

Freethinker

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PRICE TWOPENCE

All human creatures, in all ages and places of the world, who have had warm affections, common sense, and self-command, have been, and are, Naturally Moral. Human nature in its fulness is necessarily Moral.—
JOHN RUSKIN.

Getting Our Deserts.

WHEN Hamlet hands the strolling players over to the care of Polonius, charging him to "let them be well used," the worldly and wily old politician says, "My lord, I will use them according to their desert." Whereupon the restless intellect and noble nature of Hamlet exclaim:—

"God's bodikins, man, much better; use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping? Use them after your own honor and dignity: the less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty."

It is a pity that these words of the Prince of Denmark did not occur to some of the orthodox correspondents who have been taking part in the *Daily Chronicle* controversy on "Do We Get Our Deserts?" They might then have reflected that, even if it be true that every man has committed misdeeds which entitle him to more than one whipping, it would still be more fitting the "honor and dignity" of God if he made the retribution fall something short of the "pound of flesh." For he is by theory our Father—not a paid judge to administer an adamant law; and if our Father cannot temper justice with mercy, it is hard to see on what ground we are to expect any consideration from each other.

There are some, of course, who regard God as a mere tyrant, whose will is righteous simply because it is irresistible; might and right being the same thing in their philosophy. This is certainly convenient. It does away with the necessity of discussing what *are* our deserts by asserting that we *have* none. All we have is by the favor of God. Whatever he sends us we should at least be thankful it is no worse. Even if we cannot imagine anything worse, the Creator has the potter's power over the clay; and if he makes one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor, and one to swim and the other to sink, it is for him to do as he pleases, and all the pots have to do is to accept their fate with becoming thankfulness or submission. Nay, we are sometimes told that there should be thankfulness in any case. Many years ago, when we were enjoying Christian hospitality in an English prison, we heard the chaplain preach a harvest sermon. He told the prisoners, who had very little personal interest in the matter, that there had been a good harvest, and that all of them ought to be thankful. Had there been a poor one they ought to be equally thankful; nay, they ought to be just as thankful if there were no harvest at all; for God was not bound to send any harvest, every grain of corn he did send was a pure gift; they had no sort of claim upon him, not even for their lives, and if he put out his finger, and wiped them out of existence, as boys do flies upon a window, it was their duty to feel proper gratitude, and bless and praise his holy name.

Such a view as that would naturally not commend itself to a gentleman like Mr. Hall Caine. This famous Christian novelist, who runs Miss Marie Corelli so close in the sacred and profitable work of

exploiting the popular religion, has been induced by the editor of the *Daily Chronicle* to join in the "Deserts" controversy. He begins, of course, by referring to "my recent book," an advertisement of which was probably the real ground of his intervention. Then he states his belief that it is a duty on his part "to express the little that has been revealed to him in regard to the plan of the universe."

We have read Mr. Hall Caine's private revelation as to the plan of the universe, and we think very little of it. Moreover, it is not original. We might even call it hackneyed.

Mr. Caine begins, so to speak, with the year one. We will take him where he reaches the present date. First of all, he gets into a frightful muddle over Science. "Science," he says, "tells us that suffering is in all cases the result of sin." We beg his pardon, but Science tells us nothing of the kind. Nor does Science talk, as Mr. Caine does, about "transgressing the great unrelenting laws of Nature." Laws of Nature cannot be broken. To speak of either obeying or disobeying them is nonsense.

Mr. Caine is just as accurate in all the rest of his "revelation." He says that we do not get our deserts in this world, but we get what is best for us. "I have always found," he says, "that what has happened has been good for me"—including the big bank account and the Manxland castle. The fact is that "suffering is good for us." Take that out of the world, and it is no place for Mr. Hall Caine. It is by suffering that we "attain to the highest." Suffering is meant to "develop the muscles of our souls." Suffering produces "God-like virtues," and this "proves to me (he says) that God rules the world in justice."

Assuming that suffering *does* confer all these advantages, has anyone ever seen Mr. Hall Caine seeking an extra share of it? If it is such a good thing, why does he not ask for more? He need not even ask for it. He can get it without asking. There is an inexhaustible stock of it on hand. He can help himself to any quantity. Mr. Caine speaks of "the preponderating multitudes to whom life is another word for misery." Why does he not join this conscript army as a volunteer and go to the front, and thus "attain to the highest" with the greatest celerity?

We know of a deeper philosopher than Mr. Hall Caine. Mr. George Meredith has well said that adversity tries us, but does not nourish us. Too much of it tries us in the worst sense of the word. It turns us pale and grey. And there is suffering which positively degrades; suffering which paralyses all the springs of life, and flings men and women into the abyss, from which no spiral road, however long and steep and arduous, ever leads again to the light and warmth of day.

Mr. Caine does not tell us why suffering is so unevenly distributed. Does he mean to say that the happiest men get the least of it because the "muscles of their souls" are in Sandow condition, while the unhappiest men get the most of it because their spiritual muscles are so terribly in want of exercise? If he does not mean this, let him give up his argument; if he does mean it, let him plainly say so, and invite the contempt of his suffering fellow-men.

G. W. FOOTE.

Reason and Religion.

FOR several weeks Dr. R. F. Horton has been publishing, in the columns of the *Christian Commonwealth*, a series of articles on "A Reason for the Faith that is in Us." It is always interesting to find a Christian preacher engaged at this work, if for no other reason than because it is evidence that a large number of people have not any "faith" at all in them. It may be taken for granted that no preacher ever discusses scepticism if he can possibly avoid doing so. For one thing, he is well aware, in spite of bombast, that his apology is always more or less inconclusive. At most it only arrests the falling away of a supporter here and there; it hardly ever brings a new recruit. And there is the ever-present danger of *suggesting* doubts and difficulties to those who already believe. If the genesis of unbelief in individual cases could be clearly seen, it would be discovered that in not a few instances the doubt that blossomed ultimately into a complete rejection of Christianity had its origin in a course of Christian apologetics. In fact, a religion that after so long a sway finds the need of so much argumentation and excusing, which, according to its exponents, rests upon the deepest and most permanent needs of human nature, but which that human nature is, nevertheless, rejecting, must create far more doubt than any course of flatulent sermons can hope to remove.

And such articles as those of Dr. Horton's are not interesting only, they are also amusing. For very brief reflection makes it plain that these "reasons" are not the grounds of belief, but rather excuses for retaining it. There are two ways in which a reason for a belief may be given. One is by showing that it rests upon certain inescapable facts, and is forced upon people by the constant pressure of inescapable conditions. It is in this way that the social instincts, for example, have their reasonableness demonstrated. They are not the *result* of reflection, but they do admit of adequate justification. The other method is by deducing a belief from a careful examination of the facts. That adequate reasons for belief in Christianity cannot be found in the first way is shown by the fact that so much care has to be taken to prevent people giving it up. And beliefs belonging to this class are all characterised by their inescapability. Nor can anyone claim that anyone believes in Christianity as the result of reflection, for the simple and obvious fact is that no one in a civilised community does so. The acceptance of Christianity is a geographical, a social, an intellectual accident. Those who believe it do so because it is a portion of the environment into which they are born, and for no other reason. Some are built so as to stand out against this influence, others to yield to it in a modified form, but none take it as the result of adequate thinking on adequate knowledge.

Dr. Horton's reasons, then, are excuses pure and simple. God, said Heine in reply to an inquiry, will forgive me—that's his business. Excuses are Dr. Horton's business. He finds thousands of Christians who may become unbelievers unless some plausible excuse is fashioned for them remaining believers, and it is a part of Dr. Horton's work to supply the deficiency. This he seeks to do in the articles above mentioned, and with what success will be seen.

The articles are four in number. The first asks "What is Christianity?"; the second, "Is there a Higher Philosophy than Christianity?"; and the two last deal with the relations of religion and science. Dr. Horton's definition of Christianity need not detain us long. Christianity, he says, "is a conception of life, and a principle of living, which came into the world with a historic person, and by a historic event." What there was fundamentally new about either the conception of life or the principle of living associated with Jesus Christ it would puzzle Mr. Horton to say; and as he proceeds to add, with some dim perception of this

difficulty, "not that the ideas and conceptions which Christianity embodies were all new," the point is conceded. So that Mr. Horton's statement really is that certain principles and conceptions, already well known before the existence of Jesus, came into the world through him. So far the description of Christianity is simplicity itself.

But the important thing in Christianity, according to Dr. Horton, is that "through the Event and the Person they (ideas and conceptions) were brought together and endowed with dynamic force." Now the value of such a statement is best realised when we bear in mind that the complaint of preachers in all ages has been that people quite ignored what they were pleased to call the higher aspects of Christianity, and, therefore, that Christianity was a static and not a dynamic force. And it is quite certain that the conception of Christianity that ruled the world for centuries was anything but of a lofty moral character. Moreover, Dr. Horton, who is a rabid anti-Catholic, believes that the central teachings of Roman Catholicism are and always have been distinctly anti-Christian. I do not wish to discuss whether they are or not; but if they are then it is certain that Dr. Horton's form of Christianity was anything but dynamic. And in addition to that Dr. Horton finds even to-day there is "prevalent a scepticism which is often thoroughly reasonable, a questioning which is often sincere." What, then, becomes of the dynamic force of the ideas that Christ brought into the world, but which were here before he came?

The truth is that the power of Christianity, such as it was, grew out of doctrines that are now modified, out of superstitions that are now discarded, and out of organisations, which is the only permanent thing about Christianity. That Christianity is essentially concerned with a moral ideal is quite a modern doctrine, and one that is offered as a concession to the spirit of unbelief. And it is significant in Dr. Horton's definition that *all* doctrines are left out of sight. There is no mention of Inspiration, of Miracles, of a Virgin Birth, of a Resurrection. If the definition is correct, one may be a Christian and believe in none of these things. But it is not correct, and Dr. Horton knows it. These are merely definitions prepared for apologetic articles and popular consumption. If Christianity had taught with only moderate emphasis that the suppression of a portion of the truth is as much lying as uttering that which is wholly untrue—and much more cowardly—there might by this time have been established a moderate conformity between pulpit utterances and honesty of speech.

