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Speculation is philosophy intoxicated. When philosophy shall have become sober again, it will be to the mind what pure spring-water is to the body.—
FEUERBACH.

God at Chicago Again.

MOST of my readers, perhaps all of them, will remember the terrible fire at the Iroquois Theatre, Chicago, in which hundreds of persons, principally women and children, were burnt, smothered, or trampled to death. It may also be remembered that my article on this catastrophe, called "God at Chicago," was reprinted as a leaflet, of which many thousand copies have been circulated in various parts of the country. A sermon was preached upon it some months ago by the Rev. Charles Voysey, who paid me the generous compliment of saying that my picture of what must have happened in the fire and smoke and fright was the work of a master hand. I recall this compliment for the sake of Freethought, rather than my own; and in order that Freethinkers may see that the general conspiracy of silence against their leading spokesmen in the press is the result of vulgar bigotry and not of honest disdain. And now I perceive that my leaflet is the subject of comment in the first number of the *Young Man*, under the editorship of the Rev. R. J. Campbell, of the City Temple. Mr. Campbell, like his predecessor in the editorial chair, the Rev. W. J. Dawson, is to deal with his correspondence at the end of the magazine; and he opens the ball with a criticism of "God at Chicago," which was enclosed in a letter from a young man at Bristol.

I have no reason to complain of the tone of Mr. Campbell's criticism. He admits that "the writer" of the leaflet "puts his case well and pointedly." "I have no intention," he adds, "either to belittle or complain of him." But why does Mr. Campbell allude to me as "a secularist writer"? Why not mention my name? Is he afraid of advertising me? In that case, he should not criticise me. If I am worth answering, I am worth naming.

Mr. Campbell fairly quotes two strong passages from my leaflet. In the first I ask whether it is credible that an All-Seeing Eye, accompanied by an All-Powerful Hand, looked down upon the awful spectacle in the Iroquois Theatre. In the second I point out that if we had imagination enough we should see the crowded agony of that scene scattered broadcast over the whole world, where painful maladies kill people by inches, sometimes through years of unspeakable suffering.

The problem I present is "no new one" to Mr. Campbell, nor indeed "to any religious teacher." It is "the greatest problem which has confronted human imagination and baffled human reason in every age since men became capable of reflection." And how is it to be met? But, first, how is it not to be met? Let us hear Mr. Campbell:—

"I will frankly confess that at one time, when I was slowly working out a faith to which I could adjust my life, this problem almost barred the way. Even to-day the problem of human depravity seems but an addendum to it or a department of it. Moral evil is not the antecedent but the consequent of cosmical evil. Whoever or Whatever the power behind phenomena

may be, He or It is primarily responsible even for 'Man's inhumanity to man.' Even sin cannot wholly be laid to the door of humanity: Deity or the cosmic process must be held responsible in the first instance. Theologians have usually reversed this order of things, and credited to humanity the marring of an otherwise ideal world; but humanity has not always been willing to believe their theory, and in these days less than ever. If, therefore, I attempt to satisfy my questioner, it cannot be along that line."

Mr. Campbell states that he "shall have more to say in future" on "this great question." Well, I invite him to spend some of his time in answering himself, or else in working out the conclusion of his own argument. He says, for instance, that sin cannot be "wholly" laid to the door of humanity. The expression implies that it can be so *partly*. But how can it be so partly, any more than wholly, if Deity or the cosmic process is responsible "in the first instance"? It appears to me that Mr. Campbell has given his case away. This is sometimes the result of yielding to a candid impulse without having quite thought out your position. And I fancy that Mr. Campbell will find himself in an awkward struggle between his personal consistency and his professed principles. For it is perfectly clear that if man cannot sin, in the theological sense of the word—that is, against God—the Christian religion is a colossal blunder, and the Christian priesthood an unnecessary institution.

Having seen the line that Mr. Campbell will not take, let us now see the line that he does take. He denies that God is a spectator of human misery. He says that I have stated the case wrongly. "God," he says, "granted there be a God, is not merely looking on at the writhings of suffering men and women in the vivisection chamber called the world—He is humanity." To this I reply that I understand the words, but not a meaning in the words. They convey to me no definite idea. Nor is the argument made more luminous by Mr. Campbell's saying that "God and the universe are not separable entities," that God "is the universe, too," and is therefore "one with all sentient life." Mr. Campbell does not seem to see that, if God is all, all is God; and that this lands him in the Pantheism of the subtle Hindu—and of Spinoza, who was an oriental accidentally living in the west. Englishmen will have to change before they accept this philosophy. If God is in the man who cannot sleep, and in the flea that will not let him sleep, the practical Western will not build temples to such a Deity. I feel perfectly sure of that.

Another idea started by Mr. Campbell is that "the pain endured by any man may be no more than a birth throes by which he is ushered into new relations with the life of God"—the God who is himself all that is! But what has science to do with "may be's"? And how can we argue on a basis of metaphor?

Mr. Campbell may pick his case of "pain." I may pick too. Let us take the case of a woman ravished by a dozen brutes and then cut to pieces. It is common enough, we are told, in south-east Europe. Will Mr. Campbell kindly tell us how that poor woman's "pain" is only a birth throes into a higher life? And if he is able to assure us that it is so, why does he object to outrage and murder?

The next paragraph, I would fain believe, does Mr.

Campbell an injustice. He complains of the confusions of imagination:—

"Only one man can suffer at a time. Nobody bears all the agony of a suffering world; we can only bear our own share, and the part that sympathy causes. We suffer one by one, and the problem is, therefore, no bigger than the experience of the man who suffers most. It is quite big enough, but this writer need not call in imagination to make it bigger than it actually is."

Now I never used imagination in that way. I called in imagination—which is exercised every time an individual crosses the frontier of his own personality—to show how big the problem really was. It is idle to try to narrow the problem down to each man's personal suffering. This is the metaphysic of sheer egotism. Mr. Campbell must have turned from it himself, at some time or other, with impatience. My own feeling has always been the very opposite. I expressed it many years ago in a sonnet, which presents it more forcibly, and perhaps more faithfully, than I could present it now in prose:—

Oh I could bear this agonising woe
Which wrings each fibre of my bleeding heart,
And makes the swift-winged eager hours seem slow
As time to wretches stung with hell's worst smart,
Did it not give me apprehension sure
Of all the multitudinous pangs of life
My fellow mortals evermore endure
In this world's bootless and incessant strife:
Their frustate hopes and joys as frail as breath,
Their baffled strivings for the long-sought prize,
Their losses irretrievable as death,
Their dumb despairs and wild imploring cries.
My woe's a lightning flash, revealing plain
The sombre depths of universal pain.

The sonnet has more of pessimism in it than I should wish to be responsible for now, but I do not wish to qualify the central idea. It is not a comfort to me, but a misery, to know that others suffer as well as myself. If only one other being suffers, it more than doubles the size of the problem. And when the number runs into billions, and the area is as large as the world in space, and as human history in time, the problem is appalling in size and intensity.

Mr. Campbell concludes with "one suggestion:—

"It is that the key to the mystery must be sought in the principle of the Cross, by which I mean that everything great and good in human character is somehow associated with the presence of the tragical in human experience. Nobleness is born in the fire. It may seem a long price to pay, and only explains a very small part of the world's woe, but it supplies a principle of interpretation whereby to account for the presence of evil in the cosmos."

Now, it appears to me that Mr. Campbell is not really accounting for the presence of evil at all. The amount of obstacle and resistance which man has to overcome in exercising and developing his powers is not the subject of complaint. It is the gratuitous difficulty and danger of existence. Nature, if I may employ a personification, cherishes pain, not merely as a necessary, but as a luxury. She immensely overdoes it, far beyond its educative function. Moreover, I conceive that the argument—generally used by prosperous persons—for the utility of suffering, is equally overdone. It is really not misfortune that strengthens us. George Meredith well says that prosperity nourishes us, and adversity tries us; proving our capacity, but not creating it. The strength to be tested in the cold shadow must be acquired in the warm sunshine. And there is another thing to be said. It is a fallacy to read our own qualities into the nature of things. All our virtues are expressions of the law of self-preservation in relation to the race. In a certain sense, morality is a weakness; it marks our imperfection. If all men were naturally noble, the idea of nobleness would disappear; just as the handsomeness of one person depends upon the ugliness or plainness of others. Morality, in short, is only a means to an end; and the end is human welfare. But if you listen to theologians you would fancy that human welfare is almost a negligible accident, and that morality is all in all. In other words, the end is sacrificed to the means, and this is characteristic of the general topsy-turveydom of theology.

G. W. FOOTE.

A Bishop on Belief.

THE "silly season" has commenced; and in its honor the *Daily Telegraph* has initiated a correspondence on "Do We Believe?" Some four to six columns of letters are published each day—all, of course, carefully selected, so that they may not say anything of a strongly anti-Christian character. The device of initiating a correspondence as though it commenced spontaneously with the outside world is now so old that its hypocrisy is in a measure atoned by its transparency. And it is also a characteristic feature of the hypocritical character of our English "Free Press" that in a discussion as to whether people do or do not believe in Christianity only the one side should be given a hearing. The letters of pronounced unbelievers are rigorously excluded, and so one unacquainted with the conditions of English life might imagine that the only question at issue is whether one or other of the many *religious* interpretations of Christianity is correct.

In a "silly season" discussion the Bishop of London, Dr. F. W. Ingram, appropriately takes a part. The successor of a man who was the possessor of both learning and ability, Dr. Ingram is graced with but little of the one and still less of the other. As a purveyor of crude, out-of-date Christian evidence absurdities, he is without a rival, even among the Bishops; while even in such cases where it appears almost impossible *not* to say something sensible, Dr. Ingram may safely be trusted to achieve the unexpected.

The Bishop's share in the *Telegraph* discussion appeared in that paper of October 5, and consists of a sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral on the previous day. Dr. Ingram's analysis of the controversy is that it is an attempt to make "us practically ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," and upon the grounds that there is (1) insufficient evidence of the facts, and (2) belief in miracles which contradict in many ways the enlightened idea of the twentieth century. The Bishop clearly has but the vaguest notion of the difference between assertion and proof, as he imagines he disposes of one batch of objections by the bold remark that "We cheerfully believe in the murder of Julius Cæsar on about one-twentieth of the documentary evidence on which some reject the resurrection of Christ," with the further statement that "The four Gospels come out of the crucible of modern criticism, in my opinion, ten times as strong as they were before." The Bishop is quite welcome to his opinion, particularly as no student—even among Christians—is likely to be influenced by it; but he must have a profound faith in the credulity of his hearers if he imagines such wild statements to carry any weight. The statement that we believe in the murder of Cæsar on *one-twentieth* of the evidence we have of the resurrection of Jesus is simply false. Intellectually empty as the Bishop is, one can hardly believe he is so foolish as not to know this. There is no documentary evidence whatever for the resurrection apart from the New Testament writers, who always speak of it as *having* occurred, and never *describe* it as occurring. There is, moreover, a world of difference between belief in the murder of a known historical character and the resurrection of a personage whose very existence is questioned. The one is an event consonant with our experience of events, the other is directly contrary to it. In the one case there is no incentive, no motive, for invention, and scarcely any room for the growth of myth; and in the other there is every probability of the growth of myth, and every incentive for its elaboration and perpetuation. And, finally, no one questions the murder of Cæsar, while even Christians themselves are admitting that the resurrection and ascension were pure hallucinations.

