

# THE Freethinker

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*Talk POLITICS with the stupidest Englishman, and he will be sure to say something sensible. But as soon as the conversation turns on RELIGION, the most intelligent Englishman utters nothing but silly speeches.—HEINE.*

## Some Defenders of the Faith.—VII.

A UNITARIAN COUNTERBLAST.—II.

IV.

CHRISTIANS have a most extraordinary way of arguing about the Bible. Mr. Warschauer even speaks contemptuously of Mr. Blatchford for using the Authorised Version. Apparently he should have quoted from the Revised Version. This, at any rate, seems to be Mr. Warschauer's opinion. But it is a great impertinence on his part to attempt to thrust such a responsibility upon an opponent. An "infidel" is entitled, at least for the purposes of controversy, to take the edition of the Bible which the Christians offer him; and the edition they offer him is the one they use themselves. The Revised Version has not yet supplanted the Authorised Version. Many think it never will. At any rate, the Authorised Version has been in use for nearly three hundred years, while the Revised Version is a thing of yesterday. Whether the latter is better than the former is a question which "infidels" cannot wait to see decided. It may be better, in the sense of more accurately rendering the original into English, although this is disputed; but a discussion on this point is clearly one for scholars and not for the general public. It may also be better, in the sense of being more favorable to present-day doctrines; but this point is clearly one of domestic interest, and the controversy about it should be confined to the household of faith. In short, the "infidel" has a perfect right to quote from the Authorised Version; indeed, it is his duty to do so, until the Christians accept the Revised Version with something like unanimity.

Mr. Warschauer thinks, too, that he does a good stroke for the Bible by showing that Mr. Blatchford is not a profound and accurate scholar. This, of course, is very easily proved; but what is the use of it, after all? Mr. Blatchford does not pretend to be anything of the kind. Suppose he has made a thousand mistakes: are any of them vital? If not, it is a waste of time to parade them. The truth is that they are *not* vital. The principal part of Mr. Blatchford's indictment of the Bible as the Word of God is based upon its contents. It really does not matter a straw whether he is right or wrong about Ezra. And the critical dust raised by Mr. Warschauer will not blind the eyes of sensible people to the essence of the question in dispute.

What is the use of suggesting that Mr. Blatchford has borrowed from "a secularist tract"? What is the use of saying that he is probably indebted to a "disgusting and unscholarly volume" written by a "painfully vulgar and ignorant pamphleteer" called "Saladin"? This gratuitous and abusive attack upon a Freethought writer does not help Mr. Warschauer's argument in the least. It only proves that the Unitarian defender of the faith is a very ill-conditioned disputant. This trait in his controversial character is only too conspicuous. Failing to

recognise the "infidel's" right to ask how the objectionable parts of the Bible are to be reconciled with the theory of its divine inspiration, Mr. Warschauer tries to get rid of an awkward difficulty by appealing to a vulgar prejudice. He proceeds to discuss, not the character of the Bible, but the character of its critics. "It is necessary," he says, "to use plainness of speech in telling the secularist that the average Christian is neither as much at home nor as much interested in the 'less seemly parts' of the Bible as he, the secularist." This can only mean that the Secularist (with a big S this time) objects to the dirty parts of the Bible out of sheer dirty-mindedness. Which we are sorry to say is just worthy of Mr. Warschauer.

It may be perfectly true, as this gentleman observes, that "it is a mistake to think that you have described a palace when you have given an account of its sinks and dust-bins." We fail, however, to see the relevancy of the observation. No "infidel" ever pretended that his objection to the worst portions of the Bible had any sort of application to the best portions. That might almost go without saying. Nor can we allow Mr. Warschauer's metaphor to pass unchallenged. The sinks and dust-bins, at least in civilised palaces, are carefully kept out of sight. They may be necessary, but they should not be prominent. In the same way, there are certain human functions which are perfectly natural, but which cultivated people relegate to privacy. But this is not the method of the Bible. Judged by modern standards, it is quite gratuitously offensive. The sinks are too apt to be open sewers, and the dust-bins occur in the most unsuitable positions—sometimes in the middle of a drawing-room. It may also be said that the whole metaphor is very misleading. There is really nothing in any way corresponding to sinks and dust-bins that is necessary in a book of ethics. Mr. Warschauer himself would hardly introduce the savage crudities of the Old Testament into a modern manual of religion. He is trying to defend what he feels is indefensible. That is why he loses his temper.

V.

Modern defenders of the faith have a curious habit of quoting "that great poet" James Russell Lowell. Mr. Warschauer calls him "that great Christian poet." Well, he may have been a "great Christian poet," but he was not a "great poet." Even if he were, these defenders of the faith should not go on quoting the very same lines. They might find something fresh in the big book of Lowell's verses. We could refer them to lines that make his Christianity somewhat doubtful. Even the lines with which Mr. Warschauer ends his chapter on the Bible are not very convincing on this point.

Slowly the Bible of the race is writ,  
And not on paper leaves nor leaves of stone;  
Each age, each kindred, adds a verse to it,  
Texts of despair or hope, of joy or moan.  
While swings the sea, while mists the mountain shroud,  
While thunder's surges burst on cliffs of cloud,  
Still at the prophet's feet the nations sit.

We are afraid that the nations too often sit on the prophet's head. But let that pass. Our point is that this verse is decidedly not Christian. It is cosmopolitan and humanitarian. "The Bible of the

race" is not the Christian Scriptures. We are told that the last word of that sectional production was written some eighteen hundred years ago. But the Bible that Lowell sings of is always being added to, and will always be so while the human race endures. Moreover, the very statement that it is not written either on paper or on stone, is an indirect attack upon the orthodox theory of inspiration. The "leaves" represent the printed Bible, and the "stone" the two tables of commandments that Moses is fabled to have brought down from Mount Sinai, and that are still seen at the back of Christian altars.

Pope said that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing." A little poetry is a dangerous thing too. Defenders of the faith should extend their reading, or penetrate a little more deeply into the meaning of what they are acquainted with.

## VI.

We shall now deal with what Mr. Warschauer says about Agnosticism. Here, again, he has something to learn. He appears to be a dupe of words, and fancies that every new name indicates a new thing. In his opening chapter he accused Mr. Blatchford of first supporting Haeckel's "downright atheism," and afterwards taking the position "of agnosticism, not of atheism." In his third chapter he repeats this blunder:—

"As generally employed, agnosticism means an expressed inability to say whether God does or does not exist; and in this signification it has come to supersede almost entirely the militant secularism or atheism which had Mr. Bradlaugh for its ablest apostle."

Now, in the first place, it is not true that "agnosticism"—or anything else, for that matter—has superseded, almost entirely or otherwise, the militant Freethought which was so conspicuously represented by Charles Bradlaugh. The National Secular Society, which Bradlaugh founded, still exists and carries on its old work. Its principal lecturers still address large audiences in various parts of the country. Its president (the present writer) will soon be addressing large audiences in the magnificent Town Hall of Birmingham, and if Mr. Warschauer were to drop in he would see whether "militant secularism or atheism" is as extinct as he imagines. The *Freethinker* is still read by thousands of people, and its principal contributors are as good as any that ever wielded a pen in the service of their movement. It may be that Mr. Warschauer does not know of these things. It may be that he only pretends not to know them. There is something positively grotesque—we might almost say imbecile—in the clerical habit of ignoring the one organised, incessant, and popular propaganda of Freethought in this country. Perhaps their silence is the silence of fear; in that case, there is something to be said for their intelligence, at the expense of their courage and honesty.

In the second place, agnosticism has not superseded atheism, and never can supersede it, except as a label. The agnostic's definition of agnosticism, and the atheist's definition of atheism, are so much alike that common eyes are unable to detect the slightest difference. Both the agnostic and the atheist are "without God." The only difference is one of taste and temper. The agnostic is a timid atheist, and the atheist is a bold agnostic. The agnostic is often well-to-do, while the atheist is generally a poor scholar or a man of the people. Some have complained of our old epigram that an agnostic is an atheist in a tall hat, but it really expresses a great deal of the truth. Not the whole of the truth, for there are some propagandists who believe that a softer name is a better passport to attention. They think that, by exciting less prejudice, they will get a better hearing. But, in our opinion, the facts are against them. Bradlaugh made more Freethinkers than the superfine sceptics who were always sneering at him. Even now the *Freethinker* has probably more readers than all the other definitely Freethought organs put together, while the largest audiences are drawn, both in

London, and in the provinces, by the President of the "vulgar and hateful" National Secular Society.

## VII.

Mr. Warschauer seems quite incapable of seeing a point which is not as obvious as a haystack. His mind is not subtle, except in insult and evasion. He refers, for instance, to Mr. Blatchford's "declaration of inability to believe in—in plainer words, his denial of—a personal God." He does not perceive the difference between unbelief and denial. And this is a very fair test of his competence in such a discussion.

We cannot say that we have any strong belief in Mr. Warschauer's intellectual integrity. After a most ridiculous attempt at making Haeckel a sort of a Theist by an absurd dialectical play upon the word "purpose," Mr. Warschauer says:—

"One recalls Darwin's statement: 'The impossibility of conceiving that this grand and wondrous universe, with our conscious selves, arose through chance, seems to me the chief argument for the existence of God.'"

Will it be believed that this high and mighty gentleman, who lectures unbelievers as though they belonged to an inferior species, breaks his quotation from Darwin in the middle of a sentence. Let us see what Darwin actually wrote. We give the whole sentence from his letter to a Dutch student, dated April 2, 1873:—

"I may say that the impossibility of conceiving that this grand and wondrous universe, with our conscious selves, arose through chance, seems to me the chief argument for the existence of God; but whether this is an argument of real value I have never been able to decide."

By substituting a full stop for a semicolon, and breaking off in the middle of the sentence, Mr. Warschauer played a very low trick upon his readers; unless, indeed, he took the quotation at second-hand, and was a victim to the same trick played by some other Christian. One side of the alternative gives us the measure of his research; the other side gives us the measure of his probity.

Mr. Warschauer left Darwin as an implied supporter of a certain position. Had he completed the sentence he would have shown that Darwin did not support it all.

Darwin opposed, rather than supported, the Design Argument; and Mr. Warschauer ought to be aware of the fact. Just look at the following passages:—

"The old argument from Design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so certain, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been discovered.

"There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings, and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows.

"There are some points in your book [*Graham's Creed of Science*] which I cannot digest. The chief one is that the existence of so-called natural law implies purpose. I cannot see this."

These passages sufficiently dispose of Mr. Warschauer's pious effort to drag in Darwin amongst the friends of faith.