After describing what Christianity is, Dr. Horton asks whether there is any higher philosophy before us. The one reasoned theory in competition with Christianity, he says, is that of Herbert Spencer. But Spencer relegates the source of all power to the Unknown. And he asks: "Is it probable that the power which produces our human intelligence, our emotions, our moral nature, would remain unknown in the creatures that it has produced?" Is it probable! In the name of all that is sensible, what has probability to do with it? If one believes that there is an intelligent Personality ruling nature, then it is probable that it would become known to his creatures. But, then, the whole question at issue is whether nature is the expression of such a Personality or not. The only meaning to such a question is, "Is it probable to a Christian?" But as Dr. Horton is not arguing with believers, but with non-believers, such a query is simply meaningless when applied to them. And Dr. Horton's only criticism on the "one reasoned theory" in competition with Christianity is to ask the ridiculous question, "Is it probable?" It would be hard for absurdity to go further than this—even in the pulpit.

The master-thought of our time, says Dr. Horton, "is the solidarity of humanity.....that men are brothers and should live as brothers.....Yet this.....is the great idea of Christianity. Strictly

speaking, it emanates from the Gospel." It is difficult to know just what is meant by "strictly speaking," but in any reasonable use of the term the brotherhood of man does *not* emanate from the gospel. It was far more clearly, reasonably, and emphatically expressed in the writings of the Stoics than in any Christian productions, and was given a greater practical expression by old Rome than by any other state the world has ever seen. Or if teachers are needed as instances, then Confucius and Buddha will serve. Of this fact Dr. Horton has again some perception, and attempts to evade it by observing that there "is all the difference in the world between conceiving high ideals, as Confucius and Buddha did, and securing the dynamic force that will give them effect." But does Dr. Horton mean to assert that, apart from all other influences and on equal grounds, the followers of Christ have developed the sense of a common humanity to any greater degree than the followers of Confucius or Buddha? If he does, the statement is simply untrue. No people have ever outdone Christians in ferocity, in brutality, in the lust for blood. The least warlike of all the great nations is the Chinese; the least warlike of people are the Buddhists. And Buddhism has succeeded in impressing special virtues upon its people where Christianity has failed. It has kept its people sober, and Christianity has never done this. It has made its followers kind to animals, and Christianity has never succeeded here either. There are no Buddhist Temperance Associations, and there are no Buddhist Societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals. There are not enough drunken or brutal Buddhists to keep either Society going.

And, finally, let it be borne in mind that the most unbrotherly nations to-day are the Christian nations. It is Christian Russia, Germany, England that cannot, and dare not, trust each other to act honorably and honestly where occasion demands. And it is from honest non-Christians that the humanitarian movement has received its chief impulses. No men did more for this than the Freethinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and no movement ever did more for humanitarian development than the French Revolution of 1789.

(To be continued.)

C. COHEN.

Forgiveness.

THE question of the moment, in religious circles, is, "Can sin be forgiven?" It has been suggested by the publication of Mr. Hall Caine's new novel, entitled *The Prodigal Son*. The *British Weekly* praises Mr. Hall Caine, because he "has always concerned himself with the problems of the spirit," and because, in this his latest work, he gives his view on the "old questions about sin and punishment and forgiveness." The *British Weekly* admits that "the present generation may not be intensely conscious of sin or guilt," but alleges that "it is growingly aware that the Nature of Things is against evil, and that the punishment for wrongdoing does not miss those who are unconscious of their transgression." The admission is absolutely true. It is a fact that the present generation is steadily losing all consciousness of sin or guilt, because it is learning to look at the whole subject from a purely scientific point of view. Scientifically speaking, there is no such thing as guilt or sin; and, consequently, there can be no forgiveness. Both sin and forgiveness are religious terms; and it is in a religious sense that they are usually employed in application to human life. The word *punishment* or *penalty*, as it is used in the legal world, is deeply tinged with its religious associations. If there is no sin or guilt, the ideas of punishment and forgiveness are simply absurd. In Mr. Hall Caine's *Prodigal Son*, Oscar, the younger son of the Governor of Iceland, is not a sinner in the theological sense, but a moral weakling. He is so

weak that he is completely under the influence of Helga, a strong woman who suffers from a constitutional twist. He does wrong knowingly, because he is not strong enough to resist the hurtful power of the woman he loves. His impulses and sympathies are noble and good, but his weakness leads him into all sorts of baneful actions and plunges him into unspeakable misery. He is simply the slave of heredity and environment; and, consequently, he is the proper object of neither punishment nor forgiveness.

It is equally erroneous to speak of the Nature of Things as concerning itself in the least with moral issues. The Nature of Things is neither moral nor immoral, but merely *unmoral*. All its interests are purely mechanical. The only things it is against are weakness and inefficiency. Can it be denied that the weak always go to the wall, and that the inefficient, from whatever cause, do not survive? These are stubborn facts of everyday life, and the sooner we recognise them as such the better. Utterly stern and relentless is the Nature of Things, and it is useless to rebel against it.

Now, in answering the question, "Can sin be forgiven?" we must begin and end by denying the existence of sin. We are told that "as between human beings forgiveness is a real experience, at once the most terrible and the most tender of all experiences." We are further assured that "if those we love could not forgive us, and if we could not forgive them, the springs of life would dry up and the world would pass into desert." But forgiveness is the wrong term to use in such connections, because of its close and persistent association with sin or guilt. In so far as we are not perfect we are not sinners, or guilty persons, but the victims of heredity and environment. As such, it is our privilege to love and bear with one another. The things in one another with which we are to bear are, not sins, but peculiarities of temperament, eccentricities of development, malformations of character. If a man has a twist in his arm, we neither blame nor forgive him—why should we blame or forgive him when the twist is in his brain? The criminal cannot help himself. He may be sentenced to ten years' penal servitude; but no sooner is his time up than he repeats the old crimes. The tendency is in his blood, and he is helpless. To blame him would be to commit an act of injustice towards him, and to pretend to forgive him would be a screaming farce. We must remember that it is just as natural for some people to do wrong as it is for others to do right.

It follows from the foregoing remarks that what we owe one another in our numerous failings and shortcomings is, neither blame nor pardon, but glowing pity. When a man has typhoid fever, or is consumptive, our pity flows out to him in a copious stream. So, likewise, when our friend or neighbor is afflicted with some mental or nervous malady, what we ought to give him is neither condemnation nor forgiveness, but consideration, kindness, healing sympathy, or some other form of helpful ministry. Let him feel that we are deeply sorry for him, and would gladly impregnate him with our own strength. Everybody ought to know how stupendously absurd and wicked it would be to cherish resentment or anger against such a person, and that forgiveness would be a tremendous insult to him. Lying is as much a disease of the nervous system as drunkenness or melancholia; and what disease requires is remedial treatment. What theology calls sin really means misfortune, or the result of an abnormal physical condition. Every man is and must be true to his temperament, to his inherited or acquired character, to the bent given him by heredity and environment. He cannot be otherwise. A man's will-power represents himself *as he is*. Whatever he may wish to do, he must always act in obedience to the weightiest motive. This is a truth to which there are no exceptions. When a man becomes a source of danger to the community he is forced into confinement; but the object of the confinement ought to be the protection of society, not the criminal's punishment.

To punish criminals is to degrade them. To make prison service penal is to make it an instrument of evil. The goals of our land, as at present managed, are institutions for the deterioration of their inmates. Everything within them—food, work, treatment—is severely penal. The prisoners are looked down upon and despised, with the result, as a rule, that they get to look down upon and despise themselves. Prisons ought to exist for the improvement of those held within them. The treatment should be kind, the food wholesome and nourishing, and the work ennobling and remunerative. The people in charge ought to be morally strong, high-principled, tender-hearted, and sympathetic, commissioned to befriend and minister to the unfortunate ones under their care. Is it not a fact that, under the present system, criminals are lower down in the scale when they leave prison than they were when they entered it? The reason for this is that from the time of their arrest down to the moment of their release they are regarded as responsible sinners instead of as the victims of circumstances.

Yes, the law can punish men and—ruin them. It can send them to prison, and so deal with them therein as to rob them of any chance in life they ever had. But the law cannot forgive—except the innocent who need no forgiveness. The law can even rise to the high dignity and glory of granting a free pardon to a man it has incarcerated for years for a crime he never committed! But the law's punishment is as dishonoring as its pardon, in that it tends to destroy whatever shreds of character its objects may previously have possessed.

The great truth that needs constant enforcement is that what the weak and inefficient require is sound teaching, healthy environment, genial sympathy, magnetic, loving treatment—a warm place in the heart of each of the strong and prosperous. The *British Weekly* says that "Nature cannot love, cannot pity, cannot forgive"; but man represents Nature at her highest and best, and man can love and pity and serve, although, like his mother, he cannot forgive. He can reach down a helping hand to the weakest and lowest, and he can spend and be spent in the service of his needy brethren. He can become a savior of society.

Now, all human service is "a transaction between persons," and is nearly always mutual. He who serves is himself served. He whom I help with my love and sympathy, helps me, consciously or unconsciously, in return. True vicarious service is also "a very costly thing." The contact of redemptive service with wasting weakness "brings with it unspeakable pain." Virtue cannot go out of a man without suffering; but the virtue of one man working out the salvation of another yields an abundant harvest of benefit to both. This is the only true socialism. Had Helga been a thoroughly healthy as well as strong woman Oscar would have been an infinitely better man. Then she would have called out his nobler and manlier qualities, and not, as it happened, his baser and more selfish ones.

If the scientist knows nothing of human forgiveness he knows still less, if possible, of divine pardon. It is said that "the relations between human beings are not identical with those between man and God"; but who and what is God, and what are man's relations to him? It is also said that in God's sight man is a guilty sinner, doomed to suffer forever unless God forgives him. But if man is *by nature* sinful, whose fault is it? Surely not his own, for he was born in sin. He was not consulted as to whether he would have such a nature; nor can he now in his own strength get rid of it. Since man did not make himself, nor choose his nature, how can guilt attach to him for being what he is, or how can he be blamed for doing wrong? If God made him, then it is God who needs to be forgiven for making him so badly, and not man for being true to his nature. The idea of God forgiving man is perfectly ridiculous.

Theology teaches that sin is the penalty of free-

agency; but theology is grossly self-contradictory. With one breath the man in bondage to it says:—

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness:
According to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.
For I acknowledge my transgressions:
And my sin is ever before me.
Against thee, thee only have I sinned,
And done that which is evil in thy sight,—

but with the next:—

Behold I was shapen in iniquity;
And in sin did my mother conceive me.