Dr. Ingram caps the absurdity by saying he is content to rest his case on "the documentary evidence of the writings of St. Paul.....Can it be thought possible for a man to say what St. Paul

said, and yet not have believed in an actual Resurrection?" But what is the value of what Paul believed? He can be no evidence for the occurrence of what he did not see. Paul is only evidence that he believed it; and the evidence of any other Christian is quite as good to that end. Besides, St. Paul, under normal conditions, did not believe in the Resurrection. It took a sunstroke to bring him to that pass, and the testimony of a man after that affliction is hardly as valuable as his testimony before. Dr. Ingram has, however, this advantage over Paul as regards belief in the incredible. The latter needed a sunstroke to produce a state of mind that is the former's under normal conditions.

The real point of attack, proceeds the Bishop, is the belief in miracles. And he enters a protest against those who, by making the faith easy for outsiders, succeed in shaking the faith of those within the fold. It is the worst kind of defence, he says "to throw over the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.....and then expect to keep the belief of the world in His Incarnation, His Virgin Birth, and His Resurrection." Well, it is at least pleasant to find one sentence in a sermon by the Bishop of London with which one can agree. It shows how difficult it is to be consistently and persistently foolish, even in the pulpit. Certainly all the miracles stand or fall together. It is by no means proof of critical ability to accept some and reject others of the Christian miracles, although it is often taken as such. That anyone should believe that a man could get himself born without a father, or get himself raised from the dead, but could not perform the comparatively trifling feat of feeding 5,000 people with food enough for only a dozen, is not proof of greater ability, but of less. It is far better to accept all or reject all.

The Bishop of London apparently accepts all. People reject the story of the feeding of the 5,000 because they do not see such a thing happening to-day. For that very reason Dr. Ingram glories in it. It lifts him above "the petty tyranny of the present." His great soul is cribbed, cabined, and confined by the principle of universal causation; and, therefore, because there is no evidence for it, he believes it. A great Christian writer went on the same principle many centuries ago, only he did not pretend to be scientific over it. Besides, "there is an economy in God's working, and a special economy in His use of the miracle." Capital word "economy"! It does not mean anything very sensible in this connection, but it sounds well. The use of the miracle is, I presume, to convince people of the veracity of Christianity. God is economical is their performance, and to convince people in the twentieth century—a century that has had Darwin and Spencer for teachers—he selects a few ignorant peasants some two thousand years ago, and performs a miracle for their benefit. And this is economy! Why, it is downright extravagance. Their testimony is worthless. Now, if God had saved one miracle for Darwin and another for Spencer, there would have been economy indeed; for their testimony would have had some weight. But to perform miracles for the benefit of fools, and have none left for the intelligent observation of wise men—why, it is the wildest of extravagances.

Next, Dr. Ingram asks if people ought to be morally ashamed of Christianity. Of course he answers in the negative. It would take too long, he says, to state the part which the Gospel has played in the morals of Europe; which is a pity, as one would have liked an account of the part it did play. Still, it is something to be told that "It was the Gospel taught morality in Europe." The Bishop is modest, it will be noted. A less educated man would have said the Gospel invented morality. Dr. Ingram is not so rash, and he is content to say it taught morality—meaning, of course, that it was not taught before the Gospel was preached. Anyone with even an elementary knowledge of the Pagan writers will be able to judge of the soundness of the Bishop's position. Whatever morality was taught by Aristotle or Plato, by Zeno or Epicurus, by Cicero

or Seneca, by Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius, was clearly the result of that Gospel which "taught morality in Europe."

Moreover, "it was the Gospel that brought the stream of purity and hope to Rome." And the proof of this is that Rome under Christian rule was morally and socially more corrupt than under Pagan rule. I call this a proof, because it was, as Dr. Ingram would point out, the *purity* of Christians that blasted the Pagan civilisation so that it became a dim memory with the mass of mankind.

And if one wants to know how much we, who live to-day, are indebted to Christianity, the Bishop is "prepared to show" that workmen owe to it "their freedom, their homes, their education, their hospitals." That is all! And all of this the Bishop is "prepared to show" in detail—in the pulpit, of course. Some may have been under the impression that most of these things were due to other causes, and that in any case the historic Christian Church, with its ideal of celibacy, toleration of marriage as a legalised adultery, and its teaching of the inferiority of woman, could hardly have aided the development of the better home life, but this is evidently a mistake. The Bishop is "prepared to show" otherwise. I hope his other engagements will not be so pressing as to prevent him exhibiting the proof.

And, as to the future, Dr. Ingram is convinced that, as "all Socialistic dreams are hopeless, unless men are unselfish, and unselfishness has never been attained except under the power of religion, we must have Christianity." The Bishop's knowledge of history is only equalled by his insight into human nature. It is notorious that men and women, like the Russian Nihilists, are deeply selfish in the way in which they throw away their lives in the pursuit of an ideal. It is also clear that those who are engaged in anti-Christian propaganda in Britain are excessively selfish. Do they not move along a path of roses and riot in incalculable wealth as the result of their non-religious selfishness? Can we not find at Somerset House the wills of all the Freethought leaders of the past, showing how they have fattened on their non-religious work? And, on the other hand, is it not notorious that under the influence of Christianity the Bishops of the Established Church live and die upon a pitiful stipend, and even decline to spend all of that, as is shown by the sums of money they leave behind them? And does not even Dr. Ingram lacerate his feelings, even sacrifice himself, by preaching his sermons on a salary such as no non-religious worker has ever taken? Verily, unselfishness does not exist apart from Christianity.

C. COHEN.

"The Miracles of Christ."

THE Rev. A. M. Fairbairn, D.D., LL.D., Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, has the reputation of being one of the subtlest metaphysicians and profoundest theologians of the age. Among his best known and most scholarly works are *Studies in the Life of Christ*, *The City of God*, *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, and *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*. It is as a destructive critic, rather than as a constructive thinker, that he excels. While Christian believers are delighted beyond measure with his sledge-hammer attacks on Agnostic and Atheistic philosophies they are generally somewhat disappointed with his restatement of the orthodox positions. Nevertheless, he is justly regarded as a fresh, suggestive, and inspiring writer and speaker. He is, on the whole, the greatest living theologian that British Nonconformity possesses. Consequently, his books are widely read, and his sermons invariably command crowded and attentive audiences. He is always pre-eminently worth reading and hearing, however radically one may differ from his views.

On Sunday, October 2, Principal Fairbairn delivered the first of a second series of Sunday Afternoon Popular Lectures at the Central Hall, Manchester. This Lectureship is under the auspices of the

Wesleyan Mission, of which the Rev. S. F. Collier is the Superintendent. The Principal's chosen subject was "The Miracles of Christ"; and the lecture, as reported in the *Christian Commonwealth*, is full of life and vigor, and must be pronounced much superior, in every way, to the great majority of such productions.

There is much in this lecture with which Freethinkers are in heartiest agreement. Nothing can be truer than the assertion that "if there be no supernatural there can be no miraculous," and that, "if God is not, the miraculous must of necessity, in the strict sense of the word, be impossible." Nor would anybody dream of denying the accuracy of the statement that "if you exclude from your view of the universe a personal God the miracles vanish with the supernatural." "If you conceive that God is, you must conceive the greatest of all miracles as still possible. For, if there is a God, then Nature, as it appears to the senses, is not the whole of Being." All this is beautifully reasonable, and we readily subscribe to it. But, at this point, Principal Fairbairn and Freethinkers cease to be companions. Matthew Arnold may have been excessively oracular, if not positively foolish, when he penned this sentence: "The unfortunate thing about miracles is, that they do not happen." But surely there is very little to choose between that sentence and this by Dr. Fairbairn: "The remarkable thing is, they *have* happened." When, and how? The learned Principal's bold assertion proves nothing, any more than Matthew Arnold's did. It may be true that "Nature now is, and once was not"; but if Nature is synonymous with the Universe, as it now is, on what authority does the Principal affirm so oracularly that, "however natural the process may be, the passage from chaos into this fair and wondrous system, of which we form an integral and essential part, must be described as supernatural"? It is undoubtedly true that "Mind, which now is, once was not," but there is no justification for the following inference: "And from a mean beginning, from poor primitive forms, still its evolution from the pre-potent elements of promise that preceded it must still be described in language quite definite as miraculous." If evolution is natural, it cannot be supernatural; and yet Dr. Fairbairn maintains that, however natural the process may be, it must be characterised as miraculous, which is a contradiction in terms.

Theologians define miracles as violations of the order of Nature. Hume said: "There is an order in Nature that miracles violate." Here Principal Fairbairn marches off at a tangent in order to scoff at Hume's philosophy. But be Hume's philosophy true or false, "there is an order in Nature that miracles violate." After men die they are not visible on the earth. Whatever happens to them, the living see them no more. They are buried, and that is the last of them so far as this world is concerned. This is an order or law of Nature. This is what usually happens. The dead do not return and resume their former life. Now, resurrection would be a serious departure from this order. If a report came to us that a man had just risen from the tomb we would not believe it. We would describe the alleged event as contrary to Nature, and therefore incredible, if not impossible. Usually a man has two human parents, and the one is quite as essential as the other. All of us have both father and mother. If it were reported to-day that sixty or seventy years ago there was born in the City of London a man whose mother had previously never known a husband we would say that it was an idle tale, too ridiculous to be seriously considered. It would involve a violation of an order of Nature to which we have never known of a single exception. Therefore we assert, not that Parthenogenesis is impossible, but that in the human world it does not happen. That was really the attitude of David Hume towards all miracles. Babies are not born without the instrumentality of human fathers, and the dead do not rise. If there is an omnipotent personal God, all

things are possible to him; and it is conceivable that the order of Nature might have been different. But in any case our natural attitude towards any reported deviation from the normal sequence of phenomena in the Universe is one of utter incredulity. Principal Fairbairn devotes one-half of his lecture to an attempt to prove that, assuming the existence of a personal God, miracles are possible. We argue, on the contrary, that, *even on that assumption*, miracles would be contrary to Nature, and therefore incredible.