## VIII.

Mr. Warschauer's use of Herbert Spencer does not strike us as being quite ingenuous. He says that "if Huxley was the originator of the word agnosticism, Herbert Spencer is generally regarded as having given us the *thing*, in his doctrine of the Unknowable." Now this is an ignoring of Hume and Kant—which Huxley would have denounced in very vigorous language. And what would Spencer have said of what follows? "Spencer," this defender of the faith says, "was quite assured of the existence of that Power which we call God." This is absolutely untrue. The introduction of the words "which we call God" looks simple enough, but it begs the whole question at issue between Spencer and the Theists. Not even the Atheist denies the existence of "Infinite Eternal Power." But the use of capital letters only imposes on the weakest understandings. Thinking people are not caught by such a transparent artifice. Infinite and Eternal are the same thing at bottom. What we have, therefore, is Infinite Power. On this point

all are agreed. But the trouble begins the very moment you go a step further. Ascribe to that Infinite power *personality*, with its necessary intellectual and moral attributes, and you leave thinkers like Herbert Spencer behind. They see the insurmountable difficulties of your enterprise. You may use the word "God," but they decline to. And the result is that the Theist and the Spencerean Agnostic are soon as wide as the poles asunder.

So much for the childish little stratagem involved in the words "which we call God." And to think that it is with such devices that Christian apologists aim at repulsing the enemy at their gates!

Here is another, and last, sample of Mr. Warschauer's puerility. He quotes from Mr. Blatchford as follows: "You will say that all this speaks of a Creator. *I shall not contradict you.*" Then he takes this as "'Nunquam's' admission that he does not think it unreasonable to infer from the visible world the existence of a Creator."

What is to be done with a disputant like this? The sentence he prints in italics is not printed in italics in Mr. Blatchford's book. This is an offence to begin with. But worse remains. Mr. Blatchford has been dilating on the vastitude and splendor of the universe as revealed by science. He then says:—

"You will say that all this speaks of a Creator. I shall not contradict you. But what kind of Creator must he be who has created such a universe as this?"

Anyone with a grain of gumption can see, and anyone with a grain of candor would admit, that Mr. Blatchford's "I shall not contradict you," in the light of what precedes and what follows, is simply his way of saying "I will not dispute it now; I will grant for the sake of argument that there is a Creator, and I will ask you to consider whether the Creator of this wonderful universe is really the petty, base, cruel, and ill-informed God of the Bible."

Mr. Blatchford might have been a little more careful, perhaps, in view of the fact that some people are so dense and others so dishonest. But a man in Mr. Warschauer's position, a Master of Arts and a Doctor of Philosophy, who cannot or will not understand Mr. Blatchford's meaning, ought to be boiled down and turned out in a fresh mould.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued.)

### On Taking Oneself Seriously.

YEARS ago I propounded to a society of friends the theory that man's greatest need was a sense of humor. My theory was laughed at, although offered quite seriously. Further reflection only deepened the conviction, although at the time I offered to qualify it to the extent that, if it was not the greatest need, it was at all events one of the greatest. An adequate sense of humor would, I am convinced, do more, and in less time, to remedy human abuses and human misery than all our solemn disquisitions and sad philosophising. Solemnity sanctifies an abuse even while attacking it. It also gives an air of importance to an absurdity. In all its history the Church has never canonised a humorist—not, that is, a conscious one. A laughing saint is simply inconceivable.

A fitting sense of the ludicrous would kill off a good half of all the shams and absurdities in the world in the course of a single generation. And, in addition, it would prevent people who are in a general way intelligent enough initiating new absurdities. Sir Oliver Lodge, for instance, recently declared it to be his "mission" to reconcile Religion and Science. A sense of humor would have surely prevented one talking of "reconciling" two views of the universe, either of which effectually cancels the other. And, on the other hand, we have the Bishop of London gravely stating that a disaster like that of the Martinique eruption, which blotted out some

40,000 people, was sent by God in order to teach us his laws. Or, to take other instances, we have records of hundreds of individuals who have forsworn washing or clothing, because they believed they were honoring God. Or we have men—some in positions like the late Sir William Harcourt—writing lengthy essays or making impassioned speeches over the kind of clothing a clergyman ought to wear, the point of the compass he should or should not face during prayers, or the kind of candles he ought to burn. That people, apparently sane, can imagine that the God—if there be one—of a universe like this is interested in the kind of millinery worn by a parson in a pulpit is simply staggering. Only long familiarity with this particular kind of dementia can account for *anyone* taking it seriously. That these afflicted ones should take themselves seriously is natural enough: it is, indeed, part of the disease. The surprising thing is that others should take them seriously also.

To take oneself seriously may have its good side, unquestionably it has its bad one. By taking oneself seriously, thanks also to want of humor on the part of the general public, individuals of no intrinsic importance whatever are raised to the position of oracles, and questions of little value to anyone are pushed into the front to the exclusion of more vital matters. Plenty of illustrations of the above may be found in politics, in journalism, or in literature; at present, and this is really what suggested this article, I am concerned with the clergy only. More than any other class the clergy—particularly the Nonconformist section—are a fine example of what may be accomplished by taking oneself with sufficient solemnity. For here is a large body of men, poorer intellectually than any other educated class in the community, preaching a doctrine that is absurd in theory and impossible in practice, believing in a number of things that *invite* laughter, although not always receiving it, whose judgment is notoriously ill-balanced, and who yet succeed in getting themselves appealed to for their opinion on all manner of topics, religious and non-religious. The standing of these men, their religion, their teaching is one long triumph of the ridiculous.

Let us take one or two instances by way of illustration. First of all there is the education question. Nonconformists and Anglicans are constantly assuring us that the *other side* does not care for education as such. Each perceives that the other values education only as a means to getting customers for church or chapel; and the educational history of the nineteenth century fully bears out this view. It was, indeed, the scandalous way in which religious bodies had first neglected and then used education as a proselytising agency that formed a powerful reason for the State taking up the matter. And, finally, since 1870 the quarrels of rival religionists have been the principal obstacle to a proper development of our educational system. Yet, in spite of all this, one finds the clergy, simply because they have made, and are making, preposterous claims in solemn tones and with perfectly serious faces, gravely accepted as educational experts, their opinions asked for, and a farcical campaign like that of "Passive Resistance" taken by the public as a serious fight for educational efficiency and civic equality. Another victory of solemnity over sense.

Or, again, take the case of Mr. R. J. Campbell. That this gentleman takes himself very seriously there can be no question. Here is an intellectual nonentity, provided with a ready-made congregation, is himself presented to the King—who appears to be taking quite a zoological interest in religious freaks—by the Bishop of London, and who is so convinced of his own importance that he informs a correspondent of his inability to leave London while Parliament is sitting. What Mr. Campbell may be as a speaker I neither know nor care. What he is as a thinker his published sermons show clearly enough. These bristle with ancient commonplaces, tawdry sentimentalisms,

obviously manufactured "experiences," tricked out with a number of poetical and literary quotations, gathered, doubtless, from some book of reference. Yet this has gained Mr. Campbell a reputation, in certain circles, as a philosopher, simply because his sermons are preached in a solemn manner, and with an "I-have-a-very-profound-discourse-to-deliver" kind of an air.

The row over Mr. Campbell's deliverance on working men is another case in point. Mr. Campbell's experience of working men is, I believe, *nil*. Neither at Brighton nor at the City Temple had he a working-class audience. Yet he discovers that they are not thrifty, they want more wages—to spend on drink, and they do not work for work's sake, but for money. Added to which they tell lies and swear. Now, all of these charges are obviously made by a certain class of *employers* more notorious for their religious fervour than for kindly treatment of their workpeople; and one cannot help a shrewd suspicion that the statements were put into Mr. Campbell's mouth by the representatives of this class who attend the City Temple. Such charges have no point whatever against working men unless it can be shown that businesses are not run for profit, that employers and others do not swear, do not drink, are not lazy, and are not thriftless. A workman might reasonably ask whether the upper classes are to have a monopoly of the vices of life as well as a lion's share of the comforts of existence. A fitting reply to Mr. Campbell's tirade would have been a laugh. That would have killed it and—if sustained—him. Instead of this he is taken quite seriously, protests are passed at various meetings, columns of copy are published in the public press, and Mr. Campbell gets what I suppose he really desired—a gigantic advertisement.

Mr. Campbell's value is that he is a type; he represents thousands of other clergymen who by taking themselves quite seriously have imposed upon the rest of the world—the rest of the world not being blessed with a superabundance of humour. Neither more intelligent, more moral, nor better informed than their fellows, they yet get appealed to as authorities on this and that subject to such an extent that an outsider would really imagine that in them was vested the moral and mental welfare of the people. It is only when one asks, What have they done, or what do they know? that one begins to realise what a farce the whole thing is.

The cause is, I repeat, that they take themselves seriously. For this, some credit is doubtless due. To retail, week after week, the farrago of folk-lore, fraud, and stupid stories that go to make up Christianity, to retail all this as true, and remain serious, certainly implies a development of no mean character; and the clergy deserve some praise for their ability in this direction. If two thousand years ago in old Rome no two priests could meet without a smile, our Christian clergy may certainly feel proud that, in spite of living in a more civilised age, *they* can do what their pagan predecessors failed to accomplish. Two Christian clergymen can not only meet without smiling, but can actually part with the most complete solemnity.

And so I conclude, as I began, that our really greatest need is an adequate sense of humor. Nothing else really kills an absurdity, whether it is social, political, or religious. To argue solemnly with an absurdity often gives it a new lease of life. A keen perception and appreciation of the ridiculous is the only thing. Were this general, we should no longer hear or read lengthy arguments about incense, vestments, or altar lights. We should soon cease reading discussions on Biblical miracles, virgin births, or resurrections from the dead. We should cease to witness the spectacle of men announcing themselves as the mouthpieces of God—whether they were of the street-corner kind, with faces that carry the credentials of admission to a lunatic asylum, or of the pulpit variety, with the symptoms more carefully disguised. And with them would disappear a whole string of social and political abuses. The two would die out, if not

simultaneously, at least in rapid succession. One of the lessons that history teaches is that a laughing people, a humorous people, are a progressive people. If the wits are not always on the side of progress, progress is on the side of the wits. The world owes much to Lucian, to Erasmus, to Voltaire. And it would owe still more to the discoverer who could endow the race generally with a fitting sense of the ridiculous.

C. COHEN.

### The Creed of Atheism.

FREETHINKERS are being constantly taunted, by the defenders of Christianity, with their utter inability to provide a satisfactory substitute for the religion they are so anxious to destroy. Christianity, we are told, abounds in glorious affirmations, and issues many great and precious promises, while Freethought is cold, and bleak, and barren, and has nothing to promise for the future. The argument often employed is this: "Until you can offer us something better we are resolved to retain Christianity. Your creed is purely negative, while ours is delightfully positive. We offer God, and Christ, and immortality to a poor, hungry, and thirsty world—what have you to offer?" This is a fair though ignorant challenge, and we have no hesitation whatever in accepting it. The first thing to be borne in mind is that it is a culpable mistake to imagine that Atheism is a negative philosophy. Although without God and without hope beyond this world, an Atheist is yet an enthusiastic believer. Cold negations he both hates and avoids. He lives in a world of blessed affirmations. His distinguishing characteristic is that he takes his ethics neat, while the Christian dilutes and weakens his with huge quantities of superstition. What the Atheist believes he can prove and turn to use.