The confession of sin is nullified by the declaration of an iniquitous conception and a sinful birth. According to theology, only the first man, Adam, was a free-agent, and he, through his own act, lost his free-agency, and became the slave of sin. All his descendants have inherited a sinful nature; and out of a sinful nature nothing but sin can issue. But born sinners cannot be guilty, cannot justly be held accountable, and, therefore, if there be sin and guilt they are transferred from man to his Maker. In any case, man is not guilty before God, and needs no forgiveness at his hands.

Evangelical orthodoxy is nothing if not dogmatic. Here is a fine specimen:—

"The pardon of God is his coming into a life from which he has been shut out, and as the living God is greater than the world where sin reigns in death, so with him forgiveness is complete. Such forgiveness is impossible on the level of Nature. The forgiving God has a heart that beats and bleeds for his children."

Words, words, nothing but words! If God is "greater than the world where sin reigns in death," so is he mightier; and if he is greater and mightier than the world "where sin reigns in death," why, being thus infinite and omnipotent love, does he allow sin to continue through all the ages to reign in death? Why? And the echo thunders back, Why?

If we drop theology with its futile gospel of the forgiveness of sin through faith in the atoning work of Christ, and if we begin to regard what is called sin as weakness or disease that can be remedied through education, change of environment, and the ministry of brotherly sympathy, we may hope, some day, if we continue faithful to our trust, to witness some decided improvement in the ethical condition of human society.

J. T. LLOYD.

Are There Any Christians?—II.

Is it not wonderful how the idea of Christ being God could have taken such a hold in the minds of men? The least amount of thinking is enough to shatter the notion. But the masses do not think, and that is the reason why they believe such absurdities. Only a few, comparatively, think, or are able to think logically; and most of those who do think find it profitable to keep the people in the bonds of ignorance.

If Christ was God, and Creator of the world, he would have known everything; but he did not. He was as ignorant about the earth and other things as most of his poor countrymen were at that time. Christ believed that the earth was a flat plane, having ends, as others in Palestine did. It was natural for them to do so, as the writers of their Bible believed the same. Although the globular shape of the earth was known at least six hundred years before the time of Christ, the knowledge does not seem to have reached the Jews. That Christ believed the earth was flat is clearly proved by the account of the temptation in the wilderness, where he had gone on purpose to be tempted. The Devil carried him to the top of a high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth. Had

Christ known that the earth was a globe, he would have told the Devil so, instead of quoting an inappropriate sentence from the Old Testament. Are there any Christians to-day who believe that the earth is flat? Is it not a fact that all Churches collectively and individually have discarded the belief that the earth is flat? There are plenty of flats in the world, especially in the Churches; but none are flat enough to believe in the flatness of the earth. But discarding the belief of Christ makes their God an ignorant being, and how can they be Christians whilst throwing such dishonor on his name?

How did Christ live? One would think Christians would live and act as Christ did; but are there any that try to do so? Christ, during the period of his public life, was a wandering Jew, without a home or where to lay down his head. How he lived before we have no means of knowing. From about thirty to his death, according to the Gospels, he was a bachelor tramp, living on the charity of women and others. And his twelve apostles lived like him. They were all bachelors, and we have no account of them doing anything to earn a living. Christ not only practised celibacy, but favored it in his teaching, as Paul did after him. Here is the proof: "His disciples say unto him, if the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive the saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs which were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs, for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matt. xix. 10-12). Comment on the words would be superfluous. I will only ask, Are there any that try to live as Christ lived? Or would it be possible if they did try? If believers live entirely different to Christ, is not their life a condemnation of his? If they reject both example and precept of Christ, how can they be Christians?

Christ taught that the end of the world was at hand in his time (see Matt. xxiii.). After enumerating the signs and calamities attending the dissolution, he says in verse 36: "Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation." And it has not come yet. And are there any believers that believe that the world will ever come to an end in the way predicted by Christ? If there are, they must be phenomenal survivals of credulity.

Christ taught the blessedness of poverty. According to his teaching, poverty is a virtue and wealth a crime. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus nothing is said against the rich man but that he was wealthy, and he is sent to hell; and nothing is told of Lazarus but that he was poor, and he was carried by angels to the bosom of Abraham in heaven. Over and over again the criminality of wealth and virtue of poverty is taught by Christ. And there was nothing new in the doctrine. Centuries before his time the same idea was taught and believed by religious sects in Egypt. But no Church and no individual members believe the doctrine, and the non-acceptance of it is a condemnation of Christ and his teaching.

Christ taught the doctrine of non-resistance. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also," and so on (see Matt. v. 38-42). All Churches and all believers reject the teaching and disobey the command. In this, also, they condemn the teaching of their Divine Savior.

The disobedience of professing believers to the positive commands of Christ is quite a conspicuous feature. He commands his disciples to love their enemies, pray for them, and bless them. Perhaps it is possible to pray for and do good to an enemy; but to love him, I should think, is impossible. But, whether possible or not, Christians never try to obey the command. Christ commands his followers

to pray in their closets, with closed doors, in secret (see Matt. vi. 6). But all the Churches pray in public, like the hypocrites, to be seen and heard of men. The positive commandment is disobeyed by all. Christ commands that alms should be given privately. "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matt. vi. 3). Where are the Christians that obey the command? Christ commands to take no thought for the morrow (Matt. vi. 34); but Christians never obey the command. If Christ was God and only Savior, how is it possible for men and women who disregard and disobey his commandments to be Christians?

Christ commands thus: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body what ye shall put on" (Matt. vi. 25). Are there any believers that pay the least heed to these plain instructions? Do they not eat and drink quite regardless of the teaching of Christ? Is it not a fact that all who can display all the finery they are possessed of when attending churches and chapels? Do the priests dress as Christ tells them to do? No, not one of them. The words of Christ are a dead letter in all the churches, as they ought to be. But how can persons who disobey Christ be Christian?

When Christ sent his missionaries to preach, he told them and tells his followers to-day: "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey; neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves" (Matt. x. 9, 10). Are there any churches, or members, or societies that obey his command? Do missionaries go forth to foreign countries in that manner? Do the ministers, clergy, and priests practise the precept of their God and Savior? Do the bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and Pope pay any heed to what Christ commands? Not one of them in the least particular; and how can any of them be a Christian whilst they trample the commands of Christ under their feet?

Christ prohibits his disciples to take titles as marks of superiority. "Be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.....Neither be ye called masters; for one is your master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt. xxiii. 8-10, 11). Does any professed Christian obey this command? Do the Pope, cardinals, priests, archbishops, bishops, and deans? Do the clergy and ministers? No, not one of them. They all run after titles. Some of them buy worthless titles. All try for some mark of distinction and superiority over others. They are professors, doctors, and masters, contrary to the command of Christ. If they are right, Christ was wrong; if Christ was right they are wrong, and are not Christians.

When a rich young man came to inquire what he should do to be saved, Christ told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor. And, further, he declared: "Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xix. 23, 24). If these words are true (and they ought to be true, being the words of a God), what will become of the Archbishop of Canterbury with his fifteen thousand a year? What fate is awaiting the Pope, the cardinals, priests, and wealthy members? Where will the bishops, deans, clergy, ministers, and others be in the next world? None of them will be in heaven, for Christ, who is God and ought to know, tells us it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (which is impossible) than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Really it is useless to pursue the inquiry. The case is clear against the Churches and all their members. They are all gone astray from Christ. They disbelieve his doctrines; they twist and pervert the meaning of his plainest words; they attribute to him teachings he never taught; they have forged his name to absurdities he never uttered; they

have substituted their own doctrines for those of Christ, and made his of no effect. They disobey his positive commands. Christ is disbelieved and rejected by all the Churches. There is none of him in any service in church or chapel. And if he came again, as he came before—if he ever did come—and preached and lived as he did then, no church or chapel would open their door for him, and no congregation would listen to his discourses. In a Secular hall, Labor church, and a Socialist meeting he would have a hearing, but not in churches, where all have ceased to be Christians except in name.

R. J. DERFEL.

Mr. Carnegie's Successful Joke.

It has just been announced by Dr. George E. Reed, president of Dickinson College at Carlisle, Pa., that having succeeded in raising \$50,000 for the rebuilding of Denny Hall, destroyed by fire on March 3 last, he has received from Andrew Carnegie a cheque for \$50,000, to be used in erection of the new collegiate preparatory building. This building will be named Conway Hall, in honor of Dr. Moncure D. Conway, an alumnus of Dickinson in the class of '52 and an old friend of Mr. Carnegie. Conway Hall will be at once completed and made ready for dedication.

Hereby hangs a rather interesting story. When Denny Hall was burned down, and the faculty found itself without the necessary funds to rebuild it, the president at once thought of Mr. Carnegie as a possible source of a contribution toward a new structure. Dickinson is a Methodist institution, and Mr. Carnegie is a long way outside of that denomination. As a medium of communication between the college and the man who had the money but no great enthusiasm for Methodism, the faculty chose a friend of Carnegie and an alumnus of the institution, who out of regard for his *alma mater* consented to write to the steel magnate, and did so. Mr. Carnegie, who evidently has a sense of humor, replied that he would contribute to the end in view provided the college would raise an amount equal to his gift and name the contemplated preparatory building Conway Hall, after Dickinson's distinguished alumnus. The faculty consented, and set about raising the 50,000 dollars needed to "call" Mr. Carnegie. Meanwhile Dr. Conway took ship for Rome to represent the Freethinkers of America at the International Freethought Congress.

Dickinson College, which bestowed the ministerial title on Dr. Conway, is the oldest college in the state with the exception of the University of Pennsylvania, which bestowed the degree of Master of Arts upon Thomas Paine. It was founded and endowed in 1783 by John Dickinson, LL.D., who was in 1776 one of the few members of Congress who refused to sign the Declaration of Independence. He afterward enlisted as a private soldier in the Continental army, and endowed the college in gratitude for the "prosperous conclusion of the war." Dickinson was Presbyterian up to 1833, when in consequence of a division among the trustees it was turned over to the Methodists by the majority, the minority retaining the funds. It still remains divided, having two courses, one course in the Hebrew language and literature for theologs, and another for students of the natural sciences. It seems to be progressive, or it would not have permitted Freethought to buy in by erecting a hall with the money of one unbeliever and naming it after another. We have not as yet seen any protests from Methodist sources, though these may come later. Ultimately, however, the institution will find that it has honored itself by doing honor to one of the greatest living Americans, albeit the name it has chosen is that of a Freethinker.