To the question, "Did Jesus perform miracles?" the Principal's answer is entirely unsatisfactory. What he says, in short, is this: Jesus was himself a supreme miracle; therefore nothing was more natural than that he should have performed miracles. Here again he assumes what requires to be proven. Once it was held that Jesus was divine *because* he performed miracles; but now the order is reversed—Jesus performed miracles because he was divine. In either case, what requires to be proved is the *actuality* of the miraculous. How can it be determined that Jesus was a supernatural person? What are the data on which his divinity can be established? Principal Fairbairn says:—

"Before I can properly estimate the man, I must consider first the race he comes of, the place he was born into, the family he descends from, the time at which he lives, the education he has received, and the opportunity his time offered. All these must be reckoned, and the man we want to criticise must be capable of being criticised through these."

In the application of these rules of criticism to Jesus Christ, the Principal seems to be unaware of several fundamental facts of history. For one thing, the Christian conception of God is of Jewish origin. In the later Prophets, Jehovah is recognised as the only God and as the universal Father, the Savior of all the ends of the earth. And, even granting that Jesus was immeasurably above his contemporaries, was not the same thing true of Confucius, Buddha, and Mohammed? Is not every man of commanding genius incomparably superior to the people round about him? How do you explain Homer and Plato and Virgil and Dante and Shakespeare? You dare not try to explain them by the rules of criticism laid down by Dr. Fairbairn. They transcend all your petty, paltry standards. And yet you do not pretend to believe that they were supernatural beings, in the theological sense. Well, Jesus could as easily have sprung from Nazareth without a miracle, as Shakespeare did spring from Stratford-on-Avon. What Dr. Fairbairn says about the person, teaching and character of Jesus is not historical but purely theological. What he describes is not a fact, but a faith which assumed its present form only gradually through many ages. And, consequently, what he indulges in at this point is not sound argument, but perfervid rhetoric, pious rhapsody, pure sentimentalism.

Dr. Fairbairn assures us that Jesus "lives conquering the Jew who was very obstinate and proud, conquering the Greek who loves culture, conquering the Roman who hated and despised the men he had subdued." Rhetoric, nothing but rhetoric, with only the merest semblance of truth in it! Jesus has not conquered the Jew, nor the Greek, nor the Roman, nor the Englishman. Just think of it; a Jesus-like person, were he to appear in Great Britain to-morrow, would be put to the torture by our so-called Christians. The churches would shut their doors against him. The ministers would denounce him as a brazen-faced impostor. The Sermon on the Mount is tabooed in all good society. Jesus has never conquered yet, and he is less like conquering now than he ever was. But had he been himself a miracle, he would long ago have performed the inevitable miracle of winning the whole world to his side, and his royal law of love would have been supreme everywhere.

Now, since Dr. Fairbairn fails to prove the divinity of Jesus, it is evident that it is incapable of proof. There is not a single sentence in his whole lecture calculated to convert the honest sceptic, or to

remove the difficulties from the path of the doubter. His vehement proclamation of the old dogma may confirm and comfort believers, but unbelievers will turn away from it with something like disdain.

We learn from the *British Weekly* that the lecture was followed by a Conference at which questions were asked and answered. Unfortunately, no report of that Conference has reached us. We are simply told that the Principal's replies were particularly effective. But then "the majority of the audience consisted of church-going people and preachers," who were not likely to be very critical in their questions. In the absence of those "particularly effective replies" we must take the lecture as it stands; and the only conclusion to which we can honestly come regarding it is that as a defence of miracles in general, and of the miracles of Christ in particular, it is a woeful failure, not because of any defect in the lecturer, but because the thesis he set out to establish is insusceptible of verification.

JOHN T. LLOYD.

Some Defenders of the Faith.—V.

"BLATCHFORD ANSWERED."

ANOTHER specimen of Mr. Spurr's scholarship occurs in his chapter on the Resurrection. We give the whole passage in order to prevent cavil or misunderstanding:—

Blatchford: No Greek nor Roman historian nor scientist mentioned that strange eclipse [at the Crucifixion].

Spurr: For a good reason. There was no eclipse. The moon was at the full at the Paschal season, and you ought to know that there can be no eclipse of the sun when there is a full moon. Just another of your little errors which it is worth while to call attention to, seeing you make so many of them. But the darkness was local—confined to Palestine—and it is mentioned by those who knew of it. The darkness and earthquake are mentioned by Phlegon of Trallium, who lived in the second century. Eusebius mentions it and Cyril of Jerusalem speaks of the fissure in Golgotha, which he had often noticed. (Quite apart from the references, however, it is sufficient for anybody but a prejudiced 'infidel' that three Gospels mention it.

Here we have the quintessential Mr. Spurr; all his ignorance, dogmatism, insolence, and irrationality in a single passage.

The quibble over the word "eclipse" is worthy of him. There is no possible dispute about the "darkness." Luke (xxiii., 45) expressly adds that "the sun was darkened." And if that was not an eclipse, what was it? Mr. Blatchford did not say that the moon had anything to do with it. He did not suggest that it was a natural phenomenon. He simply called it an "eclipse," and it *was* an eclipse. How it was produced has nothing whatever to do with its intrinsic character.

The statement that the word of three Evangelists is "sufficient for anybody" is one of those impertinent ineptitudes in which Christian apologists are so fond of indulging. It is on a par with Mr. Spurr's other statement, with respect to the four Gospels, that "The internal evidence strongly shows that eye-witnesses wrote of what they saw." Internal evidence can never prove anything of the kind. Such evidence must necessarily be external. The proof of any person's veracity must always be outside his testimony. What he says cannot be true simply because he says it. Moreover, two of the Gospel writers are admitted *not* to have been eye-witnesses. The writers of "Mark" and "Luke" are held, by Christians themselves, to have been disciples of Peter and Paul, and not personal followers of Jesus Christ. Besides, if the word of three Evangelists is really "sufficient for anybody," why does Mr. Spurr write a hundred and twenty-four pages of reply to Mr. Blatchford? He might, in that case, have answered the "infidel" in one sentence—"Open your New Testament." But he could not charge a shilling for that.

Mr. Spurr closes a long discussion with his own *ipse dixit*. This is his dogmatism. And dogmatism, as Douglas Jerrold said, is puppyism grown to maturity.

John, who is supposed to have been present at the Crucifixion, does not mention the darkness at all. Matthew and Mark say that there was darkness "over all the land," but Luke says that it was "over all the earth." There has been much discussion as to whether the darkness was local or universal. Mr. Spurr closes the controversy. He says it was "confined to Palestine." But he does not tell us the source of his information, and we wish to know it; for blind belief in Mr. Spurr is not yet, we believe, an article even of the Christian faith.

But whether the darkness was all over Palestine or all over the world, the objection stands that it totally escaped the notice of scientists, antiquaries, and historians who lived at the time or soon afterwards. The darkness is said to have lasted for three hours, and it covered the whole of a country which was a well-known and easily accessible part of the Roman Empire. Yet this "greatest phenomenon to which mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe," as Gibbon called it, was never heard of even by Seneca and the elder Pliny, who were then living, and each of whom "recorded all the great phenomena of Nature, earthquakes, meteors, comets, and eclipses, which his indefatigable curiosity could collect."

Even if it were strictly local, that darkness was wonderful enough to attract universal attention. But it attracted none. Which is more wonderful than the darkness itself.

Mr. Spurr does not see the point: or he pretends not to see it. We cannot tell which, and perhaps it does not matter.

And now for Phlegon of Trallium. One cannot help staring to see a Christian apologist citing this witness at the present day.

Phlegon's date is about the middle of the second century. Mr. Spurr has to wait, therefore, more than a hundred years after the Crucifixion before he can find any outsider who mentions that wonderful darkness.

And Phlegon, after all, does *not* mention it. The probability is that Mr. Spurr has been reading some trumpery second-hand orthodox authority, instead of looking up the facts for himself. We believe this is a common method with gentlemen who hold forth from "the coward's castle" of the pulpit. But they might be a little more careful when they rush into print.

We will tell Mr. Spurr what Phlegon did write. Eusebius reproduced the passage, and we give the translation of the learned, laborious, and candid Lardner:—

"In the fourth year of the two hundred and second olympiad there was an eclipse of the sun, the greatest of any known before. And it was night at the sixth hour of the day, so that the stars appeared in the heavens. And there was a great earthquake in Bithynia, which overturned many houses in Nice."

Nobody can be quite certain that Phlegon wrote that passage, for Christian authors like Eusebius were full of invention. But we will assume, for the sake of argument, that Phlegon did write it. And we then ask what an earthquake in Bithynia had to do with the opening of graves in Palestine, and what the overthrow of houses in Nice had to do with the rending of the veil of the Temple in Jerusalem?

There is not a word about the darkness lasting for three mortal hours. And the date mentioned is the *fourth* year of the two hundred and second olympiad, while the Crucifixion took place, according to orthodox chronology, in the *first* year of that olympiad.

We are fortified in our belief that Mr. Spurr has not looked up the facts for himself. Had he done so, he would not have cut the ground from under his own feet by declaring that the darkness of the Crucifixion was "confined to Palestine." He would have left himself room to argue that Phlegon wrote of a part of the great world-wide marvel that

attended the passion of Christ. Whereas, by confining himself to Palestine, he cannot set up any connection with Nice and Bithynia.

Lardner was obliged to conclude that Phlegon did not refer to the darkness and earthquake of the Crucifixion. Gibbon was able to say, when he wrote, that "The celebrated passage of Phlegon is now wisely abandoned." He did not foresee how Christian apologists of the baser sort would cling to the last falsehood and the last imbecility.

Upon the general story of the Resurrection a good deal of curious criticism is written by Mr. Spurr. He says, for instance, of the wholesale resurrection of dead saints recorded by Matthew, that the story "stands alone in the Gospels, and I confess that I do not understand it. But that is to me not a substantial reason for denying its accuracy." Probably not. Mr. Spurr would have a remarkably slender creed if he denied everything he did not understand. It is the function of faith to embrace the unintelligible; a truth which is set forth with incomparable vigor and precision in the Athanasian Creed. Still, it might occur even to Mr. Spurr, in his more lucid intervals, that his inability to understand a thing cannot make it clear or credible to Mr. Blatchford or any other "infidel."

Mr. Spurr agrees that miracles do not happen now. But this is not enough for him. In his dogmatic way, he presumes to speak for the whole of Christendom. This is what he says:—

"If by 'miracles' you mean such prodigies as the raising of the dead, the curing of the sick, and similar things like those recorded in the Gospels, I agree. Christians themselves, who most firmly believe in the miracles of Christ, would agree with you that *such* miracles do not happen to-day, and they could offer you a substantial reason *why* such miracles happened then and do not happen now."

