguish even to despair. But he never suggests that Christianity came once into their minds. They never pray, they never think of God, they do not fear God, or love God, or repent before God. They do not seem to know that a God exists. No believer crosses the stage. No saintly man or tender woman brings the balm of consolation. When they make up their differences and agree to forgive and forget, the whole problem of sin is apparently solved."

Mr. Barry Pain, it is true, introduces us to several religious people; but they are all positively disagreeable, absurd, tyrannical, loathsome, or hypocritical, the underlying assumption being that all forms of religion are palpable delusions. The following extract deserves closest attention, especially on the part of Freethinkers:—

"Mr. Seton Merriman, whose moral tone was very

high, never once suggests the action of Christian forces. He could draw noble men and noble women, chivalrous, honorable, brave, sincere, faithful unto death. But they were never reinforced so far as we can remember by supernal powers, nor did they ever need such reinforcement. The atmosphere is purely pagan, though the paganism is of the loftiest and most heroic type. In Mr. Jerome's books his sky is low and the horizon near, though within the limits there is much kindness and good-fellowship."

Such is the picture of life presented to us in these four books; and Dr. Robertson Nicoll sorrowfully admits that the trend of much, if not most, of our modern Fiction is emphatically towards non-religion, or pure Paganism. "In the novels before us, we are enveloped from first to last in an atmosphere of quiet Atheism." "The divorce of literature from the Church is," in Dr. Nicoll's opinion, "a more serious business than is generally supposed"; and it is fast becoming an acknowledged fact. But is this non-religious picture of life true? "For our part," says Dr. Nicoll, "we believe it to be utterly false." I have no doubt whatever but that Dr. Nicoll cherishes his belief with perfect sincerity. His whole training, his entire experience, and what he may call his deepest consciousness, irresistibly drive him to such a conviction. But nothing is clearer than that Dr. Nicoll is, on this occasion, the mouthpiece of a comparatively small, steadily dwindling minority. The great writers he criticises believe the direct opposite. For their part, they are confident that their picture of English life is literally accurate—so far, at least, as some two-thirds of the English-speaking people are concerned. They have watched and studied life, not in the churches, not in purely religious circles, but in the wide, wide world; and the conclusion to which they have been forced by the facts is that religion is to-day at a serious discount, and that some of the noblest, most chivalrous, honorable, brave, sincere, and faithful men and women will have none of it, but are resolved to listen to and obey only the native instincts and impulses of their own humanity. To say that "God does not leave himself without a witness, and (that) no faithful picture of the lonely, striving, enduring heart can leave him out," is to give the lie to the facts. There are thousands of the very best people to whom God never appeals, to whom Christ is a semi-mythical character, and to whom the present life is all in all. Such people regard morality as the outcome of evolution, and they can discover no vital connection between it and any form of religion. The basis of civilisation is not Christianity, but the moral sense; and the moral sense is the product of social life, and the advent of social life marks the earliest dawn of humanity. Apart from ethics, which is older than the oldest religion, "the great ideas of Christianity" relate to the supernatural realm and its alleged manifestations, in which realm the people now under consideration do not believe; and it follows of necessity that upon the souls of such people, even in their "moments of tension" and their "hours of dereliction," the so-called great ideas of Christianity never come.

Now, have such people no right to be represented in Fiction? Is it fair to characterise the picture of their life, as drawn by our modern novelists, as utterly false? Such a characterisation roots itself either in ignorance or in bigotry, if not in both. It is an incontrovertible fact that there are myriads of people whom God never finds, even in their dying moments, who have absolutely no sense of the Divine, and to whom religion, in all its forms, and at all periods of life, is "an absurd delusion." These are the people whose portraits are painted by the artists whom Dr. Nicoll pronounces false representatives of the facts of life. In reality, it is Dr. Nicoll, by taking his own individual consciousness as the measure or type of the general consciousness of the race, who does injustice to the facts. Nothing is easier than to condemn the creed of modern Naturalism by prefixing the adjectives "thin, vulgar, superficial"; but nothing is more difficult than to advance a single proof of the reality of supernaturalism. The belief in the latter is

not supported by one scrap of evidence. Dr. Nicoll says: "The more one sees of life, the nearer one comes to the core of human hearts, the more one feels how much religion there is even in those to whom religion seems to mean nothing, and less than nothing. When novelists understand this we may have great books again." If by "religion," in that extract, is meant any consciousness of God, or of a supernatural world, then the assertion is wholly untrue, except as regards a very limited number of people.

Dr. Nicoll remarks: "We can only feebly protest that in novels we look for some respite from the harshness of fate. We long for a lighter and a brighter sky than that which covers us." But if fate rules the world what respite from its harshness can there be? If the sky which covers us is dark and gloomy, what is the use of imagining the existence of a lighter and brighter one? Would it not be wiser to make the most and best of the sky which actually covers us? Again: "In the name of their own principle we venture to ask our novelists whether they are giving us life when they ignore religion." But what novelists seek to portray is not life in the abstract, but the actual life of people really known to them. As a matter of fact, many of them can and do give us life without religion; and it may be their conviction, based upon their own experience, that, on the whole, life has been and is injured, and not benefited, by religion. The following sentence shows how deaf and blind Dr. Nicoll is to all that lies outside of his own experience: "Can it be that all the churches, and all the congregations, and all the preachers are absolutely without effect, that Christianity has died out of the world, that the English race has completely, and finally, and without struggle thrown off the religious idea?" No novelist has ever made such a silly allegation. Such an assertion, by whomsoever indulged in, would be an unpardonable exaggeration. What many of our novelists allege is that there is a very real and full life not covered by the churches, not affected by the preachers, not warped by superstition, and not tyrannised over by supernatural agents; and this life it is their ambition accurately to delineate. Who is competent authoritatively to proclaim that the delineation is false, or that the life delineated is not actual? Who knows that "man is more than cunning mechanism and passing breath?" Belief is not synonymous with knowledge. We have absolutely no knowledge of anything beyond and above Nature; and without knowledge faith is a wild venture in the dark. But be that as it may, whether Christianity be true or not, it is undeniable that the majority of people in Christendom lead beautiful, noble, and useful lives without its help.

Christianity has not yet died out of the world; but it is in the process of dying. The English race has not yet completely and finally thrown off the religious idea; but it is gradually freeing itself from its dominion. Having completed his dramatic motor-car mission from Land's End to Aberdeen, this is what General Booth said to an interviewer, the other day: "The people are better off than they used to be, but no nearer God. There is more prosperity in the country, but I cannot say the people are more devout. There may be less open and blatant vice and ignorance, but the trend of things is away from creeds and churches." If religion is natural and necessary to man, how is it that he is perpetually drifting away from it? Why is it such a tremendous task to keep his faith and interest in it actively alive?

Freethinkers will be glad to be told by an eminent divine that modern novelists have the courage to give us life without religion. Freethought can never languish as long as great writers of Fiction avow their faith in it. I conclude, therefore, in the words with which Dr. Robertson Nicoll opens his able and interesting article:—

"The novel, as the strongest and most popular form of literature in our day, can and does powerfully affect the national life. The time is long past when the

influence of the novel may be disregarded. The great novels of the world are on a level with the highest work of literature, and even secondary books in this line not seldom tell far and wide. In fact, there are many whom new ideas can reach only through the channel of Fiction."

JOHN T. LLOYD.

### General Reaction.

I DO not pretend to know personally the state of Freethought in Great Britain, but I gather from the pages of the *Freethinker* that there is reaction with you as with ourselves. Here we find no real Christian revival, but a revival of its cant; and the newspaper press is mostly to blame for it. Our public journals are "sold to do evil," and written for the express object of bolstering up a dead conventionality in religion and in politics. Honest and open sceptics, however able or above reproach, are as rigidly excluded from the newspapers as from the pulpit; while any fool connected with religion may say almost what he pleases in their pages. The most fulsome stuff about the King, bishops, etc., appears in our papers here, but they never give their readers a hint that any such persons as Republicans, sceptics, etc., exist. Even our advertisements are under rigid censorship, and we may think ourselves well off if they are not excluded altogether for fear of shocking Mrs. Grundy.