And yet how common it is to represent him as a wholesale denier. Even the Dictionary, ignoring the science of etymology, insults him by defining him as "one who denies the existence of a God, or supreme intelligent Being." As a matter of fact he does *not* deny the existence of a God, his only contention being that the proofs for the Divine Existence, usually relied upon, are utterly unconvincing. Not to believe in a God is a radically different thing from formally denying his existence. To reject the doctrine of immortality is by no means synonymous with affirming that there is no future life. The arguments which make us unbelievers do not entitle us to pose as positive deniers. When will Christian apologists recognise this fundamental distinction? When will they learn to be even just to their opponents? We are often assured that the aggressive Atheism of Charles Bradlaugh is now utterly dead; but wherein did the aggressiveness of that illustrious man's Atheism consist? Here are his own words: "The Atheist does not say, 'There is no God,' but he says: 'I know not what you mean by God; I am without idea of God; the word "God" is to me a sound conveying no clear or distinct affirmation. I do not deny God, because I cannot deny that of which I have no conception, and the conception of which, by its affirmer, is so imperfect that he is unable to define it to me'" (*Plea for Atheism*, p. 2). That is precisely the position held by the Atheists of to-day. They do not deny God, because they do not know him; but they do not hesitate to assert that of the existence of the Christian God as portrayed in the Bible and in the dogmas of the Church there is not a single scrap of evidence. They have no sense of God, no craving for him, instinctive or acquired; they are absolutely without God, because nothing, either in themselves or in Nature around them, bears witness to him.

Now, what are the advantages that accrue from Atheism as thus defined? What positive elements does it contain? They may all be summed up in one pregnant word—namely, CONCENTRATION. Thus Atheism is a source of strength and virtue both to the individual and to society. The Atheist is free to

devote himself, with all the force of his being, to the present world. Of a supernatural world he has no knowledge whatever, nor does he believe in its existence. The natural world is the only sphere about which he has any concern, and of this he is determined to make the most and best. The Christian believer, on the contrary, is supremely concerned about eternity. On earth he is only a pilgrim, sojourning but for a little while. Here he has no abiding city, his citizenship being already in heaven. Dr. Robertson Nicoll tells the story of a young man who one day fell upon a little tract entitled *Eternity*, which made a deep impression upon his mind. "He walked up to his bookcase and surveyed the row of volumes lettered *Shakespeare*, *Don Quixote*, and so forth, exclaiming, as he arrived at each of them, 'What has this to do with eternity?'" The masterpieces of literature were condemned and banished because they had nothing to do with the realm beyond the tomb. And yet that young man acted in splendid loyalty to his Bible and to the very genius of the Christian religion, according to which the things of the earth are but dross, to be despised and tossed away. The more deeply religious a man is the less store he sets by the things of time. The typical saint is characterised by his other-worldism, and, of course, by his inability to mingle freely among his fellows in their everyday life. But the Atheist, unoppressed by any thought of eternity, untrammelled by any hopes and fears that transcend the limitations of time, has ample opportunity to throw himself, heart and soul, into all the duties and privileges of the life that now is. He is a citizen of this world, and of no other, and his supreme desire is to discharge wisely and well all his obligations as such.

The Christian is exhorted to live perpetually in heaven even now, *in imagination*, to send his heart there in advance, and not to allow it to return again to earth, lest it become entangled in the things that perish. He is commanded not to accumulate riches here below, but to lay them up for himself in heaven, that where his treasure is there may his heart be also. But the Atheist's heart must be confined within the present sphere, inasmuch as he knows of no other. His mission is to improve this world, to serve his day and generation to the utmost of his ability, to develop by exercising his own faculties, and to find the channel of their exercise in some work of social reform. Is not this a grand and glorious mission? Is it possible to conceive of anything nobler and worthier? The true man is an Individualist and a Socialist both in one. He does the best he can for himself that he may be of use to his fellows.

But if there be no life but this, what profit is there in goodness? If death ends all, why should we live for society? Such are the questions asked by believers in immortality. But they are entirely foolish and selfish questions, after all. What has the duration of life to do with its quality? Is not goodness its own profit, and virtue its own reward? Is not the law of truth binding upon us, whether we are to live for a million years or for a single day? In teaching the opposite of this, Christianity exhibits itself as an essentially immoral religion. Goodness is a commercial commodity, and the lowest price that will be taken for it is endless bliss in heaven. The teaching of Atheism is much wholesomer, in that it makes goodness independent of time and place, and indissolubly connects it with social conditions. The virtuous man reaps his reward in his own bosom as he goes along. Good works remunerate themselves.

But what if the Atheist is mistaken, after all? Even then he will have nothing to lose but very much to gain. If the Christian is mistaken he sacrifices the highest joy of this life and gets no compensation. The Atheist is on the winning side in any case. If true to himself, quitting himself honorably in all relationships, he has a thoroughly good time of it here, and if there be a hereafter, he will inherit greater blessedness still. Having been a faithful and conscientious citizen of the earth, he will have thereby qualified for the heavenly citizenship, if there be a heaven. He has nothing to fear

whatever happens. But if the Christian is deluded, his loss will be so great, according to Paul, that it would have been better for him had he never been born.

Take another point. According to Christianity "man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." The Church frequently holds meetings the only object of which is to praise the Lord. We are called upon to love him with all our hearts, and to serve him with deathless zeal. We are to concentrate all our thoughts upon his holy name. Most of our time should be spent in loving communion with him as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We are warned again and again not to forget him, not to let him slip out of our minds, and not to permit earthly meditations to clog our spirits and incapacitate us for Divine fellowship. But what is it thus to glorify God? To subordinate everything to him. Are we to serve one another? Yes; but only through him and for his sake. Parents and children alike must give him their supreme affection. Our chief danger is to love our children and our friends with excessive devotion, a sin which our Heavenly Father may punish by robbing us of our dear ones. We are to do everything in his name and for his sake. That is the teaching of religion. Religion means union and communion with God. Ethics was originally a distinct and separate subject, and even now it is connected with religion only by the most artificial tie. In Christianity God and Christ are the two-fold centre of the Universe, and man's sole duty is to be loyal to them. They claim the whole of his heart, time, and possessions, and are consumingly jealous of all competitors.

What is the teaching of Atheism? That man's chief end is to know and be true to himself, and to adjust himself to his environments in Nature. What he is called upon to shun is only that which is injurious either to himself or to society, and his whole duty consists in seeking that which is beneficial to both. He is the servant of the race. His business is to fulfil himself, and this he cannot do without being in completest harmony with his fellows. From the dumb animals round about him he differs merely by being ahead of them in the grand march of evolution; and he owes them the consideration and the friendship of an elder brother. The Atheist knows himself only as a son of the earth, and, as such, has no interests other than the earthly. His whole time is at the disposal of the sphere within which he is confined. Surely this is a great advantage. Instead of dissipating his powers upon a host of imaginary realities in a purely imaginary world, he has the privilege of concentrating them upon the magnificent task of securing the truest welfare of himself and his neighbors here and now. Ethics is a department of Secularism, and concerns itself alone with the relations that ought to exist between the different members of society.

How can anybody say, in the face of the above and many other known facts, that Atheism is a wild, undisciplined, bald creed? As a matter of fact, it is the only creed that deals exclusively with undoubted realities, with universally acknowledged truths, and with duties the performance of which benefits actually living beings. May it be added that it is also the only creed which rejects as hurtful all unwholesome excrescences, all preternatural or morbid developments, all unverified and unverifiable dogmas, and all the dreams of supernaturalism? In short, Atheism is the only natural creed that exists, the only creed every article of which throbs with living interests and insists upon the discharge of some real obligations. Atheists are natural believers and the doers of reasonable deeds. But it must not be inferred that they are libertines. They are willing servants of the great law of social order, peace, and happiness. Their ambition is to further the growth and development of the race. Their salvation comes to them by their works alone. If their works are evil their damnation is inevitable.

They cannot find shelter behind the righteousness of another, as many Christians imagine they do. Every true man stands upon his own feet, and does his utmost to help others to do the same.

Atheism is a non-theological system of thought; but it glorifies morality. Its main emphasis is upon the sovereignty of conscience as educated by reason. It conduces to all that is noblest and best in human nature, and, consequently, to the elimination of all harmful selfishness and greed. Well, such is the goal towards which mankind are admittedly marching. I will conclude in the words of Dr. Nicoll. He tells us that in one generation the growth of infidelity has been enormous. A generation ago the clergyman was still a man of authority:—

"At that time when people stayed away from church they believed that they were transgressing. When a zealous evangelist came to them they were prepared to yield. But now everything is different. Men who stay away from church are generally convinced that they are justified. Many of them disbelieve in the Church and the Ministry. Many disbelieve in Christianity. Their whole attitude, even when not positively hostile, is critical and challenging. The air is infected with scepticism, and the preacher, even when he is listened to, has little authority."

That is to say, Atheism, the natural creed of humanity, is distinctly in the ascendant.

JOHN T. LLOYD.

### Another "God-Strike-Me-Dead" Fake.

IN a recent number of the *San Francisco Examiner* appeared this press dispatch:—

"Baltimore, Md., August 15.—Consternation reigns in the little town of Allen, in southern Maryland, over the strange death of Walter H. Whitney, a pronounced atheist, but one of the most popular residents of the place.

"On Sunday night Whitney was conversing with some friends, when he suddenly exclaimed, 'I defy the Almighty to strike me dead.'

"Instantly Whitney fell to the floor, and when those about him picked him up, he was dead.

"The tragic manner of Whitney's death not only cast a gloom over the community, but his defiance is looked upon as a sudden judgment from the Almighty. While Whitney frequently expressed no belief in God, he was a general favorite, and was much sought after as a companion."

Mr. J. F. Wilson, of Santa Monica, Cal., saw the item, and wrote to the postmaster of Allen, Md. The postmaster answered him as follows:—

"Allen, Md., Aug. 25, 1904.

"Mr. J. F. Wilson—Dear Sir,—The item concerning Mr. Whitney proves to be untrue. There was never a person in our town by the name of Walter H. Whitney, and no incident similar to the item has ever occurred in our town.—Very respectfully,

"POSTMASTER, Allen, Md."

Mr. Wilson called the attention of the editor of the *Examiner* to the fake character of the dispatch, asking for a denial of the story; but no denial was printed. The editor wrote Mr. Wilson as follows:—

"The *Examiner*,

"San Francisco, Sept. 5.

"Mr. J. F. Wilson—Dear Sir,—I enclose the letter and clipping which you forwarded, and am very much obliged to you for the opportunity of seeing it. I am sorry that we were led into publishing any such erroneous statement, but the matter was brought by the Associated Press, which, unfortunately, is not any too reliable.