We need not trouble about Mr. Spurr's "substantial reasons." He is utterly wrong as to the matter of fact. He treats Protestant and Christian as convertible terms. He excludes the whole vast body of Catholics from the Christian pale. These Catholics do *not* believe that miracles ended with Jesus Christ or his Apostles. They believe in a constant stream of miracles. They believe in miracles to-day. They will tell you of miracles of healing wrought at the shrine of the Mother of God at Lourdes and other places of pilgrimage. And there is better evidence for the reality of some of these cures than there is for the reality of any miracle in the New Testament. Nor is this all. There are many Protestants who believe that miracles happen still. Ask Mr. Stead? Ask the clerical gentlemen who gave their testimony, a year or two ago, to miraculous answers to prayer. Look at the Church Prayer Book. Why are the prayers for recovery in sickness, for rain in fine weather, for fine weather in rain, or for a plentiful harvest; why are these things retained and used, if the age of miracles is absolutely past?

The truth is that Protestant writers have systematically abused the minds of their readers on this subject. They pretend that miracles ceased in the first century. But there never was any cessation. Miracles were common in the following centuries. The writings of the "Fathers" abound with such occurrences. St. Augustine himself knew of people who had been raised from the dead. During the Middle Ages miracles were as plentiful as blackberries in September. They began to diminish in the light of science and civilisation. They happen now where faith is rampant; that is to say, where ignorance and priestcraft prevail. It would be impossible to work the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius in London, Paris, or Berlin. It is easily worked in Naples.

Our readers will see by this time that Mr. Spurr is not worth answering; though answering him may be a duty, for all that—at least to a certain extent.

We shall content ourselves, therefore, with a few concluding observations. Mr. Spurr is ignorant enough to believe, if he makes the statement

honestly, that the "truth coming through such as Confucius and Buddha is largely an affair of books and legends, and in its moral effects upon life it is almost *nil*." Such a sentence puts the writer outside the category of serious controversialists. To argue with him is a waste of time. He does not know the facts.

We advise Mr. Spurr to begin his education in this respect by reading Mr. H. Fielding's charming and edifying book, *The Soul of a People*. It will give him some information about a Buddhist nation. When he assures us that he has read it, we will give him a list of other books that will help to correct the vices of his neglected education.

Mr. Spurr actually asks, at this time of day, and in a high and haughty manner, for "evidence" that the Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount are *not* original compositions. We do not know whether he reads any language but English, but he might certainly make himself acquainted with the *Remains* of Emmanuel Deutsch, which contains the famous *Quarterly Review* article on "The Talmud." That will do for a start.

With regard to immortality, Mr. Blatchford said, "I know nothing about the soul." Mr. Spurr replies that "Such an admission disgraces any man who makes it." Indeed! What does Mr. Spurr himself *know* about the soul? When he talks about "disgrace" he proves himself an ignoramus or a nincompoop. Let him listen to the words of his better—every man's better—William Shakespeare:—

Man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,—
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,
His glassy essence,—like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep.

We will not give the reference. Mr. Spurr might hunt the passage up for himself. It will be another help to his neglected education. He might also try to understand the meaning of "glassy essence," and when he has mastered it he will know where the "disgrace" lies.

G. W. FOOTE.

Acid Drops.

We did not say anything last week about the death of Sir William Harcourt. We preferred to wait a little. During the interval we have read a good many eulogies of the right honorable gentleman. Perhaps they are accurate enough. But, for our own part, we speak of a man as we find him, and we found Sir William Harcourt playing the part of a contemptible scoundrel. When we were in prison for blasphemy, he stood up in the House of Commons, where he was safe, and libelled us. Lord Chief Justice Coleridge had said from the bench that our blasphemy was clean blasphemy. He declared that we might be blasphemous, but we were certainly not licentious, and that we did not pander to the bad passions of mankind. Yet in spite of Lord Coleridge's generous word on our behalf, in the face of our malignant enemies, Sir William Harcourt, as Home Secretary, stated in the House of Commons that we were in prison for an "obscene libel." He knew it was a lie when he said it. He was taken to task for it in some of the more decent newspapers, but (we repeat) he knew he was safe, and he was not going to eat his words for the sake of an "infidel." He gave us a dirty, malicious kick when we were down and could not defend ourselves. In other words, he was a Christian, with a Freethinker at his mercy, and he acted after the manner of his kind. Maybe he was no worse than any other Home Secretary would have been, but that is not our business. It was he who libelled us in that dastardly way, and we will not condescend to flatter him even in his grave.

The Church is thankful for the smallest mercies nowadays. It is making a tremendous fuss over Sir Oliver Lodge, who spoke for it at one of the public meetings in connection with the recent Church Congress. In the course of his address he said that "it was safer to believe Christianity as based on spiritual experience than founded on an empty tomb." Sir Oliver Lodge had already told the Church that Jesus ought to be decently supplied with two parents instead of one. Now he tells it to get rid of the Resurrection as well as the Virgin Birth. All that remains for him to do is to advise the Church to get rid of Jesus

Christ altogether. For, after all, what is left of that personage when you take the wonders of his biography away? Is there enough to cover a two-shilling piece?

Professor Orr, of Glasgow, has been lecturing to Edinburgh working-men on "Is the Bible Divine?" Of course he said it was. Nothing else was to be expected. But why did he crack that joke about there being "only three monotheistic religions in the world—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?" It is really funny to call Christianity monotheistic—with its God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, and God the Devil—to say nothing of the Goddess Virgin Mary and the countless crowd of Saints who really form a part of the Catholic Pantheon.

The Wise-and-Kensit "Protestants" got into the Philharmonic Hall meeting of the Church Congress and "raised hell," as the Americans say. It was an object-lesson in true-blue Christianity. There was no "harmony"—much less "phil-harmony." It was pure, unadulterated—religion.

"Aggressive Infidelity" was talked about by the Rev. John Wakeford at the Church Congress. He referred to the National Secular Society as carrying on "a steadily organised work by means of lectures and literature." Later on he said that the N. S. S. had "its organisation in many of our great cities, and endeavors to attract adherents by means of Sunday lectures. It is a dull failure," he added, "in most parts of England to-day, and has no future." We have heard this old clerical wheeze for thirty years. Secularism has been a dead cause all the time, yet the clergy worry over the corpse every year.

Mr. Wakeford would soon see whether Secularism was a dead cause, even in Liverpool, if he would just step upon a public platform and debate with Mr. Foote. We might also remind him that the Church Congress would not have talked so much about Mr. Blatchford if Secularism were such a dead (or dying) cause. The long propaganda of Freethought by the N. S. S. made Mr. Blatchford's attack on Christianity possible. He would not have dared to write what he did in the *Clarion* if a vast number of readers had not already been prepared to hear him on the subject of religion.

Mr. Wakeford talked a lot of pretentious nonsense about Rationalism with its new philosophy of Monism. He evidently does not know that Charles Bradlaugh spoke and wrote as a Monist. Mr. Wakeford seems to think that Haeckel invented Monism. Has he never heard of Spinoza?

We have been looking over the number of the *Clarion* which we missed while we were at Rome. We note on the front page a good article by Mr. Blatchford on "Christian Strategists." It is a good article, we repeat, though not up to the level of Mr. F. J. Gould's fine reply to the Rev. C. L. Marson, the conclusion of which is a very noble piece of writing. But why does Mr. Blatchford carry a certain pretence of ignorance to the point of absurdity? After stating that his own *God and My Neighbor* can be bought for sixpence, he says that "the books and pamphlets of other Rationalists can be got from Messrs. Watts, of Johnson's-court." Unless this statement is founded on the absurd assumption that Freethought and Rationalism are two different things, it is simply untrue, and the fact may as well be indicated. The one point these Rationalists have in common is opposition to Christianity. We defy them to produce another. And has not the war against Christianity been carried on in this country by Freethinkers, from the days of Collins, Chubb, and Woolston to the days of Thomas Paine, and from the days of Thomas Paine—through Carlile, Southwell, Hetherington, Owen, Holyoake, and Bradlaugh—down to the incessant platform and press work of the National Secular Society? Messrs. Watts & Co. are not agents for the sale of Mr. Foote's works, for instance, nor for Mr. Cohen's, nor for "Saladin's." The *Freethinker* and the *Agnostic Journal* are published elsewhere, and also our books and pamphlets (to some of which Mr. Blatchford has been indebted). Mr. Blatchford must be presumed to know all this, and it is high time that he left off a make-believe which makes his friends smile, and imposes on nobody except those who are absolutely new to the business. To put the whole matter very plainly in a few words, the Freethought party in Great Britain is not confined to the circle of Mr. Blatchford's personal acquaintances.

Ingersoll's lectures (and Mr. Blatchford owes more than he acknowledges to Ingersoll) have been published for twenty years in cheap popular form at the *Freethinker* office. Is that the reason why Mr. Blatchford did not include them in the list of publications recommended to the readers of *God and My Neighbor*?

Rev. Donald Macleod, of Park Church, Glasgow, has been preaching a warm sermon against modern fiction. It was in South Leith parish church, and [the Provost, Magistrates and Town Council were present. So it was a great occasion. We gather from a report of the sermon that the Church will never be satisfied until it supplies the fiction itself, as it used to do in former days, through the Bible. He represented some of the novelists as dreadful iconoclasts, who even talked "as if Christianity and religion were now bygone things." How sad! Mr. Macleod has our sympathy. Probably the novelists do not require it.

"An Old Rollo Boy," in a letter to the *Englishman*, says that he saw a small boy belonging to the *Rollo* receive three dozen lashes on board Nelson's old *Victory* in the spring of 1852. The lashes were administered on his bare back, and every one drew flesh and blood from him. His offence was failing to learn by heart his lesson from the Church catechism, also the Collect and Epistle. The chaplain stood by and saw the punishment properly inflicted. Good old Christianity!

The wish is often father to the thought. This must have been the case with the Rev. C. Silvester Horne's close of his remarkable reply to the Rev. R. J. Campbell's opinion of the working man. "I believe," said Mr. Horne, speaking with great emphasis, "that the working classes do hold tenaciously by Jesus Christ as the only hope of their order, and the only hope of their ultimate salvation and the reinvigoration of this nation." We venture to tell Mr. Horne that any representative meeting of working men would laugh in his face if he told them this. His knowledge of the working classes is evidently no better than Mr. Campbell's.

Mr. R. J. Campbell's description of British workmen as being, in the majority, lazy, unthrifty, improvident, immoral, foul-mouthed, and untruthful, is rousing indignant protests in many quarters. The reverend gentleman expressed his willingness to repeat the charges before any audience of working men who cared to listen. On this the secretary of the Paddington and North Kensington Trades and Labor Council writes Mr. Campbell, offering to provide a hall and a few working men to put their side of the question. All that is now required is a date. The odds are, however, that Mr. Campbell will show as much real courage as Dr. Clifford himself. We fear, too, that people are taking Mr. Campbell far too seriously. The poor man must get notoriety somehow, and it is a cheap and easy way to make sensational statements—suggested, no doubt, by some of the wealthy members of his congregation.