Possibly the action of this Methodist institution may cause Dr. Conway to modify in some degree his recent expression regarding the "darling delusion" of Freethinkers that the world is growing more liberal. He will at least admit that, as a joke, the incident is calculated to relieve the sternness of the battle Freethinkers are waging in behalf of progress and religious toleration.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Recently a young devotee in the art of training carrier pigeons rushed up to our local station just as a train was leaving for Annbank and Cumnock way. Looking into a carriage, he espied a Salvation Army official, and asked him what road he was going. The Salvationist replied, seriously and solemnly, "I'm on the road to Heaven." "The very thing," said the young man, as he handed in a small basket; "just let they doos oot when ye're hawf way."—*Kilmarnock Standard*.

Acid Drops.

How the "spiritual" people differ from each other! Mrs. Annie Besant and Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace both agree that we shall all live again, but they split over the question whether we have lived before. Mrs. Besant, like a good Theosophist, declares that we have all had several innings. Every baby in its mother's arms, instead of being a new comer, is an old stager, and has been at that little game more times than it can remember. Dr. Wallace, however, pooh-poohs this theory. In the *London Magazine* he describes reincarnation as a "grotesque nightmare, such as could only have originated in ages of mystery and superstition." "Fortunately," he adds, "the light of science shows it to be wholly unfounded." Quite so. And the light of science appears to do the same service to the doctrine of a future life. Life after death, and life before birth, really stand in the same category.

Mr. W. T. Stead is rather in favor of the doctrine of reincarnation, but it is a subject on which he is not disposed to dogmatise. We are glad to hear it. It is refreshing to find some subject on which Mr. Stead does *not* dogmatise. But we fear he must feel his limitations very acutely.

Another great philosopher, Mr. Rider Haggard, thinks it "not only possible, but perhaps probable, both that we have lived before and shall so live again." Here's English for you! And what philosophy! Just think of anything being "perhaps probable." One must recognise the profundity of Mr. Haggard's metaphysical genius.

Recurring to Mr. Stead, we note that he alludes to two persons who *know* that he has lived before. One of them says it was two hundred years ago—the other says it was two hundred and fifty. But both of them are put out of court by Mrs. Besant, who says that thirteen hundred years is the interval between incarnations. Madame Blavatsky said it was eight thousand. Perhaps it is eight million.

Dr. Clifford is very severe on the idea of pre-existence. "Not a fragment of it," he says, "would be accepted in a laboratory." Well, if it comes to laboratories, we should like Dr. Clifford to mention one in which the idea of a future life would be accepted. What is sauce for the pre-natal goose is sauce for the post-mortem gander.

Life before birth, in Dr. Clifford's view, is "only a fleeting fancy, a wayward imagination, a will-o'-the-wisp." Which displays his customary verbal diarrhoea. But when the question arises, Shall we live after death? he replies "Certainly." Any doubt as to that would strike at the roots of Dr. Clifford's profession.

At an Exeter meeting of the Church Missionary Society one of the speakers, Colonel L. W. Stirling, referred to the trouble they had with Mrs. Besant in India. She, who had once been a colleague of Charles Bradlaugh, was now (he said) as much a Hindu as a Theosophist. She had erected a statue at Benares to a Hindu goddess, and she went down to the River Ganges, like other Hindus, and bathed ceremoniously. She had also established a Central Hindu College in Benares, and she drew large sums of money from wealthy Rajahs who sympathised with her efforts in propagating Hinduism. But the Church Missionary Society was able to meet her there. Evidently it is a great battle of rival superstitions, and it hardly matters to reason and humanity which wins; only Hinduism is a native superstition over there, and Christianity is often an impudent intruder.

How they love one another! Father Ignatius (the Rev. Mr. Lyne) was speaking at Southend recently. After his address a young Churchman of the Kensitite persuasion, got up and asked him a question. It was put very civilly, but Father Ignatius's friends shouted, "Turn him out" and "Throw him in the horse-trough." There was no attempt on the platform to check their pious exuberance. And these good-tempered Christians had only just risen from their knees!

The Torrey-Alexander combination has a rival in the field. Dr. Henry and his singing colleague, J. Raymond Hemminger, have been evangelising in different parts of Great Britain. In a few weeks, it is said, they have taken 3,600 total abstinence pledges, and saved 1,200 souls. Of course we must wait for kingdom-come in order to be sure about the latter figure. Meanwhile the former figure is open to scrutiny. If the Henry-Hemminger combination goes on in this way for twelve months it could make a per-

ceptible difference in the nation's drink-bill. But will the Chancellor of the Exchequer be alarmed? We can imagine his soft smile at the question.

The Henry-Hemminger combination goes in for "mid-night demonstrations." All the up-to-date evangelists play this little game. They find it pays. There is a spicy suspicion of wickedness about it which has a vast attraction for the looser-minded godly.

Both the Torrey-Alexander and the Henry-Hemminger combinations are American. They come from the classic land of the hustlers. England is not able to compete with America in this line.

President Roosevelt himself (with all respect to the American people) is a hustler. He has written a number of hustling books, which his personal admirers call literature, but they would have attracted little or no attention if they had borne the name of a poor obscure author. In one of them he passed an impudent judgment on one of his betters. He ventured to speak of Thomas Paine as a "dirty little Atheist." Thomas Paine, who was so scrupulous in his person and attire, until his last illness left him helpless; Thomas Paine, who was a tall man, some inches higher than Mr. Roosevelt; Thomas Paine, who wrote in favor of Theism with a chaste and beautiful eloquence that leaves Mr. Roosevelt's efforts so far behind.

We suppose President Roosevelt perpetrated that silly libel on Thomas Paine for two reasons. First, to indulge his own bigotry; second, to curry favor with the mob of American Christians. Well, he has his reward.

The "Wee Kirk" leaders and the "Free Kirk" students ran foul of each other at Edinburgh—very foul. Cries of "Shame" and "It's a lie" flew round the Assembly Hall. When the hisses were loudest Mr. McNeilage shouted to the Free Kirk students: "You may hiss; you are only showing your relationship with the brood of the serpent." In the course of the amenities which followed, Professor Marcus Dods was referred to as "a spiritual coward." Evidently the handful of Highlanders who have got possession of the old Free Church of Scotland and all its property hate the Higher Criticism with a most perfect hatred. It is easy enough to see what the quarrel is about.

Rev. J. S. Smalley, an ex-president of the New Zealand Wesleyan Conference, preaching at Exeter lately, told that old Ingersoll-Beecher "cripple" story again, and it was gravely reported in the *Daily Telegraph* as a decoration of the "Do We Believe?" controversy. Most of our readers know that this story is a mere fabrication. Mr. Smalley ought to know it too. Ingersoll and Beecher both denied the ridiculous yarn. But it happens that denial—even the most authoritative denial—does not kill a pious falsehood. "Nothing in this world," as Ingersoll said, "flourishes like a good, sound, healthy religious lie."

Sir Ernest Flower, M.P., speaking at the Church Institute, Bradford, in connection with a meeting of the Additional Curates Aid Society, was good enough to assure his scanty audience that he did not agree with those who spoke of the present age as a sceptical and atheistic age. He admitted, however, if we may so express it, that there was mischief in the air. But the chief agents of this mischief, in his opinion, apparently, were "certain eminent dignitaries of the Church" who made lamentable "excursions into realms of Biblical research" and "did a great deal of harm among the half-read people." He considered that men holding important positions in the Church "should think more seriously of their responsibility." We suppose he means that they should not let the cat out of the bag in public. And there is a lot to be said for this, from a Church point of view. It is hardly the thing to give the show away in the presence of its patrons.

Rev. John Leach, of Oxford, was welcomed by a crowd of Passive Resisters on his release from prison. They hailed him as a "martyr." He had suffered seven days' imprisonment. Terrible! But our readers must not be too sympathetic—for a nominal seven days means actually five. Still, a sentence like this is sufficiently awful. Fancy, five long weary days! Yes, it was terrible sufferings like this that made the blood of the martyrs the seed of the Church. True, the editor of the *Freethinker* once went through a whole twelve months' imprisonment. But he was a wicked, hardened Atheist, and could not feel like a good, tender Christian

Mr. Leach's occupation in prison was counting peas. We never heard of that amongst prison labors before, but we

will take his word for it; and we venture to think that it was the most precise and accurate work he ever did in his life.

The most irksome thing Mr. Leach had to complain of was that he had nothing useful except the Bible to read. Couldn't he make the Bible do for five days? Or did he think it was a good opportunity for a change in his literary diet?

"A Churchman by Law" advocates in the *Daily News* the banishing of all religious teaching from State-aided schools. In the next breath he adds the following:—

"Let the Scriptures be recognised by the schools being opened each day by the reading, without comment, of a chapter from the New Testament, master and scholars reading verse and verse alternately. This would offend no one but Roman Catholics."

This gentleman appears not to have heard of Jews and Free-thinkers. Nor does he explain why Protestants should "offend" Roman Catholics in schools paid for by *all* citizens. But what can be expected from one who starts by fancying that Bible reading and religious education are two totally different things? Really, the way in which Christians get confused over the Education problem gives one an idea of the mental muddle which their faith engenders.

To-day [Nov. 17] is "Bet-und Busstag," the annual day for humiliation and prayer appointed by the Prussian State. Some ten years ago the day of humiliation fell in the spring, but as the people utilised the day to go picnicking in the country, the Church authorities had it changed to the late autumn, in order that there might not be so much temptation to stay away from church. As far as church attendance is concerned, the change of the day to autumn has not much mended matters. Except where popular clergymen preached the churches to-day were comparatively empty, and the pastors bemoaned the national shortcomings to half-empty pews. As the schools, public offices, theatres, and music-halls are all closed, the streets are crowded with promenaders, whose thoughts are certainly not of sackcloth and ashes, and restaurants, cafés, and beer-houses are crammed to the door with guests intent on making the best of a dull day. Nearly all the newspapers contain articles extolling the wisdom of setting aside a day for national humiliation and prayer. The more serious journals, like the *Reichsbote*, lament that Germans as a nation are growing more ungodly and more materialistic, that the universities and the Press are doing nothing to stem the flood of unbelief which is rapidly inundating the land. If no halt is called to this, says the *Reichsbote*, which is the chief organ of the Orthodox Church party, these destructive floods will shatter the Fatherland.—*Daily Telegraph*.