"It is somewhat late to do anything with it now, but I shall watch press reports on all similar matters hereafter with greater care.—Very truly yours,

"DENT H. ROBERT, Managing Editor."

Forwarding the correspondence to us, Mr. Wilson comments: "Such infamous reports do untold harm. Of course, most people have brains enough to know they are not true, or if such incident should occur, to explain it according to law, and not caprice; yet a large percentage of the common people really accept such stuff as 'gospel.' I lay the matter before you that the fraud may be exposed."

The author of this fake is an imitator of the fellow who invented the Renfro yarn, but with a less exuberant imagination. We suppose there are in the world people so ignorant that they believe these stories, and so a specific refutation is necessary. A general denial of all such inventions ought really to cover the ground, but it will not while papers like the *Ham's Horn* have a large circulation among the superstitious populace.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

### Acid Drops.

Mr. George Cadbury, discoursing in the Friends' Meeting House at Reading on Sunday, and dealing with the subject of "Christian Citizenship," is reported (in his own paper, the *Daily News*) to have said that "He happened to know personally most, if not all, of the Labor members of the House of Commons, and he believed they were all Christian men." Perhaps this is near enough on such a subject—for Mr. Cadbury. But it is a long way off the truth. Mr. John Burns is well-known to be a Freethinker. Mr. Keir Hardie is not a Christian in any definite meaning of the term. He came of a Freethinking family, his father and mother having been, right up to the day of their deaths, members of the Glasgow N. S. S. Branch. These two cases will do for Mr. Cadbury to go on with. We hope his cocoa is better than his "facts."

The Dean of Westminster (Dr. Armitage Robinson) has been giving some straight tips to Sunday-school teachers. They must consider the Adam and Eve story as an allegory or parable. Just the same with the talking serpent and the talking ass. Yes, that is all very fine; but the talking ass is neither an allegory nor a parable; he is a solid reality—and has often been seen on his hind legs in a pulpit.

Dr. Clifford, the Passive Resistance hero and martyr, praises Dr. Robinson's way of dealing with the Bible. "It does him great honor," he says, "and speaks well for his courage and sense." Yes, the clergy have the courage and sense to deny cock-and-bull stories at the finish, when everybody else is sick of them.

Dr. Clifford takes the public into his confidence. He has not "personally believed in the story of Balaam's ass for thirty-five years." Prodigious!

Mr. Carnegie having, apparently, worked out public libraries, is not devoting himself to organs—for churches—East Park Church, Maryhill, Glasgow, St. Salvator's Chapel, St. Andrews, and the Primitive Methodist Chapel at Hucknall Torkard, are each having new organs at Mr. Carnegie's expense. Mr. Carnegie is, so runs the report, an Agnostic.

This world is a queer place. Mr. Ernest Terah Hooley supplies St. Paul's with its communion plate; Mr. Pierpont Morgan fits out the same establishment with the electric light, and an Agnostic supplies churches and chapels with organs. Again we say this is a queer world!

Carnegie Free Libraries are not always unmitigated benefits. Sometimes they are mere glorifications of common-place, really advanced literature being rigidly excluded. There is the Keighley Free Library, for instance. Mr. H. C. Shackleton offered to supply the *Freethinker* for twelve months, at his own cost, if it were placed on the Library tables like other papers; but the Town Clerk was instructed to reply that the offer "was not favorably entertained." Mr. Shackleton asked *why*, but this question has not been answered. No doubt the bigots on the committee were afraid of being drawn into a discussion, and forced to show their hands.

Mr. A. E. Fletcher has forgotten the lesson we had to teach him two or three years ago. We see that he has been repeating in the *New Age* his ancient nonsense about the unconscious Christianity of Shelley. As a matter of fact, Shelley called himself an Atheist, and repudiated Christianity; and we fancy he knew his own mind a great deal better than his Christian Socialist patron. We suggest that Mr. Fletcher should confine his pen to subjects that he understands.

"Elim" is a Christian boarding-house in St. John's-road, Folkestone. Its advertisement card lies before us. It starts off with the text "I, the Lord, do keep it, I will water it

every moment"—which some people would take to mean that "Elim" was damp, perhaps through a defective roof or a leak in the cistern. The rules of this establishment (whose "principal" is a lady, mere man being hardly equal to such things) are beautifully pious. Visitors are requested not to do any Sunday travelling, to be present at morning and evening prayers, and to attend public worship on the Lord's Day. They must be punctual at meals, and in by 10 p.m. They must be teetotallers and non-smokers. Neither must they go to theatre or play cards. Penalties for disobedience are not stated, but are presumably heavy. "And they came to Elim," the advertisement card winds up, "and encamped there." How admirable! But there is a nasty fly in the ointment; for though the terms are moderate a reference is required, and the weekly terms are "payable in advance." Evidently the exemplary Christians in this holy "House of Rest" are not to be trusted. Which is instructive.

Our attention has been drawn to the castrated edition of Gibbon published in three volumes by Alexander Murray. Perhaps some pious clerical editor was responsible; may be the same one who cut the chapter on Miracles out of the Hume reprint. Freethinkers who can afford it should buy either Professor Bury's new edition of Gibbon in seven volumes, or the more expensive Milman-Smith edition in eight volumes; or else pick up one of the older editions second-hand. The mutilation of Gibbon's great ironical fifteenth chapter was just a pleasant job for a literary Jack the Ripper. That the butcher acted for the honor of Christ and the glory of God only made his task the more delightful.

"Religion on Shipboard" was the subject of a paper read at the late Church Congress by Lieut. T. J. Brenner, captain of the training-ship "Indefatigable." On board that ship the boys are thoroughly dosed with religion. When the bugle sounds in the morning they have to kneel down at their hammocks for two minutes in prayer. At 8.45 come the general prayers and a chapter of the Bible read by the chaplain. During the morning schooling the boys have half an hour's religious instruction. And so it goes on until they have religion enough in a single boy for a whole Methodist chapel.

The Wee Kirkers have scored again. The Court of Session at Edinburgh has decided by a majority of three to one that the judgment of the House of Lords shall be applied immediately. It looks, therefore, as if the Free Kirkers will have a very short run of litigation for their money. Altogether the situation is sufficiently comical—to Freethinkers. The eleven hundred Free Kirkers thought they could treat the twenty-seven Wee Kirkers as a negligible quantity. But the stubborn twenty-seven conceived the sublime idea of turning out the eleven hundred. And they did it! That is the very cream of the joke. The House of Lords has decided that the noble twenty-seven are the legal trustees of all the property of the old Free Church of Scotland. And the noble twenty-seven mean to act upon their legal rights, leaving the foiled eleven hundred to gnash their teeth in outer darkness; yea, the worst of all darkness, the darkness of disappointment and impecuniosity.

"One of the Despoiled" writes to the *Glasgow Record* about its report of Mr. Foote's lecture on "Wee Kirk and Free Kirk"—in which report the "large attendance" was noted. This correspondent thinks that the property in dispute should belong to the United Free Church, but the highest court of appeal in the land has decided otherwise. In any case, it is nonsense to say that "Mr. Foote speaks without knowledge." Mr. Foote studied the case thoroughly, and read through hundreds of pages of evidence, pleadings, and judgments; also a host of sermons, pamphlets, and newspaper articles. Whether right or wrong, Mr. Foote generally knows what he is talking about.

A London Christian, recently deceased, has left £25,000 to the Free Church of Scotland, and we suppose it will fall into the hands of the "Wee Kirkers," who will probably know what to do with it. We read in the papers every day of legacies to religious bodies. Would that we read a little more frequently of legacies to Freethought. While the Churches are receiving millions the Secular Society, Limited, for instance, is delighted to receive a thousand, or even a hundred.

Rev. F. S. Spurr, whose name our recent articles have made familiar to our readers, has started a series of articles in the *Christian Commonwealth* on "The Bible: is it the Word of God?" One of his early observations is really rich. "The vast majority of people who rail against the Bible,"

he says, "have never really read it through. They borrow their objections from the *Clarion* and the *Freethinker*." This is ridiculously untrue; but, if it were otherwise, does Mr. Spurr mean to say that Christians are in the habit of reading the Bible right through? As a rule, they are grossly ignorant of its contents. They know more or less of the select parts that are read out in church, and all the rest is a blank. Freethinkers *want* Christians to read the Bible. They *beg* them to do so. Reading it is the cure for believing in it.

Mr. Spurr boasts of the fact that Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, in five volumes, price £7, and contributed to by "the most eminent thinkers and scholars of the world," has a good circulation. So it has—chiefly amongst ministers of religion. "Yet," says Mr. Spurr, "to hear Mr. Blatchford and Mr. Foote talk you might imagine that the Bible had been compelled to seek hospitality amongst the old women of almshouses." Oh dear, no! It hasn't got as far as that yet. But it is on the road. The Bible as a human production is an interesting book of some value, though its merits are grossly exaggerated. The Bible as the Word of God is pretty nearly done for. And men of God like Mr. Spurr know it. That is why they are so wild.

"Is the Bible's day over?" was the subject of an address by the Rev. Dr. Whitelaw in King-street U. P. Church, Kilmarnock. Most of what he said was a professional panegyric on the book by which he lives. Here is a sample: "The Bible's day has been one of unbounded beneficence. It had enlightened the understandings of mankind, purified their affections, elevated their morals, enlarged their philanthropies, quickened their consciences, and energised their wills as no other writings had done." The reverend gentleman might as well have gone the whole hog while he was about it, and credited the Bible with the discovery of America, the invention of printing, the discovery of steam and electricity, railways, ocean liners, wireless telegraphy, trade unions, clergymen, and black funerals. Bananas and tomatoes might be thrown in as a make-weight. Certainly the Bible had as much to do with these things as with those Dr. Whitelaw enumerates.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is home again after his jolly fine trip in America. His farewell with Mr. Pierpont Morgan must have been very touching. His Grace intimates that he has quite recovered from the shock of that railway accident. He does not appear to be much concerned about the unfortunates who were sent to heaven (or elsewhere) on that occasion.

Another wealthy man of God has just gone home. The Rev. Allen Thomas Edwards, of Cambridge Park, Twickenham, has left estate of the value of £43,000. He was the owner of much house property in Shoreditch, including two public-houses, the "Weavers' Arms" and the "Red Cow," which his executors are instructed to sell as soon as convenient—though they will probably not be able to do so by the time the reverend gentleman presents himself before St. Peter at the Gate of Glory. Parson Edwards was for a great many years a preacher of the good old gospel of "Blessed be ye poor," and he seems to have made it pay, in spite of that text about the camel and the needle's eye.

Mr. John Joseph Norton, a Passive Resister, of Poole, has had an order made against him, which will be followed, if necessary, by a warrant. Mr. Norton is himself a magistrate, and with the "face" of his faith he thought he could conduct his case, and harangue his brother magistrates, from the bench. But they naturally objected to his doing anything of the kind, and peremptorily stopped the torrent of his eloquence.