Mr. Campbell's salary for preaching the gospel of self-sacrifice is estimated at between two and three thousand pounds. Well, now, if an income of this size doesn't make one an authority on working men, how much does it need to bring this about?

A week or so ago the *Church Times* put a neat, but straightforward question to the slippery Dr. Clifford. It asked, "What is the difference between a Church school subsidised out of the rates and a Dissenting Chapel, as such, exempted from payment of the rates?" It was a straightforward question, and the honest answer would be, none at all. Dr. Clifford, after due reflection, replies by saying, he "cannot think your sense of justice and fairplay would allow you to propose placing the building of Free Churchmen on the rates and continuing the exemption of Anglican Churches." Dr. Clifford's ability at running away from a plain question is phenomenal. The *Church Times* believes in a State Church and Dr. Clifford does not—at least he says he does not. Either position is logical and honest; but one must stick to one or the other. In accepting exemption from the rates the Anglican party is only acting up to its principles; but Dr. Clifford who denounces State aid is clearly acting dishonestly when he greedily grasps all of it he can get. To retort that while Anglicans get State aid Nonconformists will continue taking it is ridiculously dishonest. If the Anglican position is sound, the Nonconformist objection to subsidised Church Schools falls to the ground. And if it is not sound, then Dr. Clifford is simply saying that while other men plunder the public he will plunder it also. Besides, there is the non-Christian public who are taxed by both parties to support churches and chapels it does not believe in—but one can hardly expect the Nonconformist Conscience to trouble about this. The truth of the whole matter is that Dr. Clifford is as anxious as anybody to dip his fingers in the public purse for the maintenance of religion, his real complaint is that certain rival practitioners get more than their share.

Sir Alfred Harmsworth, who keeps a palmist on the staff of one of his journalistic ventures, has waged a successful

war against some West-End palmists who are not on the staff of newspapers. These sinners, having been found guilty, are bound over to be of good behavior. But what humbug it all is! Why does not Sir Alfred Harmsworth fly at higher game? Why not prosecute men of God who live by guessing about the next world? Or priests who take money to hurry the dead through purgatory? The handful of poor palmists were an easy prey.

Rev. Arthur Jephson, who is both a clergyman and a member of the London County Council, has been telling an interviewer that parsons are very badly trained. "It would be a good thing," he said, "if no one were allowed to take orders in the Church of England until he had qualified himself by attending a course of Agnostic lectures in Victoria Park or Hyde Park on Sunday afternoons. He would then know what some of the people around us are thinking and saying every day of their lives. He would also learn something of his difficulties, especially if he took sides against the lecturer." We are not aware of any Agnostic lecturers in the London parks. There are several Atheist lecturers, and we dare say that Mr. Jephson uses the softer term for the sake of convenience. We heartily agree, however, with all the rest of his declaration. But might it not lead to trouble? Might not some of the candidates for holy orders get staggered, and even converted, by the "infidel" lecturers? Mr. Jephson should think of this before exposing them to such peril.

What a rare thing is Christian charity! And yet it is profitable enough. Before Mr. Paul Taylor, the other day, a man was summoned by the Holborn Guardians for neglecting to maintain himself. During the hearing of the summons a Salvation Army officer described the defendant as the laziest man he had ever met. In answer to the magistrate's queries, it transpired that while at the Salvation Farm Colony the defendant had earned one guinea per week. Out of this nine shillings and sixpence had been deducted for his keep—a fairly liberal deduction—the magnificent sum of sixpence had been given to him to spend as he pleased, and *eleven shillings* had gone into the coffers of the Army. Anywhere else this would have been called sweating. In the Army it is merely Christian philanthropy. On hearing the facts Mr. Taylor dismissed the summons.

The Rev. R. F. Horton has fixed his eagle eye on the works of Herbert Spencer. He discovers that they are marked by "utter aridity," "intolerable dreariness," and "not only unintelligible, but.....terrible." It is rather puzzling how the two latter qualities run together, but Dr. Horton is rather remarkable for his "derangement of epitaphs." We are also favored with a statement of the cause of these blemishes in the work of Spencer. This is, that "he had no interest in Christian truth, in Christian life.....and no interest in Christ." Hence the failure. Mercifully, Dr. Horton refrained from passing sentence until Spencer was dead. Otherwise it might have seriously embittered his declining years.

Among those who have commented on the *Daily Telegraph* discussion on "Do We Believe?" is "Merlin," of the *Referee*. In the course of his article "Merlin" observes: "The best you can say for Agnosticism is that it is not of necessity noxious to the character of the man who embraces it. No man was ever the better for being an unbeliever.....I think I have made a very poor exchange. I had no option but to make it, and I had no option but, in common honesty, to make confession of my intellectual position. But I cannot fail to see that the true Christian is animated by a purpose and a passion which were never yet characteristic of those who think as I do."

Every man has the right to speak for himself, but no one has the right to speak in this definite, and quite unwarrantable, fashion of others. Above all, one gets tired of the professed Freethinker who goes about assuring Christians that he would like to believe as they do, but he cannot, and so he submits to the misery of his lot. Anyone who acts in this manner either does not know what Freethought is, or he lacks the courage to offend the religious world. He has lost the fear of God, and gained that of Mrs. Grundy. It is pleasant to be assured that an Agnostic is not of necessity a criminal, even though it smacks of impertinence. But what is meant by saying that no man was ever better for being an unbeliever? If Christianity is false, it is usurping human energy and time to no useful end. And, therefore, to shake it off is to have rid oneself of so much useless mental and moral lumber, leaving the energy hitherto spent on religion free for use in other directions. And if a man is not the better for this, in the name of all that is sensible, what will he be the better for?

The closing portion of the sentence quoted is more than ridiculous, it is a libel on scores of great men and women. "Merlin" says "My want of belief is sterile." And because "Merlin" feels the need for some supernatural incentive every other person must be built on the same poor lines. Garibaldi was not a Christian; Gambetta was not a Christian; Charles Bradlaugh was not a Christian. Yet here is a trinity of men who were certainly "animated by a purpose and a passion" quite as sincere, and decidedly more useful than any purpose or passion that ever animated a believer. Would Charles Bradlaugh have had more purpose or passion as a Christian than he had as a Freethinker? To ask the question is to answer it. Yet here is a man who writes himself an unbeliever (save the mark!) who laments his own loss of energy as a result of his loss of religion, and writes that a Christian is "the only man" who has "always and everywhere the courage of his convictions"! And this after the records of such lives as those of Paine, and Carlele, and Bradlaugh! Such senseless writing makes one realise that even more than free thought the world needs *solid* thought. A *strong* thinker on either side is a possession; but a *weak* one using his own weakness as a measure of others' ability or energy is a stumbling block to genuine progress.

The Romford revising barrister allowed the vote of a man in a lunatic asylum. And why not? If all the lunatics were disfranchised we should have a much smaller electorate. Think of all the Christian Scientists, Faith Healers, believers in Hell and Damnation, etc., etc. Think of the Passive Resisters. No, it would never do to knock all the lunatics off the voters' list.

Dr. Ridding, the first Bishop of Southwell, who died last August, after keeping out of heaven for seventy-six years, left all his property to his wife. His estate is valued at £58,986. "Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven."

The Archbishop of Canterbury has finished running about America in a special train with Millionaire Morgan. He is coming home again to his palace and his poor £15,000 a year. "Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen."

Rev. John Wilson, of Woolwich, in the course of his presidential address to the Baptist Union, raised the "No Popery" cry, which is now becoming quite fashionable with Nonconformists. Nevertheless he was sure that God was against the Pope, and that the glorious Protestant Reformation was indestructible. All it wanted was a little freshening up, and this job was reserved for Mr. Wilson's own body of co-religionists. "If I mistake not," he said, "the Baptists are called upon to lead in a new Reformation which is to complete the old, and to give to the people of these islands perfect religious equality in the schools, and before the law." How beautiful! But it is all bunkum. Neither the Baptists, nor any other Nonconformist sect, have the slightest intention of fighting for "religious equality in the schools." Religious equality is only possible by the total elimination of religion; that is, by the policy of Secular Education. What the Baptists want is *Christian* equality; that is, an equality among Christian sects—to the detriment of all non-Christians, such as Jews, Secularists, Agnostics, and Rationalists.

Mr. G. L. Fulford, town clerk of Okehampton, went to Jacobstow on August 3 to attend a special service to commemorate the hanging of church bells. He cycled back to Okehampton, and within sight of the town he tumbled from his machine, and was picked up dead. When his affairs were looked into, his liabilities were found to amount to more than £22,000. "Then also," the *Western Morning News* says, "came to light cases, all too true, alas, of clients being remorselessly robbed of their savings." Mr. Fulford was a very pious gentleman. "His religion," we are told, "was a cloak to his misdeeds." "How could I do other than trust him?" said one victim, "I had known him all my life as being well connected and a Christian." Put not your trust in princes, the Bible says. Put not your trust in Christians, would be a sounder rule for many investors.

The dear *Daily News* advertises itself by means of a printed slip containing "an appreciation" of its noble self by a North-London man of God. This gentleman says that the *Daily News* has come "in answer to our prayer," that it puts "God above Gold," and that it is "a champion that comes to us in the name of the Lord of Hosts." Fancy all that for a halfpenny!

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

Sunday, October 16, Secular Hall, Brunswick-street, Glasgow; at 12, "Wee Kirkers, Free Kirkers, and the Disputed Cash-Box"; at 6.30, "Holy Russia and Heathen Japan."

October 23, Leicester; 30, Birmingham.

November 6, Coventry; 20, Manchester; 27, Liverpool.