I confess that the character of our newspaper press, its utter dishonesty and exclusiveness, are the sorest facts in my life. Freethinkers won the liberty of the press, ay, were its creators. Most of us have suffered personally in defence of the press and its freedom. Our reward is to be hated, misrepresented, and abused by that press. When it is remembered that most editors, managers of papers, and journalists have no personal convictions, religious or political, their disgusting character shows out in glaring colors. To my own thinking, the lowest rung in the social ladder has been reached and permanently occupied by the average journalist, a being who, at the bidding of his owner, will write down or totally ignore the most self-denying and virtuous persons in the community, and beslobber the most criminal and useless.

Still, we need not despair. All the efforts of priests, parsons, and bribed journalists, with all the power of Mammon to aid and reward them, can never revive Christ or Christianity, Pope or priest. True, the Churches can boast of money and make ostentatious displays of their ill-gotten wealth; but they can never relight hell-fire, can never rehabilitate God, Devil, Christ, and Ghost; can never again make people shudder at the thought of "judgment" to come and the general conflagration of the world. No! nor can they restore the credit of the vile old Bible or their horrid old Churches. Unbelief is general; the average clergyman of to-day is almost identical with the average sceptic of thirty years ago; and the most devout sheep of the several folds are bewildered over "the articles of their belief"—they no longer know what to believe or what to doubt.

The Freethinkers' turn will come again, and our power and influence will go down the ages growing perfect as the years roll by. At present I feel almost powerless, but not discouraged. What damage I can do superstition in Church and State will be done, and done heartily.

I cannot close without thanking you most heartily for the kindly things you say of myself in your issue of May 29.

JOS. SYMES.

Liberator Farm, Cheltenham, Victoria,  
Australia, July 29.

Let the philosophers all say what they will, the main thing at which we all aim, even in virtue itself, is pleasure.  
—Montaigne.

## Acid Drops.

According to Reuter's correspondent the Russian officers, just before the heavy fighting at Liaoyang, gave themselves up to the wildest dissipation. Some were unable to join their regiments, and on the morning of the great Japanese victory were found in "unworthy places"—which is presumably a soft expression for "brothels." It will take a lot of "God" and "Christ" to give such warriors success in the field against the Japanese, who do far better without "God" and "Christ" at all.

Amongst the prayers officially issued by the Holy Synod of Russia, by virtue of the Imperial Ukase, is the following: "Give our Christ-loving army victory and enable it to subdue the enemy." *Christ-loving army* is good: in the brothels of Liaoyang, and on the line of constant retreat from a Christ-despising foe.

"O defender of the orthodox faith," another of these precious prayers runs, "send down thine arrows and confound the enemy. Strike them as the lightning, and deliver them into the hands of thy faithful troops." It is enough to make a cat laugh.

Just think of the Holy Synod of Russia, with the Czar's approval, publishing in the *Official Messenger* a resolution like this:—

"In virtue of the Imperial Ukase to the effect that, owing to the present trials of our dear country, more ardent prayers should be offered up for the victory of the Russian troops, who are worshippers of Christ, over a cruel enemy full of guile, the Synod pronounces the time ripe for special prayers to be offered in all the churches of the Empire, on Sundays and festivals after Mass, beseeching that heavenly aid should be sent to the Russian army, which is sacrificing its life for its faith, its Czar, and its country, and praying for long years of life for the victorious troops and for repose for the souls of the warriors who fall."

Could anything be more childish? It is worthy of an infant-school. "A cruel enemy full of guile" simply means that the Japanese fight too well for the "Christ loving" Russians.

A terribly repulsive account of the fighting on the Motienling Pass, on July 17, was given by Lieutenant Kuzminsky, and has been reproduced in the English papers. The following passage shows how beautifully religion and the lust of slaughter combine:—

"The position was won. A hideous butchery ensued of the surviving Japs, who, disdaining alike flight and surrender, crouched stolidly while our men tumbled over them, kicking in their faces, braining them with their rifle-butts, or running them through. One of our non-commissioned officers, a big Ukrainian named Lobenko, seized a little Japanese by the collar, and, throwing his rifle aside, choked him, and in the ferocious ecstasy of victory hurled his body fully ten yards down the hill. And as he did so, from his throat, hoarse with thirst and blood mania, rang that awful cry of triumph, 'With God!'"

How one is reminded of Shelley's words—"The name of God has fenced about all crime with holiness." When the savage is uppermost in man he is always most intensely pious.

"Bang! Bang!! Bang!!!" went three "crackers" let off last Sunday morning in Westminster Abbey. Many of the worshippers thought it was the day of judgment, or something nearly as bad. Some jumped over their seats and made for the north door; others left their umbrellas and Prayer Books and rushed into the middle of the church. They were dreadfully anxious to keep out of heaven. And they kept. It was only a "cracker" explosion, after all. The little treat had been arranged by a real or pretended Kensitite. A strip of cardboard attached to the crackers bore some words, amongst which the following were intelligible: "Vengeance for the death of Kensit—Lying Priesthood—Enemies of the People—Friends of the Brewers." The police are seeking for the author of this "fearful outrage."

General Booth repeats his statement about the "lapsed" masses. "Yes," he said to an interviewer quite recently, "there is more prosperity in the country, but I cannot say the people are more devout. There may be less open and blatant vice and ignorance, but the trend of things is away from creeds and churches." When the "General" talks truth and sense he is quite entertaining.

General Booth is pressing forward his old demand that the Salvation Army should be subvented by the State. Every religious sect on earth would, if it could, dip its hands in the public purse. What the "General" specifically asks for just now, according to a *Daily Chronicle* interviewer, is the "control of all social wreckage." This modest request

would involve several millions a year, and despotic powers over hundreds of thousands of "unfortunates" of both sexes. Why not make William Booth dictator of Great Britain at once?

The Grand Old Hustler of the Salvation Army wound up his motor-car tour at Aberdeen, where he informed an interviewer that he had been cheered all along the route by publicans and boozers, or, as he put it, the "occupants of their establishments." We suppose this gives the crowning touch to General Booth's respectability.

General Booth doesn't "think in continents" yet, but he thinks in figures. His way of showing the value of his Army is stating how many barracks, officers, and soldiers it has, etc., etc. No wonder, therefore, that at the reception given to him by the Corporation of Aberdeen he submitted the following statistics of his tour:—

No. of days spent	...	...	...	29
Miles covered by motor	...	...	...	1,224
No. of indoor meetings...	...	...	...	75
Congregations at indoor meetings—			estimated at	82,000
No. of open-air meetings	...	...	...	36
Civic receptions ...	...	...	...	48
Overflow meetings ...	...	...	...	53
Average length of General's speeches:				
Indoor, 1 hour 10 minutes.				
Outdoor, 15 minutes.				
Largest indoor attendance	...	...	...	3,000
Smallest indoor attendance	...	...	...	400
Largest outdoor attendance	...	...	...	15,000
Smallest outdoor attendance	...	...	...	300

One thing is wanted to complete this table: "Amount of good done—000,000."

James Thomson ("B. V."), the poet of Atheism in succession to Shelley, used to say that the churches would have to go in some day for smoking pews. It hasn't quite come to that yet, but we are making progress. Whitefield's Tabernacle, Tottenham-court-road, has a smoking service for young men on Sunday evening. At present it is held in the Toplady Hall beneath the Tabernacle proper; but smoke tends to go upward, and the congregation may follow suit. Meanwhile the young men "smoke to the glory of God" downstairs, and there does not seem any reason why ginger-beer and Kops' ale should not be introduced too. It may even come to "four half" in the future, for if the Church stoops to conquer it is silly not to stoop far enough.

There is a pier at Cowes, and some ungodly people want to have concerts upon it on Sunday evening. They only ask for "sacred music"—whatever that is; but the godly are not to be taken in so easily, for they recognise "sacred music" as the thin end of the wedge, the thick end being that awful thing "secular music." The Pier Committee is in favor of permitting these Sunday evening concerts. There is, however, the Council to deal with, and the Council says "No." Seven to three the voting was; so the question is closed for the present.

Mr. Snellgrove, a leading Nonconformist, and a member of the Cowes Council, told his colleagues that he held very decided opinions on the Sunday question. He said he would like to see the pier closed altogether on Sundays; indeed, he would rather see it swept away than that it should be used in violation of the holy Sabbath. We advise the local rate-payers to keep an eye on this gentleman. When he dies he should be stuffed and placed in a museum of antiquities. Not that we wish him to die in a hurry. Oh dear no. We hope he will live long enough to see Sunday concerts on the Cowes Pier.