Under the heading of "School Problem Solution" the *Daily Chronicle* publishes "a scheme for the solution of the elementary education difficulty" by Canon Baggallay. We reproduce this beautiful scheme in its entirety.

"1. The management of all schools receiving public money to be the same as that which at present exists for provided schools—i.e., popular control.

"2. The local authority to be enabled to rent existing non-provided school buildings for elementary education and other purposes for which the Education Acts provide.

"3. Bible instruction to be given in all schools by the staff and in accordance with the regulations which at present govern provided schools only.

"4. In any school, upon demand of a sufficient number of parents of children attending that school, arrangements to be made for separate religious instruction to be given to those children on one or more days in the week.

"5. The cost of such teaching to be borne by the religious body providing it.

"6. The religious body may arrange with a member of the staff to give that instruction."

Now the Nonconformists have declared again and again that they will never accept a scheme like this. What they want is their own policy, the whole of their own policy, and nothing but their own policy. And, for our own part, we hope they will wage an irreconcilable war with the Church of England to the end of the chapter. Freethinkers have everything to gain by Christian divisions, and everything to lose by Christian unity. If the squabbling Churches do agree they will trample on everybody's rights but their own. Look at Canon Baggallay's third clause. It provides for Bible instruction in all schools, and by the staff; in other words, the secular machinery is to be used to carry out the spiritual designs of all the Churches that are willing to join the syndicate. Evidently these pious gentlemen want watching. We have said so for many years, and we shall go on saying so for as many more years as may be necessary. For in this capture of the schools lies the great hope of priestcraft.

Unitarians and Congregationalists have been protesting at Cardiff against the Torrey-Alexander mission. Rev. Hugh C. Wallace, of Bristol, called Torrey "a liar." Of course Torrey's friends resented the description, although they ought to know that it does not sin on the side of inaccuracy. Rev. J. Warschauer, the author of *Anti-Nunquam* we suppose, declared that Torrey's mission was "a great religious calamity," and that his narrow, bigoted teachings were "infinitely more fruitful in manufacturing infidels than the teachings of Voltaire, Ingersoll, and Blatchford." We should not put it in this extreme way, but we believe that Torrey does make more "infidels" than Christians. Which is a consolation—considering the Christian cash that is spent upon him.

The *Star* pitches into Canon Rhodes Bristow for saying a good word for the publicans, and proposing that "efforts should be made to encourage men of high character and Christian life to enter" the licensed victuallers' profession. Of course the *Star* might be right from its own point of view; but Canon Bristow may also be right from his point of view. As a faithful follower of Jesus Christ he has a natural sympathy with all branches of the spirit trade. Even if he were to run a public-house himself, as the *Star* suggests, it would not be a Christian-like proceeding. His Lord and Master was twitted with being a companion of wine-bibbers. And he certainly promoted the consumption of liquor in his own particular way. On one occasion he supplied a marriage party with seventy-five (or more) gallons of wine. He does not appear to have made any charge for it, but it must have served as a splendid advertisement if he continued in the business.

John James May, a Kingston laborer, broke into St. Jude's Church and cut up some surplices. He did not reap any personal advantage, and he is probably a bit of a lunatic. But the judge who presided at his trial sentenced him to seven years' penal servitude. From a moral point of view, we have no hesitation in saying that the judge was a worse criminal than the prisoner. The sentence, indeed, is perfectly monstrous. Some judges do not seem to have the slightest idea of what their sentences mean. They roll off "seven years" or "ten years" or even "twenty years" as though it were simply a mathematical figure. If they realised what ten years' penal servitude means, they would know that hardly any crime could deserve such a punishment.

We read that the late Mr. Quintin Hogg asked two little urchins in Trafalgar-square, "What do you know about God?" and they promptly replied, "Why, that's the chap wot sends us to 'ell." A splendid answer! A masterly summary of the popular theology? Those poor urchins knew more about "God" than their catechiser.

Several years ago we heard a little fellow use the word "God." He must have got it in some way from friends or schoolfellows. Anxious to know what was in his mind, we said: "Who is 'God'? There isn't such a gentleman, is there?" "Oh, yes there is," the little fellow said; "he burns you up." How soon these little unsophisticated minds get to the bottom of the orthodox faith!

A Bristol Christian, in a letter to a friend who lent him our *God at Chicago* leaflet, says a number of things which are not worth notice. But one thing that he says is perhaps worth dealing with. "If Mr. Foote is logical," he says, "and attributes to the deliberate action of God the Chicago fire, he must also attribute to God the absence of fires in all the theatres of the world, day after day, and year after year. The proportion then would be something like a million to one." This reminds us of the defence that was set up (so the story goes) for a prisoner on trial for murder. Counsel

offered to produce hundreds of persons that his client had not murdered. But, after all, the point at issue is not correctly taken by our Bristol critic. Christians believe in a personal God who is able to work miracles. Now it does not require a miracle to keep a theatre from burning down when there is no danger of its doing so. The miracle is needed when the danger exists. Even if the place must be burnt down, God could easily give warning and save a terrible and gratuitous loss of life. But he does nothing of the kind.

Rev. R. J. Campbell does not follow up his criticism of "God at Chicago" in the November number of the *Young Man*. When he has time he might answer our reply to his last month's criticism. It would be better to deal with that than to score an easy victory off half-heard correspondents.

According to the *Daily Telegraph* "Lodge on Hacckel should be capital reading." Yes, but Hacckel on Lodge might be still better.

Lord Cross is still with us. He draws a yearly pension of £2,000 because he was once Home Secretary. This has been going on since 1887. Up to March, 1904, the right honorable gentleman had drawn the pretty sum of £22,760 17s. 5d. The only thing he ever did to earn all this money was the invention of the plank-bed—for which thousands of tortured and broken prisoners (some of them innocent) might spit upon his grave. Lord Cross has a reputation for piety. But there is nothing wonderful in that.

Rev. Mr. Robinson, of Holy Trinity Church, Burton, says that "Japan is the hope of the Christian Church in the struggle with Buddhism, Confucianism, and the other heathen religions of Asia." But he admits that the immediate prospect is not rosy. The books most read in Japan at present are Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* and works of a similar bad character. The poor old Bible is simply not in the running. However, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge is going to be busy in Japan, and its publications are expected to give the only true religion a leg up. Well, we shall see—what we do see.

Holy Russia's navy is a terror to all the world except the Japanese. Firing away at British fishing smacks is so much jollier than facing "heathen" battleships.

General Grippenbergh has gone out to the seat of war. Things will change now. He carries with him a number of holy folding images of Jesus Christ, Saint Catherine, Saint Alexander Nevsky, and other holy personages. We expect to hear of a great defeat of the Japanese soon.

## "Tramp Pilgrims."

IRELAND EXCITED OVER A NEW RELIGIOUS SECT.

THE "tramp pilgrims," as they style themselves, are a new religious sect whose present headquarters are in the village of Ballinamallard, about four miles from Enniskillen.

The essential to salvation in the belief of the pilgrims is total immersion, and as this takes place daily in the river, thousands of persons have been attracted from all parts of Ireland to Ballinamallard. After this public baptism the converts recall their experiences and tell how they have been "saved."

Mr. Edward Cooney, a son of Mr. W. R. Cooney, J.P., one of the principal merchants of Enniskillen, has left his family and gone to Ballinamallard to lead the tramp pilgrims. Some hundreds of persons from County Fermanagh have followed Mr. Cooney, and embraced the new belief. Many have even sold their farms or left their businesses in order to join the new Jordanites.

During the present week sixty-four persons have been baptised in Ballicassidy river, and these are now going about seeking converts. This is the method of baptism:—

On the banks of the river the pilgrims assemble and conduct devotional exercises. Then they form a lane on either side. The persons to be baptised march through this, hymns being sung in the meantime. Standing to his loins in the river is one of the pilgrims, and he, repeating the usual baptismal formula, catches the person converted and places him completely under the water.

So great is the excitement in the village that the authorities have deemed it prudent to draft extra police to Ballinamallard, but so far their services have not been required.

—*Daily Chronicle*.



### Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

Sunday, October 30, Town Hall, Birmingham; at 3, "The Riddle of the Universe: Sir Oliver Lodge and Haeckel"; at 7, "What Do We Know of God?" Admission free.

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

### To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.—October 30, Queen's Hall, London. November 6, Glasgow; 13, Birmingham; 20, Coventry; 27, Birmingham. December 4, Leicester; 11, Liverpool.

J. LLOYD'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—December 11, Manchester. January 22, Birmingham. February 12, Leicester.

G. VIGGARS.—Have not had time to consider it yet, but expect to very shortly. We think you are mistaken with regard to the Humanitarian League. Its honorary secretary, Mr. Salt, is a good Freethinker, and we imagine the same may be said of his assistant secretary, Mr. Collinson. Allan Clarke's article in the *Northern Weekly*, which you kindly send us, seems one for Mr. Blatchford to deal with—if he thinks it worth the trouble.

W. CAIN.—Your letter went astray somehow, and has only just turned up. Thanks for the cutting.

E. COLE.—Certainly, as you say, Freethinkers should be hygienists too. Foul air troubles the speaker even more than the audience. We will see what can be done in relation to future courses of lectures. The bother, very often is, that the ventilation is so crude in public halls, and that you have to choose between draught and asphyxiation.

SUBSCRIBER (Leeds).—You only enclosed eight halfpenny stamps, instead of eightpennyworth. Please remit the difference. Any good Dictionary will give the definitions you require. Thanks for cutting.

W. P. BALL.—Thanks for your ever-welcome cuttings.

G. SCOTT writes: "The photograph of the N. S. S. delegation has been very successfully reproduced in your front page this week. It gives quite a novel and distinguished appearance to the *Freethinker*. There could be no mistake about recognising Mr. Cohen, Mr. Lloyd, and yourself. I had not anticipated anything so effective."

SHELLEYAN.—Yes, Mr. Foote did visit the graves of Shelley and Keats while at Rome, and he intends to write about the matter—perhaps in our next issue.

A. G. B.—Thanks for your trouble, but the matter is hardly worth going back upon. We agree with you, however, that "flippancy" is one of the oddest charges that the reverend gentleman could bring against Shelley. But there is no knowing what men of God will say, when they are put out.

H. J. G. F.—Read the first two chapters of the first Gospel carefully, and you will see some half-dozen prophecies dragged in the head over heels, not one of which has any real relation to the narrative. This may set you thinking, and suggest that the story was made up to fulfil the prophecies—as the writer understood them. For the rest, in our view, the Messianic prophecies in Isaiah do not refer to Jesus Christ. If they did the Jews would have accepted instead of rejecting him. That is, of course, if he ever lived at all.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—Bethnal Green Branch 7s. 6d., W. Pratt, Esq. (New Zealand), 16s.