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton. October 16, Forest Gate; 23 and 30, Queen's Hall, London. November 6, Glasgow; 13, Birmingham; 20, Coventry; 27, Birmingham. December 4, Leicester; 11, Liverpool.
- A. T. MAWSON.—We thank you for sending us a copy of the paper on "Casual Labor" which you were to read before the Church Congress. If you believe in the Church as an agent of social progress, you did right; but we are bound to say that we believe you wasted your time. The parsons only want you and your paper to help fill up their annual show.
- W. V.—The argument does not, on the face of it, seem sound. Ether is supposed to be immensely rarer than air.
- G. F. DUPLAY.—Your reply shows that you do not understand Mr. Cohen's article. You do not answer what he really said.
- W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for your cuttings.
- G. SCOTT.—We reciprocate your good wishes.
- E. J. J.—See paragraph.
- ROME CONGRESS FUND.—J. H. Bain 2s. 3d., J. Kelsey 2s. This Fund is now closed.
- J. MAGNERS.—Orders for literature should not be sent to Mr. Foote. Doing so gives trouble and causes delay. They should be sent direct to the Freethought Publishing Company, according to the announcement printed every week in the *Freethinker*.
- T. DEARDEN.—Thanks for report of the Bishop's speech; also for your good wishes. Pleased to hear that you enjoy reading the *Freethinker* and our "works."
- F. J. VOISEY.—Thanks. See paragraph.
- E. H.—No, nothing will abolish tests while religious teaching remains in the schools. If the tests are not open they will exist all the same—behind the scenes. We do not know whether Mr. J. R. Anderson, J.P., of Beeston, is still a Freethinker.
- AMICUS.—Thanks for the cuttings. The passages you mark indicate a change of tone which we welcome.
- W. P. PEARSON.—Accept our thanks. See paragraph. Pleased to hear you so enjoyed reading the first instalment of our Congress report, and hope you are equally enjoying the rest.
- J. L. G. MACKINNON.—You probably saw that we dealt with the Rev. R. J. Campbell's outburst against the British working man in last week's "Acid Drops," which you would receive almost as soon as your cutting reached us.
- J. ARMSTRONG.—Pleased to hear from one who has been a "constant reader of the *Freethinker* for the last nine months," and regards it not only as "second to none," but as "a weekly treat" which he "would not miss for the world." It cheers and encourages both editor and contributors to know that readers are strongly attached to their journal.
- R. B. EVANS.—Mr. Lloyd's *Clarion* article was an able one, as was to be expected, and it is bound to do good. The point you object to is perhaps not too fortunately expressed. Mr. Foote and Mr. Cohen (and even Mr. Robertson, we believe) are not properly included in a list of "champions of religious Agnosticism." Mr. Foote, at any rate, has always declined to wear the Agnostic label. With regard to theology, he professes himself what Cardinal Newman called "a pure and simple Atheist." The superfine objections of little timid people to the term "Atheist" may be disregarded, not so much with a sneer as with a smile. Shelley called himself an Atheist; Charles Bradlaugh called himself an Atheist; and no one need sniff at a term that was good enough for the greatest poet and the greatest hero of modern England. Mr. Lloyd is an Atheist himself, and is not built to conceal the fact. It is evident from his *Clarion* article, as well as from his many articles in our own columns. In this respect you do him, unwittingly, a decided injustice.
- W. D. MACGREGOR informs us that the "converted infidel" named Stobbie who has been soul-saving at Hawick was never connected with the Edinburgh Secular Society, and that Mr. J. Dewar says that no person of that name has been connected with the Edinburgh Secularists for a quarter of a century. Mr. Macgregor asks whether Evangelist Stobbie has changed his name as well as his creed.
- J. E. BALLEW.—We thank you for informing us that the Rev. Dr. Warschauer, addressing a meeting on Sunday afternoon in the Unitarian Church, Clifton, spoke of the *Freethinker* as "very low." We expect professional Christians to talk in that way about this journal; and we take it as a compliment, for they hate us because they know we do their cause the most damage. We were going to begin our criticism of this reverend gentleman's reply to Mr. Blatchford next week, and the "very low" will be a final reason for not sparing the scalpel in his dissection.
- H. PARSONS.—Yes, we saw "Saladin's" reference to ourselves and others in relation to the Rome Congress; but thanks for your letter, all the same. What he said of us may be considered generous. We understand that the allusion in the McCabe paragraph is to the fact that a reference to "Saladin"

was omitted in the English translation of Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe*.

T. BRADSHAW.—Mention was made of Mr. Sykes, newsagent, 137 Leigh-road, Southend, only a few weeks ago. He has supplied this journal and other Freethought literature for many years, and made a display of it. You are right in saying that he deserves the patronage of Freethinkers.

W. VILE.—A capital idea. Accept our thanks.

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

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Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote delivers two lectures in the Secular Hall, Brunswick-street, Glasgow, to-day (Oct. 16). His morning lecture (at 12) is on a subject of great local interest—"Wee Kirkers, Free Kirkers, and the Disputed Cash-Box"—and should attract a large audience. "Holy Russia and Heathen Japan" is pretty sure to pack the hall in the evening (at 6.30). Mr. Foote will see that there is a good supply of the sixpenny edition of *Bible Romances* on sale, as there will probably be a brisk demand for them on this occasion.

Mr. Foote had a still larger audience at the Queen's (Minor) Hall on Sunday evening. Many ladies were present and a considerable proportion of strangers. Mr. Cowell officiated as chairman. The fine meeting followed Mr. Foote's lecture with intense interest, picked up all his points with great alertness, and cheered him to the echo when he finished. A number of questions were asked and answered, and two gentlemen spoke for ten minutes each in opposition. It was a live meeting from beginning to end.

We hope these Queen's Hall meetings will be kept up. Two good attendances are not sufficient. There ought to be a crowded gathering every Sunday evening. We hope there will be one to-night (Oct. 16), when Mr. John Lloyd lectures on "The True Gospel."

Mr. F. J. Gould, having lost his seat on the Leicester School Board, in consequence of the abolition of the Board itself by the new Education Act, is still minded to do something for "Secular Moral Instruction" in the town where he now works and resides. Accordingly he is seeking a seat on the Town Council, and is standing for the Castle Ward. His opponent is a publican; a jolly man, and popular through his circulation of palatable fluids. We understand that the election is likely to be decided by the votes of the Nonconformists, who are in an awkward dilemma, having to choose between a publican and a sinner. We hope they will decide for the sinner. It would be a companionable act; for, according to their creed and book, *all men are sinners*, while only a minority are wicked enough to be publicans. Secularists, in any case, will do their utmost to secure Mr. Gould's return.

Reviewing Mr. Swinburne's latest volume of poems, the *Athenaeum* says: "Unlike Tennyson and Browning, Mr. Swinburne refuses to fortify his acceptance of death with any credulity of hope. He does not sell his soul for an hypothesis. He does not seek to abate the unknown. He is content with death, whatever death may be. This is not a pose: it is his invariable attitude towards the mystery of being. Through all his poetry runs the same high defiance, the same affirmation of the manhood of man against the god-head of the gods."

The Rome Congress.—III.

XI.

WITH the exception of Dr. Conway, who, as I have already stated, spoke for a few minutes on the first day of the Congress, I am not aware that the British, American, or German delegates made any serious effort to take part in the Congress discussions—if the term is appropriate to such proceedings. Those who did not belong to the Latin races practically stood aside, and allowed the Congress to become a purely Latin demonstration. Nothing else, indeed, was really possible, without a struggle that would have confounded the confusion. Still, as a Latin demonstration, the Congress was of vast importance. It was so numerous, so enthusiastic, and so representative of the forces which, in France, Italy, and Spain, are undermining the Catholic Church, and also preventing the possibility of Protestant Churches being erected on its ruins.

Mr. Victor Roger kindly supplies me with some extracts from *La Raison* (which does not reach the *Freethinker* office now), giving opinions on the Congress by some distinguished attendants. M. Furnémont, the general secretary, admits that there might have been more order; but who was to control four thousand militant Freethinkers in such a state of exaltation? Four thousand Freethinkers have spoken, shouted, discussed, demonstrated in front of the Vatican. Never has the Papacy received such a blow in the face. M. Furnémont is delighted. He calls it a triumph—as indeed it was; and he says that if he were not depressed by the frightful overwork he would be the happiest man in the world.

Haeckel takes much the same view. This is what he said first:—

“Being a partisan of work and action, I am an enemy to these palavers miscalled Congresses. What really can one say of a Congress so badly organised as the one in which we have taken part? During five days we have lived in grave disorder. ‘I prefer injustice to disorder,’ said Goethe.”

This looks distinctly discouraging. Haeckel, however, did not mean to produce that impression. “In spite of all,” he said, “we may congratulate ourselves.” The Congress was a great demonstration at an opportune moment. It had forced forward the question of the separation of the Church and State, in particular, and made it “the order of the day” in Western Europe. “In France, especially,” Haeckel added, “the separation seems to me certain, inevitable.”

Personally, Haeckel experienced great joy at being able to expound Monism in the ancient College of the Jesuits. He thought next year was too soon for another Congress. When his interviewer hoped to see him in 1905 at Paris, beside Berthelot and Buisson, Haeckel replied: “Next year! But I shall perhaps be in Hell!” He is more likely to be in Paris.

XII.

I stated a fortnight ago that the N. S. S. delegates held their own little demonstration at the Bruno monument. There was to have been a Congress demonstration, in which they would have gladly joined; but it was postponed and postponed, day after day, until at last it seemed quite hopeless. So the fourteen of us decided to make sure of one demonstration, however small, at the monument of the greatest of Freethought martyrs. We were joined by Dr. Wilson, of Cincinnati, who had a poem with him, called “A Challenge to the Church,” written by Walter Hurb, of Camden, Ohio, and intended to be read at the Congress. This poem, which is too long for insertion here, Dr. Wilson read to “the English delegation,” as he called it, by whom it was highly appreciated. But there were no speeches. There had been speeches enough in Rome already. The N. S. S. delegates, and their American comrade, took off their hats and reverently saluted the memory of that magnificent hero. They

studied the bronze reliefs showing three great scenes in his career. The last was where he stood erect before the Inquisition tribunal that sentenced him to be put to death without effusion of blood—the infamous formula for burning alive. His head was thrown back in noble defiance. One could imagine him uttering the brave words that ring across the centuries: “I suspect that you pronounce my sentence with far more fear than I hear it.” The fourth side of the plinth bore the grandly simple Italian inscription, setting forth that the monument was erected to Bruno by the century he foresaw, there where he was burned to ashes.

Bruno’s statue is superbly poised. The figure is full length. The fine face is visible under the monk’s hood, and the hands are clasped, easily but firmly, over a book. As I gazed up at that hero of heroes the face almost seemed to smile; as though he himself stood there, and wore the look of one who had passed through the hot fierce ordeal of martyrdom, and was now safe on the sun-smitten mountain of man’s memory for ever.

I stood with my comrades on the very spot where Bruno was burnt to death. There he was butchered to make a Roman holiday. There he had felt the full vengeance of the Church of Christ. There he had stood undaunted, looking over a sea of hostile faces, and not a friend’s amongst them. There his sublime manhood had confronted the bigotry, hatred, and malice of the world. There he had refused to utter one word of submission, even after seven years’ imprisonment and torture. There he had soared above the priests of the bloody faith. There he had played the part of a second Prometheus. There he had measured himself against time and oblivion, and won the victory.

To stand in peace on the scene of Bruno’s agony was one of the great moments of a lifetime. I am glad I went to Rome, if only for that single experience. I say to stand there *in peace*. For the Eternal City is no longer in the hands of the Papacy. The power to persecute and kill is no longer enjoyed by the successor of Saint Peter. The Pope scowls and grumbles in the Vatican while the streets of Rome echo to the tread of thousands of Freethinkers.

XIII.