An appeal from "the local religious bodies" has been received by the Llangollen Town Council, begging the local authorities to support a petition denouncing the recently-inaugurated Sunday motor service on the Great Western Railway connecting Llangollen with Wrexham. One Councillor advised the petitioners to start open-air services near the station. Another Councillor said that one protesting minister had been seen travelling by train on a preaching expedition. Finally it was resolved that the petition should lie upon the table. It ought to have been *under*.

According to the *Penang Gazette* there is a Mahatma in that city who beats Mrs. Besant, and even the late Madame Blavatsky, hollow. Report says that 12,000 silver arrows were thrust into his body; then he put on a pair of slippers spiked with iron, and walked to the New Kandaswamy Temple, accompanied by a crowd of people singing religious songs. Afterwards all the arrows were removed, and the Mahatma was none the worse for his wonderful perfor-

mance. Perhaps the Archbishop of Canterbury will try this trick on his return from America. It might silence the nasty folk who sneer at his riding about in Mr. Pierpont Morgan's private train.

Even a "free press" is not an unmitigated blessing. One is reminded of this by seeing a paper like the *Star* giving nearly a column to the doings of Pastor Howton, of Glossop, whose "speciality is the casting out of Demons." This sort of thing may have been all very well some nineteen hundred years ago in Palestine; it is out of date to-day in England.

The Mayor of Southend, if we are to believe the newspapers, has accepted a purely sectarian charity on behalf of the town. Mr. Thomas Dowsett, J.P., who was the first mayor of Southend, has presented a handsome block of eight almshouses for the use of aged residents *belonging to the local Free Churches*. The present mayor has accepted the gift officially, and thanked the donor on behalf of the residents. So says the report, but how the general body of "the residents" are interested in the gift passes our comprehension. Ex-mayor Dowsett's sectarian charity might have been all right if it had been kept private. When offered to and accepted by the present mayor on behalf of the town it is a public insult to all "the residents" who are excluded from its enjoyment. Any self-respecting Corporation would have declined such a gift—without thanks. The local Free Churches should administer local Free Church charity.

The Medway mission steamer *Oriel* nearly came to grief the other day. Her engines broke down half way between the Nore and the Girdler Lightships, and she drifted about at the mercy of the wind and tide. At one moment she was perilously near the Ooze sands, and the presence of the chaplain—the Rev. Richard Griffiths—did not in any way add to her safety. But just in the nick of time science, in the person of the engineer, put things right temporarily, and the little vessel steamed slowly back to harbor.

The men of God get into trouble just like other folk. The Rev. Joshua Foods, rector of Templetrine, near Bandon (Ireland), was drawing water for his horses from a well when he overbalanced himself and fell in. There was no angel to hold him up, and he was drowned.

The female tramp ward of the Hemel Hempstead Workhouse is believed to be haunted, and the females "on the road" give it the go by. Only one lady tramp has darkened its doors during the last six months. Several volunteers—some clerical, we suppose—have offered to "lay" the ghost, but the Guardians prefer the present economical arrangements.

The faith-healing movement in the Church of England, which we referred to recently, appears to be making headway. One of its leaders is said to be a good hand at casting out devils. He is also reported to weigh nineteen stone. Why doesn't he cast out some of his superfluous adipose tissue? Falstaffian proportions are shocking in an apostle of that emaciated figure on the Cross.

"Providence" made a bad mistake the other day in a thunderstorm at Besano, in Italy. Lightning struck a church on the Colle San Martino, and smashed a statue of the Madonna delle Grazie. "God" did not even recognise his own Mother.

Another illustration of the consoling and sustaining power of religion. Thomas Robinson, aged sixty-two, a stonemason, of Blyth, having been sick and long out of work, drowned himself in the sea. A letter found in his coat pocket said, "I hope God will forgive me for this rash act. I hope God will protect my poor sister." As though God had protected *him*!

Mr. John Hollingshead, the old theatrical manager, is described by an interviewer as "a self-confessed Agnostic." "Yet, strangely enough," we are told, "he continually talks about the 'goodness of God' and the Providence that has carried him through life." After some nonsensical talk about Darwin, whom he appears to have been "dipping into" for information as to the "beginning" and the "end" of things, of course without finding it, Mr. Hollingshead stated that none of these writers "impressed" him. Poor Darwin! What did impress him was Renan's *Life of Jesus*. "I have a little paper editien," he said, "of which I read little scraps whenever I have time." After making allowance for Mr. Hollingshead's age, we still

wonder why newspapers think it necessary to publish such utterances.

Friend, go up higher! is a welcome sound in the ears of the clergy. The vacancy caused by the death of the Bishop of Southwell is worth £3,500 a year. This is a nice plum for a preacher of "blessed be ye poor," and many longing looks are cast upon it. We hear it is likely to go to Dr. Gordon Lang, the Bishop of Stepney, who is said to possess a good voice and a good figure. These advantages, with the addition of an income of £269 4s. 7d. a month, ought to make him a general favorite—especially amongst the ladies.

St. Albans Gaol has the honor of holding a Passive Resister who bears the good old Nonconformist name of Ebenezer Housden. This gentleman is doing a month for refusing to pay 4s. 6d. A small sum, of course; but the size of the sum has nothing to do with the matter. The magistrates have to administer the law or clear off the bench. Besides, if any man is to be allowed to pay his rates and taxes, or not pay them, just as his "conscience" dictates, there will soon be crowds of "conscientious objectors."

Dr. Clifford rushes in with a fresh letter on this Ebenezer Housden case. He starts by virtually denying sincerity to all his opponents, and even to the magistrates. Then he explains why Ebenezer Housden has gone to gaol. It is "because he will not pay the cost of teaching England's children the doctrine of transubstantiation." Well now, let us inquire into Dr. Clifford's *sincerity*. He objects to Transubstantiation. But he does not object to the Trinity. Yet, as Byron said, a man who swallows the Trinity is very fastidious to kick at Transubstantiation. Our point, however, is this. Just as Dr. Clifford objects to Transubstantiation, so a Freethinker objects to the Trinity. Suppose, then, that Dr. Clifford were a magistrate, and a Freethinker were brought before him for refusing to pay rates, on the ground that his conscience would not allow him to pay for England's children being taught the doctrine of the Trinity—would he let that Freethinker off? If not, how can he be sincere himself in this Passive Resistance struggle? And how can he be fighting for a *principle*? It is the nature of a principle to cover all apposite cases. And if Dr. Clifford's "principle" does not cover the case of the Freethinker as well as that of the Nonconformist, it is not really a principle at all, but a mere policy of sectarian self-interest.

At Stafford the Passive Resisters were so disorderly in Court that the Chairman said: "We shall have to order the police to clear the court if this continues. This is not a bear garden, and we can't have you howling and making a noise." Gentle Jesuites!

Passive Resisters are up to a new game. Before facing the magistrates they hold a prayer meeting, and a protest meeting afterwards. As the latter is, of course, arranged beforehand, the Passive Resisters know what is coming. What then is the object of the prayer meeting? Evidently not to ask for divine assistance. We take it to be a part of the politico-ecclesiastical game they are playing against the Church of England.

Having appeared before the magistrates as a Passive Resister, the Rev. Dr. Horton went through the miserable farce of gravely explaining to his congregation (who knew all about it, both beforehand and from the newspaper reports) why he had appeared in a police-court dock. He told them that he had obeyed a higher law than the law of the land; which is very pretty talk in a church, but not of much value outside. "Do you realise," Dr. Horton said, "that wherever the Roman Catholics can collect thirty children and build a school, they can now be permanently supported out of public money?" Well, whose fault is that? We say it is entirely the fault of the Nonconformists. It is they, and they alone, who are responsible for thrusting religious teaching into the State-supported schools, and they are logically responsible for all its consequences. We quite sympathise with the Catholics as against the Nonconformists in this matter. As long as religious teaching obtains in State-supported schools the Catholics are perfectly right in trying to secure what they regard as the proper quality for their own children. To expect them to do otherwise is simply idiotic.