WELL-WISHER (Dowlais).—Thanks for the cutting. See our paragraph. Pleased to hear from you as "a convert to Freethought after several years' membership of a Methodist body"; also to learn that your "eyes were first opened by reading the *Age of Reason*" lent you by an old friend. Glad to know, too, that you take the *Freethinker* and are now reading *Bible Romances*, which you find "interesting and profitable."

A. CORINA.—Your letter has given us much pleasure. It is good to hear that we have helped you to become an Atheist. If your wife goes on reading the *Freethinker*, as we hope she will, she will probably become one too. We have handed your letter over to the N. S. S. secretary, to put you in communication with other Freethinkers in your town.

T. CLARK.—Glad to hear you are "delighted with our handling of Mr. Spurr." We note your suggestion that the articles should be published in pamphlet form. Very sorry to receive such personal bad news from you. The secretary is writing you on the subject of the *Freethinkers*.

H. C. SHACKLETON.—Accept our thanks. See "Acid Drops." Kindly let us know if you should receive a belated reply.

JAMES NEATE.—Thanks for cutting. See paragraph.

J. HENSON.—The two N. S. S. delegation photographs have been sent. Sorry to hear of the local attempt to boycott the *Freethinker*, but glad to know you have had a straight talk with the newsagent. Also that Freethought is spreading, and that we have some ardent friends amongst the members of the National Sailors and Firemen's Union in your district.

L. GALLAGHER.—"Merlin," of the *Referee*, has been dealt with more than once in our columns recently. We do not regard him as worthy of a great deal of attention. When he talks about "the Faith of the Future" he is indulging in prophecy; and prophecy, as George Eliot said, is the most gratuitous form of error.

J. CLOSE.—There was not room to print more than the one line under the picture. Mr. Foote, in the middle, has on his left

Messrs. Cohen, Guannazi, Roger, Gott, and McCluskey; on his right, Messrs. Lloyd, Parsons, and Clarke; below him, on his left, is Mr. Wood, and on his right Messrs. Johnson and Fincken; the two ladies in front of the railings are Mrs. Forrer (right of Mr. Foote) and Mrs. Fisher (left). All the other faces and figures belong to the crowd.

E. B. BULTRUM.—The Bruno photograph was taken on Friday, September 23.

J. POLLITT.—Shall have attention.

A. H. THOMAS.—We work seven days a week already, and more hours per day than we care to count. It is impossible to add to our labors by joining in the correspondence in local newspapers up and down the country. We fear we cannot ask Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd to do so either. You will see, we think, that it would be an endless business.

M. BORTHWICK.—Thanks for cuttings.

R. BLANEY.—Hypnotism is too large a subject to be dealt with in this column.

O. ALLEN.—It seems to us "an impudent letter" too.

G. G. ROSS.—See "Acid Drops."

E. V. STERRY, 210 Spring-road, Ipswich, will be pleased to hear from any Freethinkers in the neighborhood.

ATHEIST.—Mr. John Lloyd's last pastorate was at Johannesburg. We are unable to answer questions respecting Mr. McCabe.

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FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

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### Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote delivers two lectures to-day (Oct. 30) in the great Birmingham Town Hall, and it seems probable that he will have very fine meetings. In the afternoon at three he lectures on "The Riddle of the Universe" with reference to Sir Oliver Lodge's recent reply to Haeckel. The chair will be taken on this occasion by Lieutenant-General Phelps. The evening lecture at seven will be on "What Do We Know of God?" and the chairman will be Mr. R. G. Fathers.

The Leicester Secular Hall was crowded out on Sunday evening, and the latest comers were unable to obtain admission. It was the biggest meeting seen there for many a day. In the absence of the president, Mr. Sydney Gimson, who is not yet back from America, the chair was taken by Mr. Wilber, the vice-president. Mr. F. J. Gould, the Society's secretary and organiser, occupied a seat on the platform. The chairman stated how delighted he was to have the opportunity and privilege of introducing Mr. Foote the N. S. S. president, to a Leicester audience once more. Then the folk all stood up and joined in singing a Secular hymn. After that the lecturer rose amidst hearty cheers. Mr. Foote's discourse on "Holy Russia and Heathen Japan" was followed with that profound attention which is the highest compliment, and it was gratifying to see so many ladies displaying the keenest interest. When the applause was over, and the collection taken up, the choir rendered a part-song excellently. Afterwards the chairman invited questions or discussion, but there was none forthcoming, and that was perhaps a mercy, for the atmosphere of a crowded meeting is naturally not of the best, and the fresher air outside, in spite of the mist, was a very welcome change.

We are glad to hear that the Leicester Secular Society is making satisfactory progress. Mr. Gould is working hard to build up an organic association, and the members are all working loyally in their degree for the same object. Mr. Gould and Mr. Gimson do not see quite eye to eye in politics and sociology, but these differences do not affect their practical and cordial agreement on the ethical and religious side; and this spectacle of unity amidst difference is perhaps more wholesome, in some respects, than if they agreed at every point of the compass. Mr. Gould, as our readers will recollect, is standing for the Castle Ward, with a view to

winning a seat on the Leicester Town Council, where he would give special attention to the proper education of children, while generally supporting municipal improvement. Mr. Foote's last words on Sunday evening, before the big meeting broke up, dealt with this matter. He hoped that even those who thought Mr. Gould was sure to win would go on working as though he were far more likely to lose. Judging from the cheers, Mr. Gould had many good friends present.

The Leicester "saints" were looking forward to Mr. Gimson's return from America. They miss him so much; his absence makes such a great gap; and they will feel all the happier when he is home again.

Mr. Cohen had a very good audience on Sunday evening, by far the best he has had at Queen's Hall yet. We hope there will be another good meeting this evening (Oct. 30) when Mr. Cohen delivers the last lecture of the present series. There will be some more Queen's Hall lectures in December.

The Education Committee of the Bethnal Green Borough Council have appointed Mr. James Neate, one of the N. S. S. vice-presidents, as one of the managers at St. Jude's school. His colleague is Dr. Farebrother.

Mr. H. Percy Ward holds a debate with Mr. Ernest Marklew in the Alexandra Hall, Liverpool, on Monday and Tuesday evenings, November 7 and 8, on the question of "Do the Dead Return?" Mr. Marklew is editor of the *Medium*, but we do not suppose he will bring ocular demonstrations with him. Still the debate should be interesting, and we dare say the hall will be crowded.

Some excellent letters have appeared in the Birmingham *Daily Mail* from the pen of "A Working Man who has read Haeckel." The writer appears to wield a practised pen. He congratulates Sir Oliver Lodge on retiring gracefully from a false position. When the great scientist said that "the only rational creed for a man of science" was so and so, he simply meant that it was the only rational creed for himself.

Mr. Harry Snell, whom we left behind at Rome, has returned to England, and was "on the warpath" the other evening when the Rev. R. J. Campbell "faced" the British working men and got off again alive. We are informed by a friend, who was present that Mr. Snell's speech was far and away the best of the lot; in fact, he was the only one who really "got home" on Mr. Campbell. It is generally a Freethinker who gets at the top of the flag-pole on these occasions.

M. Combes, the French Prime Minister, obtained a vote of confidence after five hours' debate on Sunday. It was the climax of nine months' agitation. The voting was 325 to 237. It meant an acceptance of the principle of the Separation between Church and State.

One of our ever-welcome exchanges is the New York *Truthseeker*. The last number to hand dated October 15 contains Dr. Moncure D. Conway's paper on "Dogma and Science," which is called "an address delivered at the International Congress, Rome." Well, it was not delivered there. Dr. Conway only spoke for a few minutes extemporaneously. During that time he mentioned two or three of the points which are elaborated in his written paper. However, we are glad to see it printed in the *Truthseeker*, and we hope to reproduce it shortly in our own pages.

Our New York contemporary promises its readers in its next number a "large view" of the Rome Congress. The large view not only overlooks all the N. S. S. delegates—including Messrs. Foote, Cohen, and Lloyd—but also overlooks the American delegates with the exception of Dr. Conway. We should have thought Mr. Mangasarian was worth a mention; while Dr. Wilson might have been tabled after travelling so many thousand miles. And has the *Freethinker* failed to reach the *Truthseeker* office lately?

The Humanitarian League (53 Chancery-lane, London) has published Mr. Edward Carpenter's admirable address on "Vivisection" in the form of a handsome penny pamphlet. We earnestly hope it will have a wide circulation. It is able, and fair, and beautifully written; for Mr. Carpenter is a true poet as well as a practical humanitarian.

## A Saintly Competition.

IN a recent number of the *Catholic Times*, a correspondent who signs himself "An Irish Priest" writes as follows, and the letter is too good to be lost:—

"PRAYING TO ST. PATRICK.

"I have been questioning a few of my fellow-Irish friends if they are in the habit of praying to their great Apostle. In every instance I find that this is not the case. St. Patrick is to them a synonym of faith and fatherland, not a saint of intercession and devotion like St. Joseph and St. Antony. Possibly I may have hit on the wrong persons, and that there may be great numbers who seek the saint's intercession. I myself only commenced this practice some four years ago. The idea came to me when I was reading in St. Patrick's Confessions where the saint declares he was saved in a great peril by invoking the Prophet Elias. At the time I was in a difficulty myself out of which I saw little hope of release. I prayed to St. Patrick and my difficulty was solved. Since that time I have regularly prayed to the saint and have found speedy and efficacious help in all my troubles."

There is more, but the foregoing will suffice. We are often bidden, by people who do not profess themselves Catholics, to admire the nobility and ingenuity of what is called Catholic philosophy. And certainly one may admit, of course, that the great Schoolmen like Aquinas were not by any means the fools or even the knaves of the ignorant Protestant imagination, and that Catholic theology is a much more respectable and homogeneous product than the Orange bigots of the Kensit type would have us believe. But what the theory works down to in practice is exemplified in this crass letter, which in its way also exemplifies the ingenuity of the whole business.

This Irish priest prays to "Saint Patrick," having presumably found "St. Joseph" and "St. Antony" deaf to his pleadings. And, like the actress and the soap, since using St. Patrick he has used no other. It will be noticed, however, that he only prays to St. Patrick to "intercede" for him. That is, of course, in strict accordance with theory. Catholics do not "worship" many gods; they only ask the "saints" to use their influence, so to speak, with their employer. What is the exact advantage of asking Jones to ask Brown, when you could quite as conveniently ask Brown yourself, it is not easy at first sight to see; but the matter becomes clearer on reflection. The "Irish Priest" must think St. Patrick more accessible than Jehovah, or else more likely to listen. It does not altogether show up the old party in a pleasant light, and is calculated to create jealousy all round. It is like the country gentleman who writes to his local M.P. to ask the War Office to show some favor to his young son in the Hussars. To the country gent, naturally, the M.P. is the person of most importance, the War Office being far off and unapproachable. So, if the example of the Irish Priest begins to be widely followed, there are likely to be "ructions." Besides, what will St. Antony and St. Joseph think when they read the *Catholic Times* and see they have been shelved for St. Patrick? They will, without doubt, complain, and the whole system of "secret commissions" may be put down.