A study recently made of the literary tastes of the inmates of Sing Sing Prison shows that Dumas is the favorite author. His books were drawn out 1,413 times in a single year. Below him in order of popularity come Charles Reade, 720 volumes; Wilkie Collins, 659; Marie Corelli, 596; Conan Doyle, 584; Dickens, 567; Rider Haggard, 481; Marion Crawford, 415; G. A. Henty, 402. This is surprising news. We had supposed from the statements of the clergy that all prisoners spent their spare hours reading the blasphemous works of Voltaire and Paine. The pious Marie Corelli, who regards education without religious instruction as somewhat worse than murder, is astonishingly popular with the criminals.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

George William Banton has been bound over, at the Westminster Police Court, in his own recognisances in £10 to keep the peace for six months; which means that he will be sent to prison if he assaults his wife again during that period. It appears that he laid unlawful hands on his better half because she did not get the children ready early enough for Sunday-school. There are six of them, all small, and their mother objected to bathing them on Sunday morning after bathing them on Saturday night—especially as they had had a cold bath every week-day morning. Naturally the magistrate took her view of the case—for there was really but one side to the dispute; and the pious husband will henceforward have to confine himself to verbal demonstrations.

Rev. John Robert Edwards, aged 56, of Grenville-place, Russell-square, has been fined ten shillings for using bad language in Hyde Park. The reverend gentleman did not seriously deny that he called one opponent "a damned liar" and another something worse. But he explained to the magistrate that he was using that language in behalf of Christianity, and it was so difficult to keep one's temper with those Atheists.

A number of pious gentlemen met the other day at the Holborn Restaurant. Their object was not, as you may imagine it was, to dine sumptuously and drink toasts. They selected that place, of all places in London, to hold a "prayer conference" in, with a view to giving "a united witness to the Deity of Jesus Christ, and to the whole Bible as the Word of God." Well, they gave their united witness—for what it was worth; and it is to be hoped that Jesus Christ, and the party responsible for the Bible, are duly obliged to them. But does it not seem a little odd that these pious gentlemen should fancy that anything they can say or do could in any way promote the Deity of Jesus Christ, or in any way constitute the Bible the Word of God?

Two gentlemen who could not attend sent letters to this Holborn Restaurant prayer conference. One of them was the Rev. Theodore Howard, who is quite new to our acquaintance, and can hardly be said to be famous. According to the newspaper report, he "declared that it was necessary that a serious and solemn protest should be made against those who perpetrate the tremendous wrong of attempting to inoculate Sunday School teachers with the views of a diseased theology." We suppose this harmless thunder was directed against the friends of the Higher Criticism. The other letter was from that model of Christian veracity and courtesy, Dr. Torrey, who said that "it was time for them to lift up their voice like a trumpet." Dr. Torrey said some time ago that people who do not believe as he does, even if they are professed Christians, are walking straight to hell. He now says that not to protest against what he chooses to regard as unorthodox is "disloyalty to God." Men like Dr. Torrey seem to know God extremely well. It is not so certain, however, that God knows them.

There was really one wise remark made at the Holborn Restaurant meeting. The Rev. Dimsdale T. Young reminded them of what the late learned Bishop Stubbs said before his death—that his clergy would never rout scepticism if they went half way to meet it. This is perfectly sound wisdom. To go and do battle with scepticism is only to demonstrate the poverty of Christian resources in the way of argument and evidence. The best policy is to wait behind the fortifications of tradition and vested interest. It is not exactly courageous, but it pays—and the acuter clergy know it.

The Rev. Fuller Gooch was quite pathetic. He said that they "rejected and repudiated statements that were made from Christian pulpits by leaders of the Churches." Fancy! So it is come to that! The leaders of the Churches are giving the show away. Yes, but why? Not for fun. You may depend upon that. They do it for reasons of professional interest. Men of God like Mr. Fuller Gooch demand that the shutters shall be kept closed, and deny that it is daylight outside. The leaders of the Churches see, and know that other people see, that daylight is streaming through every crack and crevice; and therefore that it is foolish to keep up the pretence of darkness any longer. "Let us put a brave face on it," they cry, "and declare that the closed shutters were only a blunder in chronology." But the timid orthodox men of God are like the condemned criminal in the great ending of Crabbe's powerful poem on "Prisons." The wretch is roused from his last hour's sleep, after a delicious dream of happy days of childhood:—

Alas! the watchman on his way,
Calls, and lets in—truth, terror, and the day!

Truth and daylight mean terror to these detected murderers of the human mind.

Bishop Gore, of Worcester, where the sauce comes from, eluvied poor Mr. Beeby out of his Birmingham curacy as a heretic, because he gave forth an uncertain note as to the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. It is now announced that Bishop Gore will accept nomination as the first Bishop of Birmingham. The sum of £118,000 has been subscribed for the endowment of this new bishopric, and the Bishop's stipend will be £3,500 a year—or £67 6s. 2d. a week. It is evident, therefore, that Bishop Gore believes in the Sermon on the Mount precisely as Mr. Beeby believes in the Virgin Birth. A literal interpretation is rejected in both cases. Bishop Gore has, indeed, written a treatise on the Sermon on the Mount, in which he concludes that texts like "Blessed be ye poor" and "Woe unto you rich" are not meant for us—that is, for himself; so that he is quite free to take that £3,500 a year, and as much more as they can add to it.

It is sad to see a paper like the *Daily Chronicle* pandering to the maudlin superstition of the age by giving so much space to the antics of the young Welsh revivalist, Evan Roberts; and the heading of "Wesley in Wales" is distinctly

insulting to the great, if in some respects mistaken, man who founded Methodism. Evan Roberts is a case such as mental pathologists are familiar with. He receives messages from God, and has several ladies helping him to deliver them. Being asked how a message was manifested, he said:—

"God seized hold of me. He pressed me down to the earth. I felt the weight of his hand upon me, for my face was purple. My mother had the same experience when she was converted. She fell to the ground so that people thought she was ill."

Clearly a case for the medical profession. And it is a bit of a let down to be told that the Boy Evangelist is twenty-six.

The Welsh Wesley says that his body is full of electricity. "Day and night," he says, "I can feel it thrilling me. I have no sleep. When I am at rest I am back in chapel over again, at meetings, praying, exhorting the people. The other night I jumped out of bed, the Spirit was so strong within me." The excited young man is evidently on the high road to the asylum or the grave. And the newspapers that puff him, for the sake of copy, are helping him to his doom.

The Senate of Cambridge University recommends that in future Greek shall be an optional subject. French or German or something might be taken instead. But would it not be well if an extra turn were taken at English? It seems very much wanted. Here is Dr. Rendall, for instance, Head Master of Charterhouse, and a "reverend" we believe, writing as follows on the question: "In a very short time Greek would very soon be retained only as a special subject for the few who were expected to be candidates for holy orders." Such is clerical English! A schoolboy should be able to correct it.

M. C. Sabatier, an ex-Deputy, puts forward a curious reason for leaving the Concordat alone, and the *Daily Chronicle* deems it worthy of three special paragraphs. The long and the short of it is that if the State cuts off the French priests' salaries they will have to get a living somehow, and many of them will compete with those already engaged in the business and professional worlds. Consequently it would be better to let the present arrangement continue. In other words, you should maintain a competitor in order to keep him out of the labor market. What an odd idea, to be sure! Will the Trade Unionists consider it at their next Congress?

Apropos of the recent inquiries into the religious opinions of French officers, the *Gil Blas* tells a story of the rough-and-ready manner in which such inquiries were conducted at St. Cyr as recently as 1899. In that year the son of M. Paul Doumer, now President of the Commission of the Budget, reported himself at the military school, and was formally interrogated by the captain in charge of the "bureau of matriculation." "Your name? Your age? Can you ride? Can you swim?" ran the questions, terminating with "What is your religion?" "I have no religion," was the young man's reply. "Have you never been baptised?" "No." "Your father—was he baptised?" "Yes." "As a Catholic?" "Yes." "Then that settles it. You are a Catholic. Go." And the cadet departed.—*Westminster Gazette*.

Rev. George Martin, of Southwark, has been bound over to keep the peace again. In obeying Jesus Christ—at least he says so—he upset barrows of vegetables in the Borough Market. Naturally the owners of the vegetables did not accept his divine commission to injure their property. From vegetables he might go on to meat, and do as much mischief, say to the pork trade, as his Master did at Gadara. It was necessary to pull him up in time—and the job was done by the local Stipendiary.

Idiotic pious people who put copies of the *Freethinker* in envelopes, and send them to our office, without paying postage, might really cease playing the fool. We don't take them in, and the loss only falls upon the Post Office.

As we are going to press we receive a cutting from the *Manchester Guardian* relating to the "extraordinary success" of the Welsh madcap evangelist, Evan Roberts. It appears that he had a packed congregation at Bridgend, where he secured scores of converts, including "gamblers and well-known Agnostics." We have not the honor of being acquainted with any of these well-known Agnostics, and we know from experience what a vain task it is to seek the names and addresses of such proselytes. But we note, and we beg our readers to note, the delightful association of "Agnostics" and "gamblers." It throws a flood of light upon Christian temper and Christian ethics.

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

Sunday, November 27, Alexandra Hall, Islington-square, Liverpool; at 3, "God, Man, Free Will, and Morality: with reference to Mr. Blatchford's New Crusade"; at 7, "What Do We Know of God?"