This same Dr. Horton—who, by the way, once suggested that Atheists ought to be shifted off this planet—has been positively drivelling in the Introduction to *The Open Secret: a Manual of Devotion*, which he wrote while his bad eyes prevented him from doing his usual work. The reverend gentleman soon saw that his illness was providential. "God," he says, "had in it some deep design." Fancy the omnipotent and omniscient ruler of this infinite universe

having some "deep design" to carry out through the damaged optics of a poor little worm of the dust who preaches to other poor little worms of the dust on a little spot of this little earth, which is relatively but as a grain of sand on a measureless seashore! And what was this deep design? Why, that Dr. Horton should write a book. Wonderful! God never took all that trouble over Shakespeare, but he took it with this Hampstead exhorter, who has the calm "face" to say, "I could hardly have been more clearly directed if I had heard a voice from Heaven saying 'write.'" Nay, he goes still farther; he has the blasphemous impudence to say that the book is "not his, but God's." A man who says that will say anything. We shall hear him talking of "me and God" next.

Dr. Horton probably thinks himself much superior to Mrs. Ann Daly, of Peabody-buildings, St. Luke's, but he seems to be just on her intellectual level. Her husband said something nasty in an altercation, and immediately fell unconscious into her arms, and she told the coroner that she "thought the hand of God had struck him." But it was not a "judgment." It was a case of apoplexy. Neither is Dr. Horton's book an "inspiration." It is a human manufacture.

Freethinkers should note how the Passive Resisters have lately sailed off on a fresh tack. Dr. Horton's talk about Romish doctrines is repeated by the Rev. F. B. Meyer—who actually went and rented a house in order that he might be summoned, which is seeking trouble and courting martyrdom. Mr. Meyer was allowed to make a statement before the Lambeth Magistrates, and in doing so he said that "Their main reason for refusing was that in many of these schools Romish doctrines were taught daily and without ambiguity." This is simply a new form of the old "No Popery" cry. The object, of course, is to stir up all the latent antagonism to Rome, in order that the Free Churches may figure as the true-blue Protestant party. A trick! a palpable trick! And we believe it will fail.

When it comes to Romish doctrines, one is bound to ask whether there are really any Protestant doctrines which were not derived from the old Church of St. Peter. Protestantism, after all, only differs from Catholicism as less differs from more. Protestantism is not a better religion than Catholicism except as there is less of it. Moreover, when Romish doctrines are made the chief ground of dispute in this Education quarrel, it is obvious that the Nonconformists are not fighting a citizens' battle. They are clearly fighting a sectarian battle. For they are willing to pay for the teaching of religious doctrines that they approve in the nation's schools; their objection being solely to the teaching of religious doctrines that they do not approve. In other words, as we have said before, they are struggling for the control by their own party of the religious education in all the State-supported schools in England.

Rev. J. H. Jowett, of Birmingham, another Passive Resister, was also allowed to make a statement in Court. Amongst other things he is reported to have said this:—

"They believed that there were sanctities in the individual life which no legislation had a right to invade. They believed that this Education Act had violated those sanctities, because the rate which they refused to pay was to be used for purposes of which their consciences did not approve. They, therefore, had no option but to decline to pay the rate, and to passively allow the law to take payment by force."

Some day or other, if the Nonconformists succeed in upsetting the present Education Act, Mr. Jowett will find this a very inconvenient utterance. It will be quoted against him and his friends when Churchmen refuse to pay what they will call a Nonconformist rate. And if it is now wrong to send Nonconformists to prison, how will it then be right to send Churchmen to prison? Nor is this all. It is conceivable that some Birmingham Freethinker may refuse to pay the Education rate, if only in order to see what the Nonconformists would say and do in the circumstances; and he would be able to cite Mr. Jowett (a local Free Church leader) as his authority for the principle that it is forcing a man's conscience to try to make him pay for teaching which he disapproves. And what a pretty mess the Rev. J. H. Jowett would be in then!

According to the *Daily News* "there can be only one end" to the Passive Resistance movement, and that is "the abolition of sectarian tests and the establishment of unrestricted popular control." The first half of this prophecy is hypocritical. Nonconformists are not fighting for the abolition of sectarian tests. They know very well—unless they are absolute imbeciles—that there cannot be religious teaching without sectarian tests; and as they uphold the religious teaching they necessarily uphold the sectarian tests too.

Who wills the end wills the means. We know it may be replied that religious tests and sectarian tests are two different things. But this is only another piece of hypocrisy. As the world goes, and is likely to go, all religious teaching is sectarian, and every religious test is inevitably sectarian. The object of a test is to find out whether the person concerned belongs to a particular persuasion. This involves at least two sects—the one applying the test and the one to which the person who is tested may happen to belong. And as he may belong to any one of a hundred or more, there is enough sectarianism in the case to keep a whole community in perpetual hot water.

The *Daily News* talks utter nonsense when it says that the Passive Resisters "seek to preserve religious liberty and equality." In this case *liberty* and *equality* mean the very same thing. And how are the Free Churches seeking it? They have deliberately turned their backs upon Secular Education, which is the only plan that gives absolute equality, and therefore absolute liberty, to citizens of every variety of religious opinion. What they want is an equality of opportunity amongst the principal Christian Churches, who are to unite for the purpose of robbing and oppressing all non-Christians. This is the plain truth of the matter, and the Dissenters know it; otherwise they would reply to the challenge of the Secular Educationists.

Amongst the speakers at the various meetings of the approaching Church Congress at Liverpool are the sedate and philosophical Mr. G. K. Chesterton, and General Sir Charles Warren, the brilliant hero of Spion Kop. What a treat!

Judges, being such absolute masters in their own courts, and especially county-court judges, are apt to give way to the common temptation to talk nonsense. In a metropolitan county-court recently the judge flared up at a judgment-debtor for wearing gold spectacles, which his honor seemed to consider as a sort of guarantee of ready cash. As the debtor had seen better days, it should have occurred to the judge that the spectacles might have been bought under happier financial conditions. After all, it turned out that the peccant spectacles were not gold, but merely an imitation. As two periods of 21 days' imprisonment were ordered in this case, it is shocking to think what trivial prejudices on the bench may decide the fate of perhaps as honorable persons in the court. Altogether it is absurd, in a so-called free country, to give one man the absolute power of imprisoning another. No man ought to be imprisoned without being charged with a criminal offence, and tried and sentenced in a legitimate manner. Monstrous outrages on common justice, and even on common decency, take place every day in county-courts; and the insolence of the officials to litigants who do not employ solicitors is beyond all description. There are thousands of people imprisoned as debtors, although imprisonment for debt has been abolished by law; and this very fact is enough to set the dullest heads thinking.

How these judges, all of them good Christians, put on the black cap, as it were, when a debtor who has not paid is brought before them. Not very long ago we heard a debtor brow-beaten in the most disgusting manner by the plaintiff's solicitor, with the connivance of the judge, who knew well enough that every question put to the unfortunate man was perfectly out of order. The man had lost his situation, and was obviously unable to pay £2 per month just then; and that was the only point for consideration. But the plaintiff's solicitor started an examination of the man's past life. At last he asked him, "Were you not turned out of your situation for robbing your employer?" This outrageous question evoked a general "Oh!" from the people in court, and that "Oh!" brought the judge back to his senses. In a hesitating, apologetic kind of way, he "thought he ought not to listen to this any farther." He ought not to have listened to it at all.

On another occasion we heard a judge give ten days to a bricklayer, who would have to be dragged away from his wife and family. The man's offence was really going to work instead of losing a day at the court. Immediately afterwards, in the case of an absent debtor with a salary of £5 a week and commission, the judge observed that persons with such incomes often had appearances to keep up, and he adjourned the case for better proof of "means."

It is no use looking to Christianity for any reform in these matters. It is the biggest pretender in the world; never doing anything unless it is forced to, and claiming the credit of every improvement that takes place in spite of it.



**Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.**

September 18 to 25, International Freethought Congress, Rome.  
 October 2, Queen's Hall, London; 9, Queen's Hall; 16, Glasgow; 23, Leicester; 30, Birmingham.  
 November 6, Coventry; 20, Manchester; 27, Liverpool.

**To Correspondents.**

C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.—October 2, Manchester; 30, Queen's Hall; November 6, Glasgow; 20, Coventry.

H. HOYE.—Always glad to receive cuttings.

JOHN HUME.—We hope the Rome Congress will realise all your good wishes.

E. POMEROY.—Thanks for the little book, which we will look through, we daresay with profit. We are satisfied, already, that the whole question of national education needs reviewing.

N. D.—Thanks for the paper, though we cannot deal with it this week; also for your letter and good wishes. The subscription is duly acknowledged elsewhere.