When our little N. S. S. demonstration was over, a capital idea occurred to Mr. Roger. It was that we should be photographed together in front of the Bruno monument. This was subsequently arranged. The next day we went to the Campo dei Fiore again, and the photographer was there to receive us. The police kindly allowed us to climb the railings and group ourselves right in front of the plinth. The two ladies, of course, had to remain outside. They could not practise gymnastics before the crowd. And there *was* a crowd. It took the considerate police all their time to keep a lane open for the photographer to operate in and secure his picture.

Fifty copies of the picture have been received from Rome, and may be purchased at the price of two shillings each from Miss E. M. Vance, our secretary, at 2 Newcastle-street, London, E.C. Further copies can be ordered from Rome if necessary. The picture is paid for by the N. S. S., and is the Society’s property. A reproduction of it will appear on the front page of next week’s *Freethinker*.

XIV.

I have said that Dr. Wilson, of Cincinnati, representative of the American Liberal League, joined us at our first visit to the Bruno monument. He wished to be photographed with the N. S. S. group; but the final arrangements, depending as they did upon the weather, were made in a great hurry, and it was impossible to give him notice. When he reads this he will understand why he was not included.

Dr. Wilson spent a lot of time with the N. S. S. delegates, and was good enough to say that he would have been very lonely without them. He is comparatively a young man, and I hope to hear

more of him in the future of American Free-thought.

XV.

As it happened, the Congress, or the remains of it, had sallied out to do honor to Bruno that very afternoon. And they were almost on our heels, though we did not know it.

M. Furnémont delivered a speech there in honor of all the martyrs of Free-thought. The other speakers were MM. Gérault-Richard, Audiant, Merlino, and Podrecca.

Then the Congressionists went on to the Janiculum, to lay a wreath on the monument to Garibaldi. The N. S. S. delegates, with Dr. Wilson, happened to be going to the Garibaldi monument themselves, and they were lucky enough to witness the demonstration.

It was a beautiful scene. Right on the summit of the Janiculum, one of the famous seven hills, the bronze figure of Garibaldi, mounted on a splendid bronze charger, poised upon a massive lofty plinth, looked over the Eternal City of which he was the principal liberator. Nearly the whole of the upper part of the plinth had been taken possession of by children. There they sat, boys and girls, with their arms round each other's necks or waists, their dark eyes flashing, and their faces full of eager interest. They reckoned themselves, and they were, a part of the demonstration. Twenty years hence some of them may remember it with pride as well as pleasure. Below them were the leaders and speakers, and below these again the crowd of demonstrators. The weather was perfect. The serene blue Italian sky was flecked with fleecy clouds, the air was delightfully balmy, and the far-off Sabine hills gleamed softly through the light, tremulous, summer haze, like mountains in a dream.

The principal speaker was M. Célestin Demblon, who proved himself a fine orator. M. Demblon is a municipal councillor at Liège, a member of the Belgian parliament, and professor of history and French literature at the New University of Brussels. He is a very interesting personality. French fervor is tempered in him by the Northern phlegm. I had the pleasure of conversing with him at our hotel. He is a passionate admirer of Shakespeare, and has translated *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* into French. He favored me with a copy of his admirable pamphlet on "Protestantism," showing the absurdity of the expectation that Protestantism has a great future in France and Belgium. Altogether I regard M. Demblon as one of my most pleasing memories of the Rome Congress. I was delighted to hear him speaking so admirably at the Garibaldi demonstration, and to hear the enthusiastic applause with which his speech was greeted.

XVI

The other speakers at the Garibaldi demonstration were French, and I wondered why *they* monopolised the talking. France had not assisted Garibaldi and the liberation of Rome. France had upheld the Papal power with rifles and bayonets. It was only the disaster to French arms at Sedan that allowed the Italian troops to enter the Holy City. England, however, had done something for Garibaldi and Italy. She had given her moral support, which meant a great deal then; she had subscribed money, she had sent volunteers to fight under Garibaldi's flag, and when he visited her shores she gave him a more than royal reception. It would have been fitting, therefore, if an Englishman had been asked to speak a few words in front of Garibaldi's statue. But the organisers were all Latins, and it did not occur to them. They meant no harm. They simply forgot that the world was wider than the Latin nations.

XVII.

Seeing that the Congress was a fiasco as a Congress, though a splendid triumph as a Free-thought demonstration, my readers will not be surprised to learn that the N. S. S. delegates, in

order not to waste their time, went about as much as possible seeing the sights of Rome.

We arrived at Rome on Tuesday morning (Sept. 20) soon after five o'clock. We had been in the train since two o'clock on Sunday afternoon. Some of us had slept fairly well in the train, but I was not one of them. Yet it was too late to go to bed at the end of our journey; so we had a wash-up and our milk-coffee, and sallied out into the streets. Congress posters met us at every turn. So did policemen and soldiers. We had seen plenty of soldiers before. They stood in rows, with stacked rifles, in the station at Turin: they occupied the railway when we were "hung up" at Genoa by the strike. And both the policemen and the soldiers gave us an object-lesson in continental government. Two or three of them would walk up to a fresh poster; if they approved it they let it pass—if they objected to it they defaced it. They defaced one Congress poster apparently for no other reason than its being printed on pink paper. They seem to hate "red" like bulls. Yet they were civil and even obliging to us when we sought their services. A lifted hat and a pleasant smile went a long way with them. Perhaps they felt the change from their dealings with their own compatriots. Still, it was a treat when one got back to England to see the homely "copper" again; the very bad-fit of his coat helped to make him look so domestic.

Modern Rome is spick and span. Many of the new buildings are "fine" in their way, but with no particular architectural merit. The sweet air keeps them clean, but they look too much as though one builder had contracted for the lot. Modern Rome is a cheap edition of Paris.

Rome, after all, is ancient Rome. When you wander amidst the vast suggestive old ruins, you feel that "there were giants in those days." When you return to the streets of modern Rome you feel that you are amongst pygmies.

This is not meant as a special reproach to the people of Rome. It would apply almost as well to the inhabitants of any other European capital.

Hobbes's great image occurred to me as I stood on the Palatine, and looked down from the colossal ruins of the palaces of the Emperors upon modern Rome, with St. Peter's and the Vatican at the back of it, where the city loses itself in the Campagna. The Holy Catholic Church is but the ghost of the dead Roman Empire, sitting throned upon the grave thereof.

The cure for any man who believes in Christianity is to take him to Rome, show him the ruins of what Rome once was, and what Rome now is, and let him work out for himself how much progress Christianity has caused on that very spot.

Shadows of demigods seem to haunt the ruins which modern Rome now keeps in a sort of repair and lives by exhibiting. The mighty Julius Caesar, the foremost man of all this world, soldier, statesman, and philosopher, with great projects for the world's advancement seething in his vast and active brain; Augustus, who kept the peace of the world for thirty-eight years, ruling a vast Empire, and keeping little more state than an ordinary Roman gentleman; Titus Vespasian, who, with all the imperial burdens resting upon him, could still find time at the day's close to regret that he had missed an opportunity of doing an act of kindness; Antoninus Pius, the gracious father of his people; Marcus Aurelius, whose grand brows seemed weighted with superhuman thought, and whose hand in the magnificent equestrian statue on the Capitol is extended like that of a beneficent god to the whole of mankind; these are some of the grand figures that sweep past before the mind's eye as one treads the ground which their genins and character sanctified.

Compare the kings of modern Europe, after nearly two thousand years of Christianity, with the least of that great company. The result makes us laugh or shudder—as we see the comedy or the tragedy of the comparison.

G. W. FOOTE.

Revival of Religious Bigotry.

THERE are many signs of reaction in the religious world; and with the reaction a spirit of persecution manifests itself. The majority in many Councils show what they would do if they had the power. What they can do by means of obsolete old Acts, they do in the most high-handed way; and some do not hesitate to use their majority to make new laws for themselves and others. And in some cases the minority are so imbued with the religious sentiment, and are so much afraid of Mrs. Grundy, that their opposition is most sheepish and ineffective.

The reaction is helped not only by Councils and local authorities, but also by magistrates on the Bench, judges in the Courts, and the majority of the press. The leading newspapers cater for the sects by reporting their speeches and sermons and doings, and supporting their superstitious teaching. The same press suppress all news, as far as they can, of all Rationalist movements; they ignore their meetings, boycott the speeches, and belittle all who are pronounced unbelievers. And many of them will not admit any letters from any quarter in protest and opposition. The organs where you can say all you think on any subject whatever are very few.

But there are a few press organs that advocate liberal ideas in religious matters as well as in politics, and for these we must be thankful. But I am afraid that the most liberal of them are too mealy-mouthed and too ready to conceal their unbelief. In dealing with superstition, plain speaking is the most honest and most effective.

The reaction has actually overtaken many eminent scientists, as recent utterances clearly show; and I fear that the silence of the majority is an unfortunate result of it.

Even the Government has been infected by the reactionary spirit. The Education Bill of 1902, endowing the Church of Rome and the Church of England in the day schools, was a thorough reactionary measure in that respect. A generation or two back it would have been impossible to pass such an Act.

In the Churches the reaction is very conspicuous and active, especially after the attack on Christianity in the *Clarion*. After the death of Bradlaugh and Ingersoll the Churches lulled themselves to sleep, for they thought Freethought was dead. They were greatly mistaken. Freethought and Freethinkers are two different things. Freethinkers die, like other men; and the death of Bradlaugh and Ingersoll was a loss to Freethought and the world. But Freethought did not die with them. It cannot die. If all the leaders died in one day, however great the loss, the cause would live, as the living truth is embodied in it, and new living leaders would rise to take their place.

Two things have contributed to awaken the Churches to a fighting attitude. One is the spread of what is called the Higher Criticism in the Church itself. And what is the Higher Criticism but the arguments and objections of Freethinkers? When uttered by unbelievers they were too low to be answered except by slander and persecution. When uttered in the Church by Christian apologists they are honored by the title of Higher Criticism. For this we must be thankful; they are doing our work in quarters where we have no access, and would have no hearing if we had.

The other cause of the awakening is the spread of doubt amongst the members and attendants of the Churches. This is shown in the difficulty of getting suitable candidates for the ministry. The low quality of the clerical mind has been a noted thing at all times; of late it has been painfully conspicuous. Real ability in the clerical ranks is like angels' visits—few and far between. The spread of unbelief is also shown by the dropping off of members and attendants from the churches and chapels. The complaints are general that the churches are half empty. A minister lately, in a

Conference, advocated the selling of empty chapels to help to make congregations in other half-empty ones, and to have the money to help other worthy movements.

The reaction is seen on all hands. Restrictions are enforced on Rationalists, and dropped in the case of others; halls and schools are refused except on conditions that cannot be accepted; books, pamphlets, newspapers, and periodicals are refused admission to libraries; museums and theatres are forced to remain closed on Sundays; permission to open on Sunday, even for charitable purposes, is refused; Sunday open-air concerts are forbidden; and old obsolete Acts are revived against Sunday trading of all kinds except the clerical craft.