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.—December 4, Leicester; 11, Liverpool.
- J. LLOYD'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—December 11, Manchester. January 22, Birmingham. February 12, Leicester.
- F. S.—Thanks for the cutting. The book reviewed is evidently worth our attention—and shall have it.
- C. W. STYRING.—Thanks for the cutting. See "Acid Drops." Mr. Foote would be glad to visit Leeds again, but there seems to be a difficulty in obtaining a suitable hall in a central part of the city. We are not quite as sure as you are that the Sunday Societies are doing a really great work. They often act as a wet blanket on all burning questions; and thus pander to, instead of mitigating, the hereditary spirit of intellectual compromise and dread of ideas in the British people. Entertainment is legitimate enough, but it ought not to be treated as propaganda.
- J. BLACKHALL.—Glad to hear you are so pleased with *Bible Romances* and delighted with the *Freethinker*. Mr. Cohen will like to know that it was hearing him at Newcastle that led you to become a reader of this journal.
- F. J. VOISEY.—See our paragraph. Thanks.
- W. MORTIMER.—We have referred to the article on "Science and Immortality" in the *British Medical Journal*, and perceive that you have made a (not unnatural) mistake. Miss Ingersoll, who founded the Ingersoll Lectureship in 1893, to commemorate her father, is not the daughter of Colonel Ingersoll, who died in 1899.
- T. WARRENDER.—If you read French well you should read Macterlinck in the original. If you do not, you should read him in the English translations published by George Allen. Mr. Alfred Sutro is the translator, and an excellent one too. The last volume, *The Double Garden*, is capitally done into English by Mr. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos.
- J. McCORRIE.—Thanks. We shall make use of it.
- J. CRAYTON.—Mr. Foote would be very happy to visit Newcastle again, but it seems impossible to obtain a suitable hall there now on Sundays. He occasionally visits South Shields, and that is the nearest he gets to Middlesborough at present.
- A. D. CORRICK.—We do not know of any very recent book dealing with the Josephus forgery. How can the demonstration of the forgery be any the more certain for being done by a living scholar. Dead scholars live still—don't they?—in their works. We dealt with the Josephus forgery recently in our criticism of the Rev. F. Spurr's reply to Mr. Blatchford. For the rest, you can hardly expect great scholars to go on, generation after generation, demonstrating an admitted forgery. There comes a time when such things are simply taken for granted.
- BRUNO.—You do not run any legal risk, if that is what you mean; but we cannot undertake to advise you as to whether you should do it or not. We judge for ourselves, and leave others to do the same.
- JAMES READ.—Pleased to have your general good opinion. On the exceptional point we think you are mistaken. Mr. Blatchford has been mentioned scores of times in the *Freethinker*, and often very handsomely.
- F. S.—Accept our thanks for cutting, and see paragraph.
- W. P. PEARSON.—Pleased to hear that Mr. Ward had a "crowded out" meeting at Liverpool on Sunday evening. We hope he will fare as well at Birmingham to to-day (Nov. 27).
- C. D. S.—In our next. Thanks.
- A. G. LYE.—We earnestly hope the new Coventry Branch will have a highly-successful winter season.
- J. G. STUART.—Pleased to see your pen still active in the good old cause. You prick the Passive Resistance bubble neatly.
- J. T. GRIFFITHS.—Your letter, with pamphlet, shall have attention. We thought the "missing links" argument was played out, but there seems to be no end to the credulity or impudence of Christian apologists.
- THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street Farringdon-street, E.C.
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- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.

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Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote delivers two lectures to-day (Nov. 27) for the local N. S. S. Branch in the Alexandra Hall, Islington-square, Liverpool. Both subjects are likely to draw large audiences. Those who wish to secure seats in the evening should be at the hall in good time.

Mr. Foote's afternoon audience at Manchester on Sunday was slightly affected by the Labor Demonstration in the Free Trade Hall, but the Secular Hall was crowded in the evening with a fine, enthusiastic meeting, and the lecture was followed by a considerable number of questions. The annual collection—a fairly good one, we believe, was taken on behalf of the N. S. S. General Fund.

Mr. Cohen had two good meetings at Coventry on Sunday, in spite of the counter attractions provided elsewhere by three "Sacred Concerts," two of which were held opposite the hall in which he lectured. Mr. Cohen's lectures were followed by close attention and much appreciation. He also had to answer several questions. The chair was taken in the afternoon by Mr. Shaw, the Branch president. Mr. Partridge travelled over again from Birmingham and rendered valuable assistance.

Tyneside Freethinkers will please note that Mr. John Lloyd lectures, morning and evening, to day (Nov. 27) at South Shields. Mr. Lloyd has many friends in the district who will be glad of this opportunity to hear him again.

In the *Life and Correspondence* of the late Lord Chief Coleridge the biographer cites three judgments as typical specimens of his contributions to the law, and two of them concerned Freethinkers. The first was in the case of Bradlaugh v. Newdigate on the law of maintenance; the second was in the case of Regina v. Foote and Others on the law of blasphemy. Lord Coleridge's judgment in the latter case wrought a revolution in the common law of blasphemous libel. Had it not been for that judgment, the Secular Society, Limited, would never have been incorporated—for the simple reason that it *could* not have been. Freethinkers owe much to Lord Coleridge, who was a Christian without being a bigot: a very rare exception.

The Pioneer Press is selling at our publishing office a remarkably cheap edition of the great David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, which is one of the finest, subtlest, and most daring works that the eighteenth century produced. Huxley had no hesitation in calling Hume the greatest thinker of that century, and we have no hesitation in calling the *Dialogues* his second masterpiece. This edition has a Preface by Mr. G. W. Foote; it is excellently printed on good paper; the size is handy; and the price—although it runs to over a hundred pages—is only fourpence.

Dr. C. W. Saleeby had an excellent article on "Divine Discontent" in last week's *Academy*. "It is writ large in universal history," he begins, "that discontent and doubt are the seeds of all intellectual and moral progress." And the conclusion is as follows: "Thus whilst the Church still teaches, I suppose, as once it taught, that disbelief is a mortal sin, history teaches us that it is the seed of all progress: whilst the acceptance of any dogma or convention is the acceptance of some one's rejection of some other dogma or convention. If you accuse me of despising the work of the past, I answer that *this*, when we read aright, is what our fathers, of their experience, have taught us. It is of such right reading that the essentially modern idea of toleration is born. Men can be expected to tolerate dissent only when they can study, on a sufficiently large scale, the history of opinion. They despise the work of the past who refuse to learn therefrom. And if you or I should suffer some distress, as suffer we must, at the uprising of some form of discontent which, rightly or wrongly, we cannot call divine, we may take comfort from that great saying of Carlyle's: The first of all truths is this, that a lie cannot endure for ever."

Tolstoy, in his newly translated address *To the Working People of all Countries*, makes honorable mention of Thomas Paine as one of the pioneers of the movement for the nationalisation of the land. He refers to Paine as "the celebrated author of the *Age of Reason* and the *Rights of Man*."

London Freethinkers, and provincial Freethinkers who may be coming to London in January, should note that the Annual Dinner, and the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, will take place at the Holborn Restaurant on the second Tuesday in the month (13th). The price of the tickets is 4s. as usual, and there will be the customary brief speeches and vocal and instrumental music after the dinner.

Our friends are asked to do what they can to help the boycotted *Freethinker* along. Its circulation has been improving of late, and there is no reason why it should not go on improving. It is a good plan for its readers to pass their weekly copy on when they have done with it; or, if they like to keep it by them, to purchase a second copy for lending around to their friends and acquaintances. We are also willing to post a copy of the *Freethinker* for six consecutive weeks to anyone whose address is sent us as that of a person likely to be interested in its contents. Such addresses should be forwarded direct to the business Manager at our publishing office.

Our London readers are requested to make a note of the fact that Mr. Foote is going to deliver a special course of three Sunday evening lectures at the Queen's (Minor) Hall in December. The subjects will be advertised in next week's *Freethinker*, and also in the weekly newspapers which print lists of such announcements. Friends who can circulate small, or display large, bills of these lectures should apply to Miss Vance, at 2 Newcastle-street, E.C., for as many of either, or both, as they can use judiciously.

The price of the front reserved seats at these Queen's Hall meetings will be one shilling. Admission to all other seats will be free. It is hoped, however, that the Freethinkers who occupy them will be as liberal as possible in regard to the collection. It will depend on the result of the December course whether another course will be arranged for early in the new year, with other lecturers as well as Mr. Foote occupying the platform.

DIVINE SHAKESPEARE.

Were no other proof extant and flagrant of the palpable truth that Shakespeare excelled all other men of all time on record as a poet in the most proper and literal sense—as a creator of man and woman, there would be overflowing and overwhelming proof of it in the creation and interaction of these three characters [Othello, Desdemona, Iago]. In the more technical and lyrical sense of the word, no less than in height of prophetic power, in depth of reconciling and atoning inspiration, he is excelled by Æschylus: though surely, on the latter score, by Æschylus alone. But if the unique and marvellous power which at the close of the *Oresteia* leaves us impressed with a crowning and final sense of high spiritual calm and austere consolation in face of all the mystery of suffering and of sin—if this supreme gift of the imaginative reason was no more shared by Shakespeare than by any poet or prophet or teacher of Hebrew origin, it was his and his alone to set before us the tragic problem of character and event, of all action and all passion, all evil and all good, all natural joy and sorrow and chance and change, in such fulness and perfection of variety, with such harmony and supremacy of justice and of truth, that no man known to historic record ever glorified the world whom it would have been so utterly natural and so comparatively rational to fall down before and worship as a God.—A. C. Swinburne, "*Harper's Magazine*," October, 1904.

A small boy, living in London, and who always took his walks in Hyde Park, returned to his mother one day and told her that he had seen a lion in the park. His mother assured him that such a thing was impossible, but the child persisted, and, on going out to tea in the afternoon, again repeated his tale to his hostess. His mother was annoyed at the child going about repeating what seemed such a fabrication of fibs, and told him to ask God to forgive him for telling such falsehoods. On inquiring next morning if Tommy had done so, he replied: "I did ask God to forgive me, and he said, 'Don't apologise; I often make the same mistake.'"

A Pious Revolutionist.

WE are familiar with the French Revolution as "an awful result of Atheism"; but if we take the trouble to inquire into that upheaval we find it difficult, if not impossible, to learn that Atheism had anything to do with it. There were a few Atheists concerned, it is true, but they figured as the victims, not as the sacrificers. On the other hand, let us turn to the most notorious of the actors in the Revolution—that is to say, to Robespierre—and let us see how *he* stood in respect to Theism.