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

F. L. G.—All right. Better late than never.

ROME CONGRESS FUND.—Previously acknowledged, £86 19s. 6d. Received this week:—J. W. Lawrence 10s., Alfred Cooper 5s., F. L. G. 5s., Mrs. James Alward £2 2s., Mrs. and Mr. G. L. Alward £2 2s., Grimsby Freethought Friends 16s., Mrs. A. Forrer 8s., G. Wenborn 2s. 8d., Four Hetton-le-Hole Freethinkers 10s., E. L. K. 1s., E. Self 2s., J. Stevens 1s. 6d., T. J. Thurlow 2s., P. Rowland 10s., A. J. Wilkins 1s., J. Hannan 1s., R. H. Sewell 1s. 6d., J. Charter 2s. 6d., Anon 6d., Mrs. Siger 1s., X. Y. Z. 1s., T. H. Elstob 2s. 6d., S. Burgon 5s., Well-Wisher 5s., Disciple 1s., E. Simpson 1s. 6d., E. D. 1s. 4d., W. Wilson 2s. 6d., M. Cohen £1 1s., J. Ramsden 5s.

G. L. ALWARD.—Many thanks for your kind letter. It does us good to hear from old friends. Kindly convey our best regards to "brother James's" widow. We should be very glad to see you all at Grimsby again. The survivors, we mean; for some of the old familiar faces are now but a memory.

W. A. VAUGHAN.—Pleased to hear of your success so far in bringing together the Freethinkers at Balham and district. Twenty-two is a respectable number to begin with. We wish all success to the Freethought lectures on Clapham Common, and are glad to know that Freethought literature is in such good demand. We shall be writing you further in a few days.

A. J. WILKINS.—See acknowledgment in list. The other remittance is passed over to the proper hands. Many thanks for the cutting, which we had not seen.

T. H. ELSTOB.—Thanks. Acknowledgments in this week's list.

J. G. STUART.—Glad to see you are going on with the fight. Your letters will do good. Thanks for the kind things you say of us.

T. ROBERTSON.—We also look forward to seeing you in October.

S. BURGON.—It is good of you to send a second subscription. We will act as far as possible on your advice to "take care of ourselves."

T. E.—We assume that you desired acknowledgment as a "Well Wisher."

BIRMINGHAM SAINT.—Rather an Irish "Rebecca."

H. SILVERSTEIN.—No apology is needed. We were glad to shake hands with the two Cardiff friends (Messrs. Parry and Hurcam), and only sorry that having to catch our last train home debarred us from a longer chat with them. It is pleasant to know that they felt amply compensated for coming so far to hear us.

W. P. PEARSON.—Very sorry to hear of your disappointment on Sunday. You ought to have had longer notice. Thanks are certainly due to Mr. Hammond for stepping into the breach so readily in the evening.

W. P. JACOBS.—We believe the book is only procurable second-hand now.

W. S. CURRIE.—Very glad to hear from "an ex-Salvationist who never knew what true happiness was until he fell in with the 'infidels.'"

G. L. MACKENZIE.—Letter unavoidably stands over till next week.

E. D.—That the Stratford Town Hall lectures introduced you to the *Freethinker* is a proof of their utility.

J. HANKS.—Our trouble with Smith and Sons is an old one. Having a monopoly, they should place the public convenience above their own prejudices.

W. WILSON.—Glad to have such an old veteran's letter. Your memory goes back to the earliest days of organised Freethought propaganda. It is encouraging to hear that you are "delighted" with *Bible Romances*.

THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street Farringdon-street, E.C.

THE National Secular Society's 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.

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**Sugar Plums.**

By the time this week's *Freethinker* is in the hands of its latest readers the National Secular Society's contingent of delegates and honorary delegates will be on their way to Rome; not to join the Church, but to take part in the great International Freethought Congress. They start on Saturday morning (Sept. 17) at 10 o'clock from Victoria Station, travelling to Paris by arrangement with Cook's agency, and from Paris to Rome by the special train conveying the French Freethinkers to the Eternal City. The N. S. S. party will arrive at Paris on Saturday evening, and will spend the night there—which will be a very welcome break in the journey. The special train from Paris starts at 2 p.m. on Sunday from the Gare de Lyon, and should arrive at Rome on Monday evening. The Congress opens on Tuesday morning.

Mr. Foote being away next week, and Messrs. Cohen and Lloyd with him, the *Freethinker* will be got ready as far as possible before he leaves London. Branch secretaries will please note that *all lecture notices* must be sent for that week to *Miss Vance*. Letters addressed to Mr. Foote will not be opened until he returns from Rome.

There was a crowded audience at the fine Stratford Town Hall on Sunday evening, and Mr. Foote's lecture on "What do we Know of God?" was highly appreciated and enthusiastically applauded, whilst his humorous sallies excited so much laughter that time had to be allowed occasionally for the meeting to recover its equilibrium. Loud cheers greeted Mr. Foote's statement that wherever Freethought could obtain the use of public halls, like other causes, it was able to attract audiences which lots of Christian exhorters would very much like to get; and perhaps that is the reason why there is generally so much bigoted opposition to the granting of public halls to Freethought societies. One gratifying feature of the Stratford Town Hall meeting on Sunday was the presence of many ladies, several of whom were obviously following the lecture with great alertness and sympathy. Here and there mothers had brought children with them—which is another encouraging sign. Thirty years ago Freethought audiences consisted mostly of men—and elderly at that; by-and-by younger men came along, then ladies began to grace the meetings with their welcome presence, and now they begin to bring the children in. This is *real* progress. When we get a good hold on the women we shall also get a good hold on the children. And the clergy know it. That is why they do their best (or worst) to shut Freethinkers out of "respectable" meeting-places. While we are writing we have correspondence lying on our desk about a dastardly attempt to shut Freethinkers out of a certain fine hall in the provinces, simply because they got first-rate audiences there. If this dastardly attempt succeeds we shall have to give the matter full publicity in the *Freethinker*—and, if possible, elsewhere.

*Reynolds's Newspaper* gave the following notice of a book which all Freethinkers should do their very best to circulate:—"Mr. G. W. Foote, chairman of the Secular Society, is well known as a man of exceptional ability. His *Bible Romances* have had a large sale in the original edition. A popular, revised, and enlarged edition, at the price of 6d., has now been published by the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, London, for the Secular Society. Thus, within the reach of almost everyone, the ripest thought of the leaders of modern opinion are being placed from day to day."

The Glasgow Branch of the National Secular Society sends us a copy of its annual report and balance-sheet. Branches in other parts of Great Britain should send for copies to the corresponding secretary, Mr. T. Robertson, 1 Battlefield-crescent, Langside, Glasgow. Some of them

would benefit by reading it, and seeing what they could do to produce one like it. It is, indeed, a most fascinating document. It is a brave record of work done, both indoors and outdoors, including the circulation of a vast quantity of Freethought literature. The Branch has put by nearly £200 as an Endowment Fund, which will be added to as far as possible, with a view to building a Secular Hall when a suitable opportunity occurs. Three cheers for Glasgow!

The *Blackburn Times* of last Saturday (Sept. 10) contained a friendly and eulogistic notice of the late John Umpleby. We have much pleasure in quoting the following passage:—

"An ardent Liberal, he was to be found at almost any hour of the day in the Blackburn Reform Club, where he did much reading. Although in his 90th year, he had excellent eyesight, and read the smallest print without the aid of glasses. A staunch teetotaler, he was a subscriber to the work of Mrs. Lewis's Mission, and about two years ago addressed a meeting at Lees Hall. He possessed an extensive knowledge of many subjects, was extremely well-read, and took a keen interest in natural history and botany. He was a man of original ideas, and his conversation was invariably interesting, although his opinions did not always carry conviction. Unfortunately, however, his deafness made an interchange of views a matter of some difficulty. He was of a somewhat retiring nature, and disliked publicity. Of a generous disposition, he extended his sympathy freely to all deserving objects in an unostentatious and practical manner."

Justice is also done to Mr. Umpleby's long devotion to the Freethought cause.