Only a few weeks since a cripple was summoned for delivering ordered newspapers to customers on Sunday, and the magistrates ordered the papers to be confiscated. In Manchester one of the arch-bigots deprived a nursing institution of at least a hundred pounds by an appeal to the old obsolete Sunday Act. The same sour bigot prevented two theatres charging for admission in order to assist the lifeboat collection. It is difficult to speak or write respectably of such fanatical bigots.

Almost every week, in some district or other, reports of outbursts of religious bigotry appear in the newspapers. That religion, exploited by the priest, is the cause of it is palpable. It is all priest-craft. Museums, theatres, concert halls, and shops must be closed that the shop of the priest may be full.

Are the Rationalists and liberal-minded people not numerous and strong enough to put an end to the reactionary bigotry? If they were organised and disciplined for the fight, I think they are. Unfortunately, we are only a mob fighting an enemy with an army of thoroughly disciplined soldiers. Till our forces are better organised and trained the results of our efforts will never be worthy of our cause, which is to have free thought, free speech, free Sunday, free land.

The old obsolete Acts ought to be repealed. They are never dead till they are repealed. As long as they are on the Statute Book some bigot or fool may at any time revive them, and cause much trouble and mischief, as is done in many a district at the present time.

A thought has risen in my mind many a time that it would be a good move on the part of theatres to open on Sundays and give free performances or concerts, and make collections towards expenses, or place boxes in convenient places for voluntary contributions. Such a move would popularise the theatre and help to create a demand for the repeal of the old Sunday Act. By such means religious bigots would soon find out that common sense is stronger than common superstition, and that refined entertainments would be more popular than nonsensical ritual and the brainless twaddle of pulpit oratory. The people would desert the churches and crowd the theatres and other places of entertainment, indoor and outdoor. That is what the clergy know, and fear. They have not faith enough in their religion and ministry to attract and retain the people, and therefore invoke the law to fight for them. But let them beware. Some of these days there will be a league formed that will crush their pretensions and secure for the British people the liberty which they ought to have had long ago.

R. J. DERFEL.

Gospel Hash.

VERY reluctantly, the writer was urged to attend a Wesleyan chapel on a recent Sunday evening; very reluctantly, to please a young friend, and at the preacher's especial invitation, he went. Shown with much deference to one of the highest seats in the synagogue, and courteously supplied with a hymn-book, he awaited the utterances of the preacher. It was in a handsome Gothic building where the ser-

vices were held, with a fine chancel and "altar," an organ on the side, and choir stalls filled with men and women singers, a pulpit, and a reading-desk—all very like an Evangelical Church of England place of worship.

The preacher, a rather imposing-looking, stalwart person, who was introduced to the writer as a man of "broad views"—which, alas! proved to be extremely narrow ones—conducted the service. Prayers of the usual fervid Wesleyan type were made between some doleful, wrathful hymns, and some lessons from the Bible. The writer sat quietly, but inwardly uneasy, through hymns and prayers, and tried to behave very decorously in the prominent place given him. But the young man with him was overcome, now and then, with "giggling" at the preacher's manner and the unhappy hymns.

Then came the long-expected sermon. It was an "effort" evidently, and exceedingly boisterous for that very small congregation in that very large, expensive edifice. Much waving of hands, much shouting, much gesticulation, much lifting up of the body—an old preaching trick—a lot of mouthing, a heap of rant and cant, a total disappointment to the writer, who expected at least a logical, forcible, enlightened discourse, and got—Gospel Hash!

The text was, "How can a man be born when he is old?" and ran on about regeneration, etc. "How can a man be born at all?" yelled the preacher, stupidly; whereat some of the young people in the choir and the youth by my side tittered. Then came the usual goody talk, anecdotes, allusions to science, snarling at scientists as fancying they knew and must control all things, and a round-up with tremendous emphasis with the question, "Canst thou by searching find out God?"

Then came more windmill gyrations of the preacher's arms, more shouts, muffled sobs, groans, etc., interlarded by rambling "pious talk," in no connection with the text, but no showing how a man is to be "born again," which I had expected to be demonstrated there and then, and no hints how such a "miracle" could be performed. More farrago and religious rubbish, and at last a grand pyrotechnic display of pulpit fireworks, a wrathful hymn, a foolish prayer, and the thing was over. I was ashamed of the preacher and disappointed utterly.

"But I am justly punished for going," said I to the giggling youth who had beguiled me there, and who laughed so at the "rot" of the sermon that he could hardly walk down the steps. He despised the discourse equally with myself, but could not control his risibles. I was disgusted with such an effort from any sensible minister—and yet they said, "He is a powerful preacher." "Humbug!" I replied, with other ejaculations more pertinent than pious.

"Can it be," said I to my giggler, when he had sobered down, "that you and other young men can go to hear such claptrap nonsense?" "Well, I don't go often, and mean to go less," was the reply. "I should think so," was my rejoinder. "Better stay home and read an informing book, or a good novel, than to waste your time listening to such trash as this Gospel Hash!"

Was it not pitiful that a congregation should be assembled and expenses made to defray the cost of such a wretched attempt? If such a building were provided for scientific lectures or Freethought addresses on Sunday evenings, with such a choir and organ, and suitable music, how much more good could be done! The intolerable and long sermon did me out of a charming concert. But had there been intellect, thought, or information, I could have condoned that; but the hash of Gospel facts, irrelevant texts, unmeaning anecdotes, lugubrious pathos or bathos, and the skyrocketty conclusion were "too many" for me. Simple and sound digestion of the average healthy man cannot stand such conglomerations. Plain, nutritious living is what we need mentally as well as physically.

No doubt there are pulpits where there is a show of intellect, common sense, and practical knowledge; but there are others—yes, "there are others"—

where sense is wanting, reason banished, science scoffed at, and free inquiry almost sworn at. What food for the people is here—what pabulum for thought, what direction for the conduct of life? American hash, notably "turkey hash," is often like the work of Creation as set forth in Genesis—"very good"; but save us all on Sunday evening, after a decent tea, from anything in church or chapel like "Gospel Hash"!

GERALD GREY.

The "Beam" and the "Mote."

The Rev. R. J. Campbell says, in the *National Review* for October, that the British working man is "often lazy, unthrifty, improvident, and sometimes immoral, foul-mouthed, and untruthful."

THE Rev'nd R. J. C., plus L. S. D.—

A Gentile agent of the Jew, J. C.—

Denounces working men—for what? just guess!

For sundry things, including *thriftlessness!*

Yet Christ, the *thriftless, shaftless, homeless Jew,*

Who blest the poor, and curst the well-to-do,

Is lauded by the pampered R. J. C.,

As type of all a working man should be!

The Rev'nd R. J. C. is well-to-do,

And, so, contemns the gaberlunzie Jew.

The Rev'nd one, moreover, says—Forsooth!—

That workmen, *sometimes*, violate the truth.

Ye "Motes" and "Beams"! A Rev'nd face of brass!

A witted humbug, or an honest ass!

The workman *sometimes* fibs; the Priest, *sans cesse*;

His rôle involves incessant truthlessness.

He blames the *incidental* liars; so,

The *amateurs* are censured by the "pro."

As truth, and word of God, he speaks and reads

What, well he knows, he neither holds nor heeds.

He prays to God before the public eye,

Yet knows the act to be a pious lie.

Ye "Motes" and "Beams"! A Rev'nd face of brass!

A witted humbug, or an honest ass!

G. L. MACKENZIE.

The Holy Stone of Damascus.

The Rev. A. Boddy, vicar of All Saints' Church, Sunderland, who believes in faith-healing and in casting out of devils, picked up at the Gate of Damascus a stone which he has used as the foundation-stone of his Sunday-school, "in the hope that it will serve as a blessed barrier against wickedness."

Gin a body meet A. Boddy

Comin frae The East

Wi' a muckle chuckie-stane

Huggit till his breist,

Need a body wonner at

His meek an' mim-like smirk?—

Wi' "holy stanes" the glaiket Boddy's

Gaun' to foun' a kirk.

Gin A. Boddy meet a body

"On the road to hell,"

Need A. Boddy stop a body

Claver-clash to tell?

Bletherin' Boddies worry bodies,

Nae "Heaven" and "Hell" ken I;—

Ance busy-Boddies ca'ed on me,

But noo they a' ca' by.

Could a body see A. Boddy

F'littin' Nickie-ben,

Aiblins mony an unco body

Would his kirk atten'?

For ilka body has his fetich—

Nane they say hae I;

An' a' the clergy frown on me,

But what the waur am I?

FRED. L. GREIG.

PRESENT LOCATION UNKNOWN.—A caller stopped at the house of a certain man and asked if he was at home. "'Deed, an' he's not," replied the woman who answered the ring. "Can you tell me where he is?" "I could not." "When did you see him last?" "At his funeral." "And who may you be?" "I'm his remains," said the widow, and she closed the door.—*Philadelphia Public Ledger*.

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.

QUEEN'S (Minor) HALL (Langham-place, W.): John Lloyd. "The True Gospel." Doors open 7, Chair taken 7.30. Discussion invited. Admission free. Reserved front seat, 1s.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Liberal Hall, Broadway, Forest Gate, E.): Doors open 7 p.m., chair taken at 7.30 p.m., C. Cohen, "What are the Real Aims of Secularism?"

OUTDOOR.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Station-road): 11.30, W. J. Ramsey. North Camberwell Hall (61 New Church-road): 3.15, Religious Freethought Parliament. All seekers of truth invited; 7.30, F. A. Davies, "What is the Use of Religion?"

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): W. H. Thresh, 3, "Freed from the Fetters of Faith"; 7, "What are We to Believe?"

COVENTRY BRANCH N. S. S. (Baker's Coffee Tavern, Fleet-street): A. G. Lye, 7, "Charles Bradlaugh."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (110 Brunswick-street): G. W. Foote, 12 noon, "Wee Kirkers, Free Kirkers, and the Disputed Cash-Box"; 6.30, "Holy Russia and Heathen Japan."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 3, L. Small, B.Sc., "The Philosophy of Science.—I."; 7, H. Percy Ward, "A Freethinker's Review of the Church Congress." Monday, 8, Rationalist Debating Society.

LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (Armley Park): 11, G. Weir, "Jehovah's Flat Earth." Crossflats Park, 3, Debate between H. C. Hepton and G. Weir. Subject, "Are Christ's Teachings Practical?"

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints): 6.30, Councillor McLachlan, "Will; in Relation to Progress."

NEWCASTLE DEBATING SOCIETY (Lockhart's Cathedral Cafe): Thursday, October 20, at 7.45, D. R. Bow, "The Pleasures of Shop-Keeping."

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7.30, Lecture arrangements.

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