Maximilian Marie Isidore de Robespierre was born at Arras on May 6, 1758, five months after the marriage of his parents. He was baptised the same day; and, by a curious coincidence, his god-mother bore the Christian names of Marie Antoinette. The prefix "de" tells us that de Robespierre was born an aristocrat, like most of the leaders in the Revolution. His family could trace back its ancestry two hundred years, and it was armigerous—that is to say, the de Robespierres had a legal title to bear a coat-of-arms. Although his family possessed a small landed estate, Maximilian was educated on charity, and he graduated for the bar free of cost; and, as the de Robespierres had been for several generations clients of the Bishops of Artois, he soon obtained preferment. But his humanitarian principles stood in his way. As a member of the Criminal Court, it became his duty to pronounce a capital sentence upon an assassin. The guilt of the criminal was undoubted; but de Robespierre loathed the idea of being accessory to the death of a fellow-creature, and after several days of mental agony he resigned his judgeship rather than pronounce such a sentence, for the idea of capital punishment filled him with horror; and a couple of years later he endeavored in vain to persuade the States-General to abolish it. He was a man of the most morbid sensibility. The mere sight of blood made him ill. He had the greatest affection for animals and birds. His sister relates how she carelessly left a favorite pigeon out of doors one stormy night, and the poor bird was found dead next morning. Maximilian's grief was so intense that it alarmed his family; he overwhelmed his sister with reproaches, and it was days before he could think of the unfortunate bird without shedding tears. In Paris, a large dog was his constant companion; and even when he shunned human society he never lost sight of his dearest dog. In his business as a lawyer, de Robespierre was painstaking and industrious; he exercised a dutiful care over his sister and a younger brother, who were dependent upon him owing to the death of his parents; and he was regular and strict in his morals and his habits. Private vices he had none, except that he occasionally wrote verse (the biographies call it *poetry*—save the mark!). His turn of mind was distinctly religious; not that he was a devout or earnest Catholic, for there were few such in France in the eighteenth century; but he had profound Theistic convictions, and was continually prating about the Supreme Being. He was quite shocked at the scepticism of his prospective sister-in-law, and said, gravely: "Little one! you are laughing at religion; you do not yet know how much comfort and hope is hidden in the depths of a permanent trust in God." In fact, Maximilian de Robespierre was one of those painfully good young men who are celebrated in Sunday-school stories, and held up as examples to others.

But in 1789 Louis XVI. summoned the States-General. Maximilian de Robespierre, like all the serious young men of his time, was a fervent follower of Rousseau. Rousseau's *Social Contract* reads now as an extraordinary farrago of erroneous dogmas, having no basis but the half-learned ignorance of an erratic Calvinist; but in the eighteenth century it was looked upon as a revelation in politics; and it turned Robespierre into that most dangerous of fanatics, the political fanatic. He became a can-

didate for the States-General, and issued his election address, in which he announced that he not only relied upon the votes of his fellow-citizens, but also upon the assistance of the Deity. "The Supreme Being will hear my prayers. He knows their sincerity and their fervor. I can hope that he will fulfil them."

By favor of the Supreme Being, or the electors (probably the electors), de Robespierre figured in the Legislature at Versailles. He was not an imposing man. He stood 5ft. 2in. in his shoes; he had a sickly yellow skin, hollow cheeks, thin lips, and a projecting pointed jaw. His voice was shrill and harsh, his delivery monotonous. He attracted little attention at first, and was unanimously looked on as a bore. But the States-General gradually discovered that Robespierre was an enthusiastic exponent of Rousseau, whose philosophy was the life-blood of every member. "He supported the most uncongenial proposition by a repetition of the cardinal principles which were the religious dogmas of the time, and the invariable provokers of applause. Nor did the revolutionaries ever rise from some speech of his without experiencing the dangerous and useless satisfaction which proceeds from listening to the public utterance of our most cherished common-places." Great is Rousseau, and de Robespierre is his prophet!

The first thing the members of the States-General did was to vote themselves eighteen francs a day. As the reason of their being called was the want of money in the country, this was a bad augury. The wage of a skilled mechanic at that time was three francs a day; so that each deputy received as much for one day's attendance as a mechanic for a week's hard work. We must also remember that money was much more valuable then than now; so that the eighteen francs was nearly equivalent to £2 of our present money. Half of his eighteen francs Robespierre sent home to his sister, and he lodged in Versailles on the other half.

Robespierre soon distinguished himself as the supporter of the clergy—that is, the lower clergy; for he had a profound contempt for bishops and cardinals, and the rest of the wealthy hierarchy. The Archbishop of Aix came into the Assembly to plead the cause of the poor. He drew from his pocket a piece of black bread. "Such," he cried, "is the bread of the peasant." And he asked that the States-General should vote money to the clergy for the relief of such distress. Up rose Monsieur de Robespierre. "To assuage the sufferings of the poor," said he, "we must recall the clergy to the principles of the primitive Church. It is only necessary that the bishops should renounce that luxury which is an offence to the modesty of Christianity, dismiss their carriages, their horses, and the insolent lackeys who attend them, and then there will be ample funds to feed the poor." On the disendowment of the Gallican Church, Robespierre exerted himself to procure pensions for the aged and infirm ecclesiastics who were deprived of their benefices. He opposed the imposition of oaths of conformity upon the clergy; and when it was proposed to make factious speeches by priests a penal offence, he protested against the measure on the ground that priests were citizens, and citizens ought not to be prosecuted for expressing their opinions. His popularity with the clergy was further increased by his advocacy for the repeal of the laws against the marriage of priests; and although he failed to carry the States-General with him, he received many flattering letters from ecclesiastics, some of whom exhibited their erudition by addressing him in the three languages that were used upon the Cross—Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

Robespierre's constant support of the clergy irritated his associates, and he thus defended himself:—

"God created all men for equality and happiness. My religion is that of justice and humanity. The priest is no longer the object of veneration, but the idea of that religion which he personifies. Little now remains

save those eternal dogmas which are the support of all our morality, the touching and sublime doctrines of charity and equality which the Son of Mary formerly taught mankind. Belief in the Divinity is implanted in every mind: the people connect it with the religion they have hitherto professed; and to attack this belief would be to attack the morality of the nation."

One evening, in the Jacobin Club, one of the members objected to Robespierre's talk about "Providence," which was mere superstition. Robespierre replied:—

"It is not leading mankind into superstition to pronounce the name of the Divinity. I maintain those eternal principles upon which human weakness rests itself as the basis of virtue. It is no vain language in my mouth, any more than in those of the illustrious men of the past, who all believed in the existence of God. To invoke Providence, as the expression of the idea of a Supreme Being who essentially influences the destiny of nations—who seems to me to watch with a peculiar love over the French Revolution—that is not too bold, for it is the sentiment of my heart. How could I be equal to struggles which are above human strength if I had not elevated my soul to God?"

Such was the strain in which the revolutionary invariably spoke. His two texts were "I and God" and "I and the People." His views on God were wholly metaphysical: his idea of the People equally so. He had no eyes for the real people who did the work and paid the taxes, and were rushed off by the military conscription to fight and die in foreign lands, to keep a few rascals in power, or who clamored in Paris for meat and bread that were at famine prices owing to the mismanagement of doctrinaires like himself. *His* People was a vision of his mind inspired by Rousseau. As Hilaire Belloc says,* and gives figures to prove it:—

"In the chapel of the Jacobins night after night a vision of 'the People' filled the darkness of the nave above the candles, haunted the remote and deserted chancel. It inflamed a hundred orators, and inspired the noblest rhetoric of that tribune. But 'the People' were not there; doctors, lawyers, contractors, master-carpenters, master-masons, many young lords and a few old livers, made up the audience to which could be thrown such golden enthusiasms."

Carlyle marvels at the patience of the auditors who could sit for hours under the long-winded, monotonous, egotistical orations of Robespierre; but they were not all admirers. Many ridiculed his clerical style and his constant self-assertion. The Atheist Condorcet, who was afterwards hunted to death by Robespierre, thus discussed him:—

"It is asked why there are so many females at Robespierre's house: at the tribune of the Jacobins: at the Cordeliers: at the Convention. The reason is, the French Revolution is a religion, and Robespierre hopes to make a sect. He is a kind of priest who has his devotees, his Marys, his Magdalens. All his power is in a distaff. Robespierre preaches, Robespierre censors. He is furious, grave, melancholy: he thunders against the rich and great. He has but one mission—to talk—and he talks unceasingly. He has all the characteristics of a founder of religion. He has a reputation for sanctity. He talks of God and Providence, and calls himself the support of the poor and oppressed. He is followed by women, and men of weak intellect. Robespierre is a priest, and will never be anything else."

His apotheosis was reached when a mad old woman, Catherine Theot (styled *Theos* by the mocking Parisians), founded a new sect with Robespierre for its deity. She declared him to her disciples as another Saul, the Chosen of God, the Savior of Israel, the regenerator of true religion, and the founder of perfect harmony upon earth; and she wrote him a letter in which he was addressed as the Son of the Supreme Being, the Eternal Word, the Redeemer of Mankind, and the Messiah foretold by the prophets. She further announced that her followers should sit upon blue thrones, with a white throne in the centre for Robespierre. Vadier arrested Madame "Theos," and read a report to the members of the Convention, who very naturally shrieked with

* Robespierre: A Study (London, 1901), p. 193.

laughter at the description of the new religion; but Robespierre, seeing himself made supremely ridiculous, insisted upon the immediate release of the old fool, and did his best to hush up the matter. It was a terrible blow to his self-love; but he was soon sounding his own praises as loud as ever, notwithstanding the satires of the minor poets, like Girez—

So, followed by his devotees,
And by his court hemmed in,
The deity of Sans-culottes,
Robespierre, comes in.
"Denounce them all," he cries, the pallid depute,
"Great Jesus! Men of no sense
Are always wasting incense
That alone should be burned to me."

On November 9, 1793, took place the festival of Reason in most of the churches of Paris. In spite of disputes about Swearing and Non-swearing Priests, the Catholic religion had hitherto been treated with the customary respect; and Mercier recalls that *Corpus Christi* Day (i.e., the Thursday after Trinity Sunday) had been celebrated with processions, in which the Legislature had taken part. Legendre, one of the deputies, was mobbed because he was thought to have acted irreverently as the procession went by, and barely escaped with his life. But now, on the motion of a few eager spirits, the Goddess of Reason was revered instead of the Body of Christ. Sundry ladies figured in blue robes and red caps, before somewhat critical audiences. In one church the spectators complained that the goddess was skinny and yellow. In another the goddess was pronounced fairly satisfactory, except that she had defective teeth. Altogether the Feast of Reason appears to have been "funny without being vulgar."

But Robespierre could not see the humor of it; and on May 7, 1794, he ordered the Convention to decree—

"First, that the French people recognise the existence of the Supreme Being, and the immortality of the soul.

"Second, that they acknowledge the worship of the Supreme Being as one of the duties of man."

"The only basis of civilised society is morality," said he. "The idea of the Supreme Being and of the immortality of the soul is a continual appeal to justice: this idea is then social and republican. To recall men to the pure worship of the Supreme Being is to give a mortal blow to fanaticism. Let us leave the priests and return to the Divinity. Let us establish morality upon an eternal and sacred basis," etc., etc.