We have received another welcome letter from our gallant old friend and colleague, Mr. Joseph Symes. He sends us with it a note for the *Freethinker*, which appears in another column. Our readers will be interested in the following extract from Mr. Symes's letter:—"I see you have a splendid staff of helpers, and should be sorry to occupy your space to the exclusion of fresher matter from younger men, but I may find time for a note now and then, and if I send it on do as you please with it. I am now enjoying the first mental holiday I have had for over a quarter of a century, and am working like a nigger every day helping a good carpenter to build me a house. To-day I am taking it easy owing to a bit of rheumatism in my right shoulder. Otherwise I and mine are well, as I hope you and yours are. P.S.—Until I get my farm in trim, I see no possibility of a trip to England. Still, *nil desperandum!*"

Dr. Moncure D. Conway left New York on August 15. After a brief stay at Paris, where he has many friends, he was to go on to Rome, where he will represent American Freethinkers at the International Freethought Congress. Dr. Conway has completed his Autobiography, which will be published this autumn in America and England.

*Dana*, the little monthly organ of a party of independent thinkers in Ireland, has already been introduced to our readers' attention. The September number opens with an anonymous, plain-spoken article on "Physical Force in Literature," the writer of which protests against the temper of Irish controversy. "Everything is howled down here," he says, "except a facile orthodoxy." "The life of a country," he adds later on, "is in its heretics, its doubters of all accepted faiths and formulas, who have yet faith in an ideal. Without such, a country becomes a dead sea of humanity. It may be that the doubters will find the old faiths best after all; but if they do they will have gained their spirit and their everlasting life, and will be masters in the guild. But it is useless pointing out the long generations who have had such hopes and such beliefs. The authority of twenty centuries is no excuse for a man laying aside the exercise of his reason." Even stronger speaking to the same effect may be read in Mr. Frederick Ryan's article on "Criticism and Courage." We hope *Dana* is finding a fair circle of readers. It is bound to do good if it can only get a hearing. English readers can obtain it from the London publisher, David Nutt, 57-59 Long-acre, W.C. The price is sixpence net.

Last week's *Athenæum* reviewed Canon Henson's new book on *The Value of the Bible*, and concluded with a striking sentence. With regard to the religious question, which is not at all bound up with ritual controversies, our contemporary says: "It will tax all the intellect and piety of the Church of England to extract from the present distress the seeds of future triumph, or even to save her from overwhelming defeat at the hands of the cultivated classes."

## Evangelistic Methods.

If the distribution of tracts, street-corner preaching, and peripatetic evangelism in general could effect any permanent improvement in the morals of the people, or indeed achieve any ethical result at all comparable with the amount of time, money, and energy expended, many of our large cities should be well on the way towards a realisation of the Millennium. Some urban districts are favored with a systematic delivery of tracts (the writer receives two every Sunday with automatic regularity), and the zeal displayed in this class of work by well-meaning persons is frequently worthy of a more useful cause. The locality which we favor residentially is subjected to an intermittent bombardment by several detachments of the ubiquitous *Salvation Army*. The open-air performance of these religious mountebanks is really an exhibition of sheer mental atavism. The tambourine, cymbal, and big drum method of worship irresistibly recall the frantic gyrations of the primitive savage around his medicine-man to the insprising accompaniment of the tom-tom.

We have no objection to these street-corner enthusiasts "finding Jesus" if they would not make such a fuss about it, and if they would only keep a hold of him when they *do* find him. As a rule, those who suddenly find the Lord at a revival meeting lose him again with equal rapidity. There are so many people who mistake a purely temporary and evanescent revulsion of feeling for remorse of conscience and repentance that is going to last. Just as men of a certain type of character rush to "take the pledge" after each bout of intemperance in the fond delusion that they have taken a final step, so many persons imagine they have "found salvation" when they are really only experiencing a natural reaction after a course of vicious living. Usually a counter-action sets in, and the common sequence to a conversion of the above variety is the return of the penitent with renewed zest to his former mode of life.

During the time of a "Mission" we have seen, in this city of Glasgow, the Roman Catholic Churches crowded to the door with frightened sinners of either sex and all ages. So great is the pressure on such occasions that kneeling accommodation is at a premium. A closely packed mass of humanity hangs upon the eloquence of the preacher, who plays upon the supernatural terrors of his auditors and skilfully runs up and down the entire gamut of human emotions. The people sing, "All our sins we now detest them; never will we sin again." And they mean it! But it wears off. Visit that church about a fortnight later and you will have little difficulty in securing a seat.

No one could be more anxious to conserve freedom of speech and the right of public meeting than we are, but there are obvious limits to human forbearance, and we think the Salvationists overstep them. There is absolutely no escape from these howling evangelists of the causeway. In every quarter of our cities the air is made hideous and the peace of the neighborhood disturbed by the raucous vociferations and the discordant trumpeting of the apostles of "blood and fire." And if you flee to coast or country they are there also. The extent of the nuisance is added to by the more orthodox religious bodies, who have of late years been imitating the noisy methods of the Salvation Army as closely as they dare. And the effect of it all is, we should think, not at all likely to edify any sensible person within hearing distance. It seems scarcely calculated to induce a religious frame of mind in any listener. But one never knows. So many things pass under the name of religion. And nervous excitement is one of them.

As for the tracts and leaflets so profusely circulated by the various missionary agencies, it is pretty generally recognised what sorry stuff they are composed of. In the whole realm of literature it would be impossible to parallel the productions of the innumerable societies for the propagation of the Christian delusion. For pure inanity and fatuity they

are unapproachable. It should be added, however, in justice to the writers and publishers of tractarian rubbish, that the average "tract" merely exhibits in aggravated form certain characteristics which it possesses in common with much more pretentious religious literature. The present writer can truthfully assert that the miserable apology for argument served up by the religious press, and the glaring evasion of the real difficulties of the case displayed by religious defenders generally, had no small share in opening his eyes to the actual hollowness of the Christian position. But meantime let us return to the tracts.

The most striking quality attaching to such tracts as are by way of being of a biographical nature is the atmosphere of unctuous rectitude and unblushing egotism that pervades them. This is none the less obvious that the writers are usually profuse in their expression of self-depreciation. We are all familiar with the pride that apes humility. It deceives no one; and if all stories are true His Satanic Majesty chuckles in unholy glee at its every manifestation. Ostentatious humility is a well-known product of religion, and the Uriah Heep type of character seems in no danger of becoming extinct. Whenever we hear a man proclaiming at a street corner to a ring of auditors, "Dear friends, I was once a great sinner, but thanks be to God I am saved to-night," and proceeding to expatiate upon the enormity of his misdeeds prior to his conversion, it always sounds to us as if he were prouder of the wickedness of his former life than of the reformation he has achieved in himself. And when this sort of thing is reproduced in cold type its effect must be even more nauseating on the intelligent reader.

It seems a pity that some people should be so anxious about their eternal salvation. For the souls of some individuals we come in contact with are so miserably small (if they have any) as to appear scarcely worth much anxiety. Mr. A. B. Munro, Chairman of the Glasgow Christian Workers' Union, evidently worried himself at a very early age regarding where he should spend eternity. In a leaflet which is now before us he tells us that, although "not yet *nine* years of age," he went regularly to the revival meetings, and was "in concern about salvation." According to his own statement, the preaching was largely taken up with the thoughts of hell and the eternal torment of the lost. We can therefore imagine what a beautiful childhood Mr. Munro must have spent. However, as he grew older the impression passed away, and it was the sudden death of a cousin in a railway accident in later life that recalled his attention to the next world and made him anxious "to reform and become religious." This killing of his cousin was doubtless a most fortunate interposition of Providence on Mr. Munro's behalf, but we would like to know the cousin's view of the matter.

The complacent egotism with which the worthy Munro gives his testimony is enough to raise the gorge of anyone. We take the liberty of quoting a somewhat lengthy passage, as it beats anything we have come across in this line for some time past. As a piece of unblushing self-laudation it deserves to be immortalised:—

"I now entered heartily into Christian work, became a Sabbath-school teacher, and gave much time and thought to the work, visited slum districts, and prevailed upon parents to send their children to the school. I attended regularly the church prayer-meeting, and cultivated the gift of prayer, stored my mind with portions of Scripture, so that in prayer I might have liberty and fulness. I attended the Young Men's Literary Society, and soon became chairman. I was so zealous for good works that I spent much time in various departments of church work with whole-hearted devotion, and I gave periods to private prayer with intense earnestness."