Talking of these "secret commissions," it may be mentioned that "St. Anthony," on whom our friend, the Irish Priest, has unceremoniously turned his back, does a large business. For instance, from the correspondence columns of the *Irish Catholic* of September 17 last, I take such a paragraph as this:—

"A Client of Holy St. Anthony, according to promise, publicly returns thanks for favor obtained, after invoking his intercession. Thanks-offering sent."

The important point of the foregoing is contained in the last two words. From the same column I take also the following as a specimen of several:—

"The Sisters of Faith, Convent and Schools of the Holy Faith, 116 Coombe, Dublin, gratefully acknowledge the following subscriptions towards St. Anthony's

bread for children in danger of loss of faith, the enemy's camp being only a few yards distant."

Then follows a list of subscriptions made up of sums ranging from 2s. to 1d. The "enemy's camp," I believe, refers to some Protestant schools in the neighborhood. Thus it will be seen that St. Anthony does nothing for nothing, and is as keen a business man as Mr. Harry Marks. Of course the branch house on earth takes the money and he does the work. In many Catholic newspapers and Catholic Churches you will see boxes for receiving the money for "St. Anthony's bread." And the faithful resort thereto especially when they have lost anything. Three-pence for a silver brooch, or sixpence for a sovereign lost is a normal charge.

And now St. Patrick threatens to set up a rival establishment. Still, as the agents on earth are likely to be the same, the only friction that can occur is what may go on round Jehovah's foot-stool.

Such is popular Catholicism in the opening years of the twentieth century. And it is in the interests of such superstition, too contemptible to be discussed, that the Pope anathematizes the Freethinkers who really stand for common sense and human dignity.

AN IRISH FREETHINKER.

### A Poet's Philosophy of Happiness.

[An Address by M. M. Mangasarian, before the Independent Religious Society, at the Grand Opera House, Chicago.]

It is to say little, but to say it well, is an art, and if it is an eternal law that "first in beauty shall be first in might," then we must concede that the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam is a rare gem. The poem under consideration is only about one hundred quatrains or stanzas in length, totalling not more than four hundred short lines. Yet its beauty is as striking as its brevity. It is exquisite in workmanship, rich in rhythm, and bold in conception. In these one hundred verses the Persian poet has said all that Shakespeare said in his *Hamlet*, Goethe in his *Faust*, and Calderon in his *El Magico Prodigioso*. This brief poem is to-day as fresh, as full of vigor, as sparkling and stimulating as when the Persians first heard it nine hundred years ago. As we read it we seem still to feel the breeze of its motion—its air and spray play upon our cheeks and refresh our tired energies. Omar's *Rubaiyat* is like a sweet scented manuscript, which, though we have read it a hundred times, throws a fresh gust of perfume in our faces every time we open it anew.

The author of this philosophical lyric may be likened to a musical instrument of unmeasured range, possessing cords which express the whole gamut of human passion. There are chords here which emit a melody more tender than the tear of childhood, and which fall upon the ear more softly than the moonlight upon the sea; and then again, there are strings in this lyre over which sweep in thunder and music all the agony, the doubt and sorrow of the human soul.

We propose to give a faithful exposition of Omar's views—not to criticise them. We shall also refrain from moralising or preaching. Let us first know the man and his thought. To understand him we must permit him, for the time being at least, to command our cordial and unprejudiced attention.

Omar Khayyam, or Omar the Tent-maker, for that is the meaning of *Khayyam*, was born in the province of Korasan in the eleventh century. We cannot resist the temptation to call attention to the charming story related by the Vizier of Sultan Arslan, Nizam-ul-Mulk. He writes in his Testament of his two school fellows, of whom Omar was the younger. It appears that these three boy friends made a vow "that to whomsoever fortune falls, he shall share it equally with the rest." Many years after, when Nizam was invested with office, and rose to be Vizier of Persia, his old school comrades came and claimed a share in his good fortune according to the

terms of their pledge. The Vizier was faithful to his vow. "The greatest boon you can confer on me," said Omar, when his turn came to ask for an equal share of the Vizier's fortune, "is to let me live in a corner under the shadow of your friendship, to spread wide the advantages of science, and to pray for your long life and prosperity." When the Vizier found that Omar was really sincere in his refusal to accept a high office in the government, he pressed him no further, but allowed him a yearly pension, sufficient to assure the philosopher-poet of a liberal support for the rest of his days. He spent all his time, we are told, "in winning knowledge of every kind."

Omar was not only a singer of songs, but also an accomplished mathematician. If the two hemispheres which compose the measure of human power are mathematics and poetry, Omar was one of the world's few who could expatiate in both. He was an astronomer of deserved renown. He taught the Persians how to reckon time. He made for himself the reputation of being a man of erudition—a serious soul, who was haunted by the perplexing questions of human destiny—questions for which he could find no satisfying solution in the dogmatic creeds of his time. It is delightful, while perusing the musty annals of eight hundred years ago, to come across a man of the intellectual breadth of Omar. His candor and courage are as charming as the brilliance of his mind. He publishes to the whole world, not extracts from his thought, but—himself. No cloud or even film of dishonest obscurity is permitted to come between him and his public. Broad in his sympathies, tolerant in his judgments, polished in his manners, and elegant in his style, he was also honest to the pulses of his heart. As he could not subscribe to the juggling creeds of the *Sufi*, who may be called the sophists of his day, he felt constrained to formulate a creed of his own, which he did; and it was so original, so daring in spirit, so sonorous and musical, that it has rendered cheery eight centuries of the world's life.

When Fitzgerald's translation of the *Rubaiyat* was first published, Europe hailed this son of light with precisely the same feeling experienced "by some watcher of the sky when a new planet swims into his ken." Here was a veritable nightingale from the rose gardens of Iran, whose song awakened the deepest vibrations of the human soul.

The *Rubaiyat* is a poem of protest. In it Omar has touched upon the great questions that have always vexed the human intellect. His quatrains are the protest of the rationalist against bigotry and cant; the protest of the free thinker against dogma; of the layman against the hypocritical priesthood; of the lover of life against the outrage of death; of the creature against the capricious gods to whom ignorance and fear bend their knees!

Eight hundred years ago this poet-philosopher tormented his brain to solve the riddle of the universe. Alas! he found not the light for which he yearned, and hence his tears—tears which the power of his genius changed into pearls.

Perhaps the first thing about the *Rubaiyat* which impresses us is its sadness. It has been stated that poetry is the language of a soul in pain. It was the opinion of Aristotle that the poet, by virtue of his craft, was a melancholy man. This apparently contradicts the popular conception that the poet is a jocund soul, gay and blithesome, because, forsooth, he is for ever singing. Yet this popular conception is true only in appearance, "for," says Alfred de Musset, "though Comedy has kissed the poet on the lips, the Muse of Tragedy has kissed him on the heart." Frequently the poet's song is a sigh. His music is a pean of passionate protest—a cry from the depths! But though he is a sufferer, still he expresses his suffering in so charming a way that we wish we could suffer as he does. If it does not sound paradoxical, I shall say that the poet takes great pleasure in being sad; he has elevated sadness into a secret happiness.

Permit me to quote a little from a few of the

world's foremost poets to show that there was in them all an accent of discontent—a "melancholia" which the Greek Philosopher considered so becoming to a poet. Homer, the Father of Poetry, and a Greek, who were the most youthful people in the world, says:—

"Jove from his urns dispensing good and ill  
Gives ill unmixed to some, and good and ill  
Mingled to many, good unmixed to none."

Could it be possible for a poet to see the world in that light, and not to carry about him an all-permeating sadness? To live in a world where perfect misery is frequent, while perfect happiness is unattainable, makes the great pagan tragedian, Euripides, express in one brief line the vanity of human existence:—

"Life is called life, but it is truly pain."

Still another praises "the workmanship of death that finishes the sorrowful business of life."

Sophocles struck the same note when he declared "that man's best fate is not to be born at all, and that failing this good fortune, the next best thing is to die as quickly as possible."

And we are familiar with that touching and sweet strain with which Menander summarised his philosophy:—

"Whom the gods love die young."

Among the modern poets and philosophers is discernible the same mental mood. The high priest of modern pessimism—Schopenhauer—based his prejudice against the Jews upon the grounds of their obstinate and inflexible optimism. He could not see how, in a world such as the one we live in, anybody could desire life. Referring to the Old Testament injunction, "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long," he exclaims impatiently, and with considerable temper: "Ah, what a misfortune to hold out as a reward for duty." But Schopenhauer's premises were wrong; for who that has read Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Job has not found in them the same undertone of "melancholia." Leopardi, in Italy, championed the same philosophy which Schopenhauer fathered in Germany: "It is given to us either to die or to suffer"—*Nostra vita a ché val*. This was an echo of Voltaire's voice, who had many years before declared that "happiness was a dream, and pain alone was real." This sombre, yet quivering, thread runs through all the works of modern masters. We find it in Thomas Carlyle, whose bursts of passionate lament roll like measured thunder in his pages; in Tennyson, the author of *In Memoriam*, which is but the wail of a wounded bird; in Goethe, who exclaimed, "The human race is a poor affair"; in de Musset, who confessed that the memory of "having once wept" was his sole consolation—we find this same tone certainly in Heine and Byron, and even in Browning, who exclaims:—

Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years,  
Man goeth to the grave and where is he?

Even as all the fresh streams which glisten in the sun and meander through the plains finally find their grave in the bitter sea, so does human life, after a moment of mingled happiness and misery, sink into the darkness of the grave. Such is the burden of the poet's song. To be poetical one must have, it seems, the Promethean agony, born of that contemplation of the fearful struggle of man against the insoluble problems of life and destiny. Prometheus, chained to the rock, with his life-blood slowly ebbing away, is the type of the poet. He has a great dream in his soul, and the fire of that dream is consuming him. He has a great ideal, and the beauty of that ideal has made him blind to the transient and futile pleasures of the present.

Omar plays in his *Rubaiyat* upon this same chord of sadness. Let us listen to a few of his strains:—

The bird of time has but a little way to flutter—  
And the bird is on the wing.

The flower that once has blown forever dies.

Once more:—

Never again will the withered tulip bloom.

He likens life to a "battered caravanserai whose alternate portals are night and day"—

'Tis a tent where takes his one day's rest  
A Sultan to the realm of death address.  
The Sultan rises and the dark Ferrash  
Strikes and prepares it for another guest.

To the same effect are his words:—

The wine of life keeps oozing, drop by drop.  
The leaves of life keep falling, one by one.

And, in a still sadder accent, he sighs:—

Yet Ah! that spring should vanish with the rose,  
And youth's sweet scented manuscript should close.  
The nightingale that in the branches sang, Ah  
Where and Whither flown?  
Who knows?