Every line of the above reeks of the most disgusting egotism, and there is more of a similar kind. The man writes condescendingly regarding his own father and brother; but what of that when he even adopts a patronising tone towards his God! To

judge from his pamphlet Mr. Munro evidently considers that Christ is greatly indebted to him for his many services in the cause of the Lord. This Christian gentleman appears—in true Pharisaical fashion—to keep an accurately detailed record of his multifarious good works. He has "witnessed for Christ" all over "Scotland, England, Ireland, the United States of America, and in Western Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales." We wonder what would have become of Christ's cause if only Mr. Munro had been killed in that railway collision instead of his cousin! At any rate, our worthy evangelist must have had some very pleasant trips and seen a great deal of *this* world in his day. Doubtless, when he goes upstairs by-and-by, he will present himself for his crown of reward with the same self-satisfied air of assurance he displays in his tract. How sad if he should be disappointed!

Another artless little leaflet that has been handed us professes to set forth *Man's Questions and God's Answers*. The questions are there all right, and some of them ticklish enough—"Is there a God?" for instance, and "Am I accountable to Him?" But when we find that every question on the list is answered by a quotation from the Bible we can scarcely regard the matter as finally settled. Not even the closing assertion of the compiler of God's answers, that "These are the true sayings of God," will suffice to convince us. For the man who imagines that the Bible is an authority or an infallible court of appeal on any subject whatever has a tremendous deal to learn.

The candid Christian of any intellectual standing must experience a feeling of dismay when he contemplates the utter imbecility that characterises the bulk of missionary literature. And when we reflect that it is all issued for an ostensibly moral purpose we are but the more deeply impressed with a sense of the influence for evil which a great part of it must exercise. In demonstration of the demoralising tendency to which we allude, it is only necessary to quote a passage from a precious production called *Seeds of Truth* which has been handed to us lately. The reader is assured that "he may be a religious man or a worldly man; he may belong to no Good Templar Lodge nor teetotal society; he may be a drunkard, swearer, wife-beater, and everything bad; but if he will believe in Christ that is enough—all God seeks from the sinner for salvation." We have no hesitation in asserting that such teaching as this is immoral, using the word immoral in its true sense. There is not the slightest suggestion made that any amendment of life or reformation of character is even commendable on the part of the sinner, far less demanded from him in return for this priceless boon of salvation. *Believe in Christ* and you are saved! "It is not how much sin a man commits, but his rejecting Christ" that merits eternal damnation.

The deleterious effect of such teaching as the above can scarcely be over-estimated. The matter assumes a more serious aspect when we remember that the class of literature we are dealing with is very largely circulated amongst people with undeveloped or only partially developed minds—people who are incapable of realising its pernicious nature. We have ourselves met individuals leading the grossest of lives who were, nevertheless, calmly confident in their "faith" as to their eternal welfare. They had nothing to concern themselves about. Their salvation had been already purchased. The "Good Book" was their surety for that. However enormous their misdeeds might be, the Blood of Christ would blot them all out.

Such is the condition of mind of many nominal Christians. Surely we are warranted in describing it as an *immoral* condition of mind. And that such a mental state is induced and encouraged by certain evangelistic methods and tract literature of a peculiar character seems indubitable. The amusing phase of the matter is that, in all probability, every zealous manufacturer and disseminator of the trash we have censured is thoroughly convinced that *Atheism* and *immorality* are convertible terms.

G. SCOTT.

## The "Association" Sermon: Science to Help Religion.

THE heading above is copied from the *Manchester Guardian* of Monday, August 22, 1904. The sermon was preached at Great St. Mary's, Cambridge, by Professor Bonney. A professor of geology preaching to a congregation of scientists makes one wonder at the influence religion still has on many minds, and the power it has to warp the intelligence of really able men. It is difficult to know which is the greatest farce—a scientist preaching religion, or scientists crowding to a church to hear a sermon. Both are farcical enough to make a good pantomime.

Why should the Church, that is to say, the priests, who really are the Church, show so much anxiety to get a smile from Science, wherever and whenever scientists meet? Are they afraid of science? They well may be. Are they conscious that science is undermining their fortifications? Science is doing that whether they know it or not. And yet how patronisingly they speak, and with what superior air they censure, counsel, and teach the erring scientist. Sometimes they talk like elderly parents to children. They assume an air of know-all infallibility, addressing ignorant erring men, telling them what to believe, what to disbelieve, what to do, and how to do it.

Why should the clergy, in their priestly character, meddle as they do with science and scientists at every opportunity? As men and citizens they have the same right as all other students, and their presence and support would be welcomed. But as clericals it would look better on their part to mind their own business in the churches and chapels. If Freethinkers and scientists were to make a point of visiting towns and localities where Christians hold their conferences and anniversaries, to preach their doctrines and lecture the clergy and the churches, what would the reverend gentlemen think of them and say about them? Such a proceeding on their part would be quite as becoming as the meddling of the clergy with science and her teachers.

What a change has come over the Church! For nearly two thousand years the Church has been a bitter and implacable foe of science. Persecution of Rationalists never ceased. The martyrs of Freethought are counted by thousands. During all those centuries the Church never sought for help from science. On the contrary, the Church by the help of the State did all it could to crush science and prevent its rise. But in spite of Church and State science has triumphed, and a small section of Christians implore scientists to help religion.

Only a small section of the Church seek for the friendship of science. The bulk of the priests and members cannot conceal their hostilities. Freethinkers are still persecuted and punished for their unbelief. The heroes of Freethought are slandered most scandalously. Barefaced lies are invented to traduce and destroy the characters of the living and the dead. Even the advanced few cannot conceal their innate desire to belittle and misrepresent the unbeliever, as recent addresses clearly show.

Why should religion seek help from science? Why not call on religion to help science? If science is so fallible and imperfect as priests declare it is, and religion is so perfect and infallible, would it not be more rational to offer help to science than to seek help from it? But science does not want the help of religion, and religion has no help to give. The anxiety of the Church to obtain the patronage of science shows that it is conscious that religion and science are in deadly conflict, notwithstanding that Christian apologists declare there is no disagreement between them.

Why should religion want help from science or anything else? If it is from God and contains the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, why should it fear and tremble and cry for help from

those it used to despise and persecute? If the doctrines of religion are true they ought to be impregnable, and its defenders should not dread an assault from any quarter. Science wants no help but the help of reason to find out truth by inquiry, research, investigation, and study. It has no dogmas to uphold against facts. It is ever ready to drop any opinion, theory or supposed knowledge as soon as new discoveries prove them to be erroneous. It has no vested or any other interest to defend and spread any teaching a moment longer than the teaching is supported by reason, evidence, and facts. Scientists are free to accept truth from all sources and quarters, and free to express all they learn, discover, and think, without any fear of being excommunicated and ostracised in consequence. Till the Church has the same freedom, its cry for help from science is ridiculous and undeserving of any notice.

What is it that science is asked to help? It is called religion, but what does the word mean? Apologists seldom define their terms, and are always chary to tell exactly what they mean. We have to guess mostly what they are driving at. If the word "religion" means truth, progress, improvement, efficiency, knowledge, and means to increase the wealth and comfort of the people, science is always and fully helping religion. All the improved appliances in the arts, crafts, and professions are the results of applied science. Railways and steamships, telegraphs, telephones, and wireless telegraphy, photography, and all the wonderful discoveries in electricity and other things are all helps to man to live better and more comfortable. Science helps everything that is good and desirable. But what has religion and the Church done for man here in this world? Nothing, is the only true answer to the question. Throughout the centuries the Church has supported the oppressors, aggrandised itself, and left the masses in ignorance, poverty, and misery.

But help to increase knowledge, to improve conditions, to uplift the masses, to abolish the poverty and misery of the world, is not the help from science desired by the churches. Professor Bonney said: "The Gospel message to the student of philosophy and science of the twentieth century was not so very different from that which Paul proclaimed to their predecessors at Athens—Jesus and the Resurrection." "Let those Christians who are not afraid of a wider study of either this world or the mysteries of the universe now seek an alliance, which they have too long repudiated, and call in their turn, as well they may, to fellow workers in science, come over and help us." Evidently the Church want Science to say there is no conflict between science and theology; that the dogmas of religion are true; that the Church is a divine institution; and that the priests are students and teachers of true knowledge like the philosophers and scientists.

What the Church, that is to say, the priests, of all sects wants is the support of science to priestcraft. They feel that their vested interest in supernaturalism is in danger from the teaching of science; they are conscious of their weakness and inability to defend their doctrines or emoluments, and they want the giants of science to come to the front to give them character, and testify they are all right, and good fellows, preaching the truths of religion, which is in perfect agreement with Science. History is repeating itself. The commotion in the Church today is a similar disturbance to that caused by Demetrius in Ephesus, and is produced by the same motive, though under another name. "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," said they of old. "Great is Jesus of the Christians," shout the priests, their dupes and abettors to-day. Turn to the nineteenth chapter of Acts, and by substituting Jesus for Diana and the priest for the silversmith, you can read an account of what is taking place now in all Christian countries.