Here, then, we have an exceedingly sensitive and fine-fibred soul, who cannot look at the great drama of life without shedding tears, which well up in his soul and rush to his eyes—tears which mingle in his voice and make his music tremulous!

*Doubt* is another great theme for the poet; it is that of Omar. All great literature is sceptical. I mean that the highest dramatic or poetic composition has for its central figure or hero a sceptic. As, for instance, the Prometheus of Æschylus, who defied Zeus; the Faust of Goethe; the Hamlet of Shakespeare; the wonder-working Magician of Calderon; and the Manfred of Byron. From a literary standpoint the masterpiece of the Bible is the Book of Job, and Job was a sceptic. In the other books of the Bible we read of men talking with God, but in Job we have a man talking against God. The sceptic is like an eagle in his lofty eyrie measuring the abyss with his eye, and resolved to test and trust his wings. There is in his attitude of mind, in the audacity of his spirit, in the greatness of his self-confidence, a power whose spell the poet cannot resist. The most interesting era in history was the Italian Renaissance, because it was an awakening. It was man shaking off the yoke of the past, and reaching out for the forbidden fruit of knowledge. What makes America the wonder of the world is that she is the personification of rebellion. She is a protest. She has defied the past, shifted from the old positions, and pioneered humanity into a new thought. Wherever there is doubt there is thought, research, adventure, risk, activity—in one word, life. In the *Rubaiyat* the questions which the poet propounds to the Deity, his challenge to the invisible Power, his criticism of Providence, his demand that the world be made anew, his yearning for the truth that shall make all things clear and all men free, instead of scandalising us, should make us feel as never before the measure of the human mind and the dignity of human nature!

Up from heaven's centre, through the Seventh Gate  
I rose and on the throne of Saturn sate  
And many knots unravelled on the road,  
But not the Master Knot of human fate.

Omar acknowledges that here was a "door to which no key could be found"—the veil through which no one might see. In his despair he challenges the mute skies for an answer to the problem of life:—

Then to the rolling heaven itself I cried  
Asking, what lamp had destiny to guide  
Her little children stumbling in the dark,  
And "a blind understanding" Heaven replied.

Such an answer as this naturally stung him to the quick, provoking in his inmost soul defiance against a Being who places man in the midst of a thousand thousand pitfalls, with no better light than a *blind understanding* to guide him.

What! out of senseless nothing to provoke  
A conscious something to resent the yoke  
Of unpermitted pleasures, under pain  
Of everlasting penalties, if broke!  
What! from his helpless creature be repaid  
Pure gold for what he lent us dross-alloyed—  
Sue for a debt we never did contract,  
And cannot answer—oh, the sorry trade!

Walking in the streets of Naishapur, he sees the potter thumping his wet clay, shaping it into vessels

of use and beauty. In the potter's showcase he finds these vessels standing in a row, and is struck by the thought that they were *not made to last*. Then he imagines that he hears these forms of clay discussing the origin of their existence, and the problem of their destiny, even as men worry over the questions which beset human life.

Said one among them, "Surely not in vain  
My substance from the common earth was ta'en,  
That he who subtly wrought me into shape  
Should stamp me back to shapeless earth again."

Like these clay vessels, thought Omar, men are tormented in brain and heart to solve the mystery of being.

Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument  
About it and about ; but evermore  
Came out by the same door wherein I went.

With them the seed of wisdom did I sow  
And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow ;  
And this was all the harvest that I reaped—  
I came like water and like wind I go.

If this is all that philosophy can do for him—to show him his impotence—what would be the use of continuing to weary the flesh with unanswerable questions of destiny? Are we not here but for a brief spell? and shall we spend this precious time piling up foolish counsel and inventing subtle explanations which alas! explain nothing?

"Would you that spangle of existence spend about the secret?" he cries.

It is at this moment that Omar resolves to find the seat of that *blind understanding* within, that he may tear it out of him.

You know, my friends, with what a brave carouse  
I made a second marriage in my house,  
Divorced old barren reason from my bed  
And took the daughter of the vine for spouse.

But what is it he offers in place of this *blind understanding* which is the cause of the intellectual turmoil and torment of his mind? Before we discuss that question let us briefly review a few of the remedies proposed by other men and systems against the malady of the mind.

(To be continued.)

### As Others See Us.

*Saint Andrew*, a Glasgow weekly, chiefly devoted to religious interests, began a series of articles on "Militant Freethought" in its issue for October 20. Christians are warned against making light of the Freethought attack upon their faith, and especially against the mistake of assuming that Freethought is in any wise to be condemned either on the side of intelligence or on the side of morality. Attention is also drawn to the fact that Freethinkers are influential out of proportion to their numbers. "They have almost succeeded," the writer says, "in identifying the Socialist and Labor parties with Freethought. There was a time when the backbone of the Radical party was the Dissenting working man. We speak under correction, but we fear that the backbone of that and of all the allied parties to-day is the unbelieving working man."

The first of these articles in *Saint Andrew* is devoted to "The Literature of Freethought." Our readers will probably be interested to see what it says of the *Freethinker* :—

"The *Freethinker*, edited by Mr. G. W. Foote, is published by the Freethought Publishing Company, which issues a great number of books and pamphlets. Mr. Foote himself is a voluminous writer, and has a great command of terse, idiomatic English. He is also a very popular lecturer on the Freethought and Secularist platforms. It cannot be said that he minces matters. He is an out-and-out opponent of Christianity. A popular edition of his *Bible Romances* has just been issued, in which he gives the result of recent Higher Criticism, although he and other Freethought leaders maintain, not without reason, that the conclusions of the Higher Critics were anticipated by Thomas Paine a century ago. The last issue of the *Freethinker* contains an article by the editor entitled 'God at Chicago Again,' and here, too, Mr. Campbell, of the City Temple, is assailed for some comments in *The Young Man* upon a tract entitled 'God at Chicago,' by Mr. Foote. Neither Mr. Campbell nor Mr. Foote throws much light on the origin and end of evil, moral and material. Then there is an article by Mr. Cohen entitled 'A Bishop on Belief,' which deals with some utterances of

the Bishop of London. Mr. Cohen is a Jew, and it may be added that among the most fervent advocates of Freethought to-day are Mr. Lloyd, formerly a Presbyterian minister in England; Mr. McCabe, who was a Roman Catholic priest and professor; and another gentleman who was a Wesleyan minister. Mr. Lloyd criticises in this number of the *Freethinker* a lecture delivered by Principal Fairbairn upon 'The Miracles of Christ.' Under the heading 'Acid Drops,' there is given anything that appears absurd in the conduct and utterances of Christian advocates. And here we are bound to say that Christian apologists too often give cause to the enemy to blaspheme. 'Save us from our friends!' one is repeatedly impelled to ejaculate in reading this section of the *Freethinker*. No one should undertake that responsible position who has not made a thorough study of Rationalistic and Freethought literature in addition to a competent knowledge of Christian apologetics. Too many undertake the study who are quite incompetent."

After referring to the Secular Society, Limited, and to the N.S.S. Branches in various parts of the country, *Saint Andrew* comes nearer home and notes that "The Glasgow Branch is very flourishing and aggressive."

### Obituary.

I REGRET to record the death of Mr. John Fagan on October 15, after a brief illness. Mr. Fagan, who was seventy-three years of age, and intimately known to London Secularists, was one of the first little band of speakers who took part in our outdoor propaganda more than thirty years ago. His platform work naturally decreased of late years, but he was ever ready to "fill a gap," and only a fortnight prior to his death defended his principles as keenly as ever at the Kingsland Green Lecture Station.

The burial took place on October 19 at Finchley, in the presence of a number of his Secularist and private friends, the service being read by his colleague, W. J. Ramsey. Much sympathy is felt with Mrs. Fagan, who was entirely dependent upon her husband's scanty earnings, and a list, headed by the President of the N. S. S., and also contributed to by the Society's Benevolent Fund, was at once opened at the office for her immediate wants. It should be noted that a brother Secularist and admirer of Mr. Fagan kindly undertook the whole of the funeral arrangements, which were carried out excellently.—E. M. VANCE.

### GOETHE ON ELOQUENCE.

WAGNER.

Pardon, I heard your declamation ;  
'Twas surely an old Greek tragedy you read ?  
In such an art I crave some preparation,  
Since now it stands one in good stead.  
I've often heard it said a preacher  
Might learn, with a comedian for a teacher.

FAUST.

Yes, when the priest comedian is by nature,  
As haply now and then the case may be.

WAGNER.

Ah, when one studies thus, a prisoned creature,  
That scarce the world on holidays can see,—  
Scarce through a glass, by rare occasion,  
How shall one lead it by persuasion ?

FAUST.

You'll ne'er attain it, save you know the feeling,  
Save from the soul it rises clear,  
Serene in primal strength, compelling  
The hearts and minds of all who hear.  
You'll sit for ever gluing, patching ;  
You cook the scraps from others' fare ;  
And from your heap of ashes hatching  
A starveling flame, ye blow it bare !  
'Take children's, monkeys' gaze admiring,  
If such your taste, and be content ;  
But ne'er from heart to heart you'll speak inspiring,  
Save your own heart is eloquent.

—Goethe's "Faust" (Bayard Taylor's translation).

### THE OLD GODS.

"Nothing in the world will go backwards," said an old lizard to me. "Everything pushes onwards, and finally there will be a grand advance in all Nature. The stones will become plants, the plants animals, the animals human beings, and human beings Gods."

"But," I cried, "what will become of those good folk, the poor old Gods?"

"That will all arrange itself, good friend," replied he. "Probably they will abdicate, or be placed in some honorable way or other on the retired list."—Heine.

## 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.): G. Cohen, "Atheism or Theism: The Final Issue." Doors open 7, Chair taken 7.30. Discussion invited. Admission free. Reserved front seat, 1s.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 3.15, Religious Freethought Parliament; 7.30, J. Hampden Davies, "God and My Neighbor."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Liberal Hall, Broadway, Forest Gate, E.): 7.30, G. Parsons, "The Mythical Christ."

### OUTDOOR.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Station-road, 11.30, A Lecture. Brookwell Park, 3.15, Debate, J. Cornish v. J. H. Davies, "Rev. R. J. Campbell's Justification."

### COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Town Hall): G. W. Foote, 3, "The Riddle of the Universe: Sir Oliver Lodge and Haeckel"; 7, "What Do We Know of God?" Thursday, Nov. 3, at the Bull Ring Coffee House, at 8, A. Barber, "Secularists and the Ethical Societies."

FAIRFORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, Mossley Clarion Choir.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, Discussion Class—Open Discussion; 6.30, Vocal and Instrumental Concert.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 3, L. Small, B.Sc., "The Philosophy of Science.—III.," 7, H. Percy Ward, "Is Secularism Immoral?" Monday, 8, Rationalist Debating Society.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints): 6.30, W. Sanders, "The Christian Worship of the Golden Calf."

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7.30, Committee Meeting; important business.

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