What nonsense even professors talk when trying to defend the indefensible. There are, it seems, Christians who are not afraid to study the mysteries of the universe. In one sense, there is nothing

strange in that, as all the stock-in-trade of priestcraft is mysteries. But to study the unknown is impossible. Science deals with what can be verified. It may try to discover the unknown, but to study it is not possible till found.

Science cannot help religion in a theological sense. Scientists under the influence of religion, which they are unable to throw off, may weave doubtful phrases in its favor, which a few of them do, to their own discredit and the injury of science. On the other hand a few, sadly too few, are courageous enough to speak out boldly and firmly, and tell the Church and others that science proves that theology is nothing but superstition and delusion, which science must destroy. But for some reason or other the majority of scientists are silent on the question of religion, and that gives an opportunity to the clergy to declare that Science is with them. The silence of scientists retards the progress of knowledge and helps to spread and perpetuate superstition.

In the interest of science itself and the welfare of men at large, scientists ought to speak out. They cannot support supernaturalism without discredit to themselves and an injury to society. The only real help science can give to religion is a help to destroy it, to make room for something better and nobler. Religion is a decoy to catch the masses to serve and support the priests. There is no greater curse in the world than priestcraft. It is a huge nightmare on the vitals of the people. The people can never stand upright and manly with such a dead weight on their backs. As idle parasites whom the toilers have to feed, clothe, and house, priests of every kind are a ruinous encumbrance. But as supporters and propagators of errors and superstitions they are a universal curse which scientists and all others ought to unite to destroy. There cannot be a happy world for all till the landlord and the priest are abolished, and science occupies the place now filled by superstitious religion.

R. J. DERFEL.

### Obituary.

WE have to record the death of Mr. John Umpleby, of Blackburn, a veteran Freethinker and one of the National Secular Society's vice-presidents. Mr. Umpleby was a familiar and welcome figure at N. S. S. Conferences until his great age rendered his attendance impossible. He was a very straightforward and courageous man, with a rich vein of sly humor. His attachment to the Freethought cause was profound and sincere. Regret is out of the question in the circumstances, yet our fine old friend will be missed, for his absence causes a peculiar vacancy. Mr. Umpleby was in his ninetieth year, and death came to him rather as a friend than as an enemy. The last letter he wrote us, not many months ago, showed his great feebleness, but his love of Freethought only went out with his life. When the end came it was very peaceful. His daughter, Mrs. S. A. Haydock, informs us that he said good-bye to her and her brother, turned a little on his side, and in a few moments quietly breathed his last. It was on the second of September. On the fifth his remains were cremated at Manchester. Thus One of the Old Guard of Freethought is mustered out.

### Correspondence.

#### THE ITALIAN MEETING IN THE HOLBORN TOWN HALL.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I attended this meeting this (Monday) evening. Mr. William Heaford took the chair. Another Italian, Mr. Ernest Pack, supported the chairman, as also a Spaniard and two other Italians. There were about 100 present, chiefly Italians.

The Chairman made a rather lengthy speech in what one of the subsequent speakers described as a near approach to "Esperanto." The important point of the speech was that there were three delegates going to Rome to represent English Freethought—Mr. J. M. Robertson, Mr. McCabe, and himself. A lengthy proposition was read in Italian. This was supported by Mr. Pack, who said he had listened very

attentively to two very interesting speeches of which he had not understood a single word. Everything went splendidly until Mr. V. Roger asked what was the object of the meeting, and why, considering that Freethinkers had been organising the Congress for at least twelve months, this meeting had been called in the last week, after English Freethought papers had gone to press; and also why the Chairman had not mentioned that there was an organised Freethought Society having an existence of some thirty years, and that that Society, according to *La Raison*, was being represented by fifteen delegates? What was behind all this? The Chairman lost his temper, and interrupted the speaker; upon which an Italian gentleman asked him to leave the chair if he did not understand his duties better than that. When the speaker had finished, the Chairman (in English) said he was not going to answer personalities.

Some very animated speeches were then delivered, and a counter proposition was proposed by an eloquent Italian gentleman, and when put to the vote, about eleven o'clock, was carried by a large majority. When I last saw the Chairman he was gesticulating furiously to Mr. Pack and a couple of other Italians on the pavement outside. I hope the organiser was pleased with his carefully-prepared meeting. I was; and I am still laughing at the way this lovely bladder collapsed after a very small pin-prick.

V. ROGER.

### God-Daring.

The Christian loves to tell of folk who die  
While "daring" God to kill them on the spot;  
A gospel which, at best, is half a lie,  
And wholly foolish, whether true or not.

The Christian who believes these tales must own  
That men by "daring" God can force his pow'r  
To do what they, by impudence alone,  
Have challenged him to do within an hour.

To challenge God to kill you on the spot  
Is worthless as a theologic test,  
Since sudden deaths are common, though they're not  
Preceded by a "blasphemous" request.

Belief in these religious tales implies  
That man can "throw his glove" at Nature's Hub,  
And "draw" a badgered bogey from the skies,  
As baiting draws a badger from a tub.

Since "daring" God to instant act succeeds,  
Let's challenge him to do some useful work;  
To "care for oxen," give to him that needs,  
And civilise the Briton and the Turk.

Since "daring" God to foolishness succeeds,  
Let's challenge him to show a little sense:  
To do some useful *God-attesting* deeds,  
And cure the Christians of their false pretence.

I challenge God to kill, within an hour,  
The superstitions that corrupt our youth!  
Or teach, within a year—with all his pow'r—  
The parsons and the priests to speak the truth!

G. L. MACKENZIE.

### THE RETORT CRUSHING.

Someone wrote to inquire if Mark Twain's book of *Extracts from Adam's Diary* was an authentic work, and if the late wonderful progress of archæology had indeed led to the discovery of such a hieroglyphic record on stone. Authors get all sorts of absurd letters, but among them Mark Twain can claim a certain preeminence. People write to him on every known subject under the sun. Some time ago he received a letter from a young man saying that he had heard that fish was good for the brain, and asking the author how much he thought one should eat to reach the most effective results. To this epistle Mark Twain replied: "For you, I should think, a whale. Not a large-sized whale, just a medium-sized one."

Stephen Girard's will prohibited clergymen from ever entering the door of Girard College. At a visit of the Knights Templar of Boston to the institution, one of the knights, a well-known physician, who wore a white necktie, was passing in. The doorkeeper accosted him, saying, "You can't pass in here, sir, the rule forbids it." "The hell I can't," replied the physician. "All right, sar," replied the doorkeeper, "pass right in."

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday and be marked "Lecture Notice," if not sent on postcard.

### LONDON.

#### OUTDOOR.

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

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Station-road, 11.30, F. A. Davies; Brockwell Park, 3.15 and 6.30, W. H. Thresh.

CLAPHAM COMMON: 3, "Why Christianity is Not True."

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

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Stratford-grove): 7, F. A. Davies.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Hyde Park, near Marble Arch): 11.30, E. B. Rose; Hammersmith, 7.30, E. B. Rose.

### COUNTRY.

BATLEY (Market Place): 3 and 6.30, C. J. Atkinson and J. Barker.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Coffee House, Bull Ring): Thursday, September 22, at 8, A. Barber, "Tolstoi's Revolution."

COVENTRY BRANCH N. S. S. (Baker's Coffee Tavern, Fleet-street): 7, J. A. Mitchell, "Force and Matter."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (110 Brunswick-street): H. Percy Ward, 12 noon, "Do the Dead Return: an Exposure of Spiritualism"; 6.30, "The Holy Bible: Divine Revelation or Human Invention."

HUDDERSFIELD (Market Cross): Saturday, at 8, G. Whitehead and C. J. Atkinson.

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Armley Park): 11, G. Weir, "Divine Justice"; Crossflats Park, 3, Debate between Bruce and Weir. Subject, "The Resurrection."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): W. C. Schweizer, 3, "Kropotkin on the Realistic Basis of Ethics"; 7, "The Re-birth of Japan." Monday, 8, Rationalist Debating Society: W. C. Schweizer, "Individualism."

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