Accordingly, on June 8, Paris was summoned to a fresh *fête*—the Festival of the Supreme Being. It is remarkable how many festivals they had at the Revolution, in spite of the poverty of the country, the riots, and the famine. Marat had said of one of the earlier *fêtes*, that the cost of it would have fed and clothed all the starving poor of Paris; but the *fêtes* went on, and the people starved. In the present instance the painter David had prepared a group representing Atheism surrounded by its associates, Selfishness, Nihilism, Vice, and Crime. Robespierre appeared, and, as usual, made a speech:—

"Frenchmen! At length the happy day has arrived which the French people consecrate to the Supreme Being. He created men to aid and love each other, and to attain happiness by the path of virtue. Being of Beings! The hatred of hypocrisy and tyranny burns in our hearts, with the love of justice and our country!"

And so he applied a torch to Atheism and her satellites, and as the flames died down a statue of Wisdom arose in their place.

Having thus demolished Atheism, Robespierre looked round with pride. He stood supreme as the ruler of the country, and the foreign newspapers satirically styled him "*Maximilien I. roi de France et Navarre.*" Two days after the Feast he introduced a Bill to strengthen the power of the Committee of Public Salvation; for "Salvation is by blood!"

We have said nothing of Robespierre's political acts, for they are too well known to history. His Bill of June 10, it will be remembered, was the

direct cause of his downfall; for it made the infamous Committee of Public Salvation the despotic ruler of France, without the semblance of control by the Legislature. The deputies did not mind princes and aristocrats being guillotined, but they had a profound regard for their own sacred heads. Some of the bolder spirits circulated the report that Robespierre had drawn up lists of the members whom he wished to remove. Then ensued one of those scenes so familiar in Latin Parliaments. Everyone orated at once, or yelled "Tyrant! Tyrant! Down with the Tyrant!" And at last Robespierre was arrested and led away, surprised at the sudden revolt of the deputies he had ruled so long with his interminable speeches upon the principles of Rousseau.

His friends on the Paris Council rescued him from the officers, and took him to the Hotel de Ville; and the Maire of Paris, his devoted friend, issued a proclamation, commencing "Citizens! The country is in greater danger than ever. Robespierre is proscribed, who has established the consoling belief in the Supreme Being, and the immortality of the soul!" But the citizens responded not. Mercier tells us that at this time Paris contained "a population of 600,000, held in awe by sixty bandits;" and on the present occasion the 600,000 looked on in indifference at the domestic quarrel of the sixty bandits. Robespierre had organised the city into sections, with officials and committees, with a view to ensuring the appearance of an armed mob when he required it; but the armed mob did not appear. A few hooligans assembled; but a thunderstorm came on, and they went home, out of the wet. Jupiter Tonans had asserted himself against the supporter of the Supreme Being. Towards morning Barras called out the garrison of Paris, the only available regular force, about six thousand men, and surrounded the Hotel de Ville. The doors were forced, Robespierre was struck down by a pistol bullet, and executed the same afternoon.

When Louis XIV. heard the news of the Battle of Ramillies he exclaimed, "Has God forgotten all I have done for him?" A similar thought must have struck Robespierre. On May 7 the Convention decreed the existence of the Supreme Being. On June 8 they celebrated the feast of that personage. On July 28 Robespierre was guillotined!

It is always interesting to note the parallel march of piety and crime. The Reign of Terror began on January 21, 1793, when Louis XVI. lost his silly head, and the Committee of Public Salvation was formed. The Terror ended on July 28, 1794, with the death of Robespierre. In the interval about two thousand persons were guillotined in Paris. Of this number 1,366 lost their lives between June 8, 1794 (the date of the Feast of the Supreme Being) and the execution of Robespierre. "A word to the wise is enough!"

We have quoted from an admirer of Robespierre, Hilaire Belloc, as to the revolutionary's relation to the "People," of whom he prated so much. Another Robespierophile, Dr. Jan Ten Brink,* significantly says:—

"It is remarkable that, according to statistics, the greater number of those who ended their lives by Dr. Guillotine's instrument belonged to the masses. In the country 6,000 farmers were taken to the scaffold; in the towns more than 2,000 working men, against 700 nobles and 1,200 priests."

On the death of Robespierre 7,800 persons were liberated from the prisons of Paris—among them the well-known Thomas Paine, who had been condemned to death, but escaped through the mistake of a turnkey.

Carlyle draws a picture of the working-classes of Paris at the end of the Terror, patiently devouring their scanty allowance. Three herrings apiece, wetted with a little vinegar, eaten without bread, and nothing to drink with it except the muddy Seine water. They would gladly have eaten more; but

* *Robespierre and the Red Terror* (London, 1899), p. 320.

there was naught to be had. Such was the result of Robespierre's eloquence for the "People."

His brother was guillotined with him. His sister lived on until 1834 in receipt of a pension from the French Government. She always insisted upon the aristocratic "de," and was styled Mdle. de Robespierre, to distinguish her from the common herd; but she had no qualms at taking a pension from the taxes, contributed by the labors of the "People."

Our task is done. We have related the simple, unvarnished tale of Robespierre, the political fanatic; the devotee of Rousseau; the instituter of the Reign of Terror; the proclaimer of the Supreme Being, and the immortality of the soul. We have not dwelt upon his crimes, but upon his speeches; and these are perfectly clear. He was no Atheist, but a violent Pietist; and those who ascribe the French Revolution to Atheism are simply confessing their ignorance of the whole subject.

CHILPERIC.

Correspondence.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CELL.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Lord Kelvin's alleged proof of Creation—namely, the assumption that Nature cannot evolve a living cell because the chemist cannot construct one—has been well met by Mr. Lloyd. I would like to supplement his article by pointing out that the cell, although it is now conveniently regarded as the biological atom, must be a highly complex organism, and therefore in all probability must have been a product of long-continued evolution from simpler forms of life, such as "viscous fluids" or indefinite particles. In its higher forms—the human ovum, for example—the cell must evidently be almost infinitely complex in its structure, though the minuteness and the transparency of the whole microcosm may baffle microscopic investigation. In its lowest forms the cell must still be exceedingly elaborate. Thus the amœba, the elementary type of the single-celled organism, displays powers of irritability, contractility, digestion, etc., which must apparently depend upon a complicated structure duly evolved and maintained by Natural Selection.

Lord Kelvin might as well argue—theists have, in fact, argued—that man must have been created because chemists cannot build him up from his constituent elements. Science now proves that man was *not* created, but was evolved. Similarly it is only reasonable to conclude that the cell was evolved. In the one case we have the means of tracing the descent. In the other the record is undecipherable and perishable, so that we can only guess at the actual steps.

Protoplasm itself—the basis of the cell and of all known forms of life—is itself a variable, highly complex, and unstable compound, and, especially in such forms as we have it now, must presumably have been a product of evolution by the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest or best-adapted variations. Of the forms in which it existed before the cell was evolved and became supreme we know nothing, and cannot reasonably expect to know anything. Such elementary forms of living substance are not likely to be discovered now, since if they did appear under present conditions they would be devoured, as Darwin pointed out, in their incipient stages by the more highly evolved cell organisms with which they cannot successfully compete as rivals, and whose perfected powers they cannot possibly withstand.

W. P. BALL.

A COMPLAINT.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In your issue of November 13 you give a reply to a correspondent, who signs himself "F. Howard."

As I have a suspicion that your correspondent has assumed my name—and very likely my address also—without my permission, I shall consider it a favor if you will notify me the next time this individual writes you.

You will see I have some reason for complaint when I inform you that only a few weeks ago this same person wrote a letter to another journal *re* the "B.S.L.," actually signing my name and giving my address without my sanction.

And further, according to a certain monthly journal, I am supposed to be the secretary of a society of which I am not even a member, and my name and address printed without my permission.

As I feel sure you would not intentionally do me an injury, will you be good enough to forward to me any letter you may have or in future receive signed in my name and giving my address. And if this contemptible business does not cease I shall place the matter in other hands.

FREDERICK HOWARD.

165 East Street Buildings, Baker Street, W.

PIETY AND SELFISHNESS.

This character of constant egotism shows itself chiefly, and with most directness and energy, in theological thought, each believer being always intent on his own individual interest, which is so preponderant as to swallow up all other considerations. Not even in the sublimest self-devotion can the Christian put his individual salvation out of sight. To do so indeed was justly regarded by the Church as a dangerous aberration. Still the frequent clashing of these imaginary interests with real interests furnished a wise priesthood with a powerful means of moral discipline, in obedience to which admirable sacrifices have often been made with advantage to society; and yet not true sacrifices, since they proceeded from a prudent weighing of interests. The benevolent and disinterested feelings innate in man must no doubt have shown themselves even under such a *regime*, and even in some respects were indirectly stimulated by it. But though the Christian doctrine could not prevent the working of the benevolent instincts it must have seriously impaired their character; so seriously that probably we do not yet fully know their nature and intensity because they have never yet been left to their own direct working. Moreover, there is every reason to suppose that the constant habit of considering the eternal interests that must be dearest to every believer in Christianity has, by gradual affinity, developed in man, with regard also to his temporal interests, an excessive caution, an undue taking thought for the morrow, and so at length a regard for self stronger than his fundamental organisation required, and therefore capable of abatement hereafter under a better moral *regime*. Whether this conjecture be well-founded or not, it is undeniable that theological thought is by its nature essentially concerned with the individual, and never, directly, with society. To the eye of faith, especially monotheistic faith, social life has no special end of its own, and therefore no existence.—Auguste Comte, "Discourse on the Positive Spirit," pp. 115-116.

MEN'S AND DOGS' RELIGION.

"I have been away at Boulogne," says a letter of June 12 [1872]; and now that I meet with this sentence, I remember that my old engineering friend, Loch, whose name has for a long time disappeared from the record, was staying there with his wife and family, and that to join him was the motive for going. He and I renewed our habit of early years, and took country rambles inland and along the coast. One of them left a permanent impression. We passed a wayside shrine, at the foot of which were numerous offerings, each formed of two bits of lath nailed one across the other. The sight suggested to me the behavior of an intelligent and amiable retriever, a great pet at Ardtornish. On coming up to salute one after a few hours' or a day's absence, wagging her tail and drawing back her lips so as to simulate a grinning smile, she would seek around to find a stick, or a bit of paper, or a dead leaf, and bring it in her mouth: so expressing her desire to propitiate. The dead leaf or bit of paper was symbolic, in much the same way as was the valueless cross. Probably, in respect of sincerity of feeling, the advantage was on the side of the retriever.—Herbert Spencer, "Autobiography," vol. ii., p. 236.

An Englishman was strolling along a high road and overtook an Irish drover with a number of cattle proceeding to a fair in the south. Being a genial soul he entered into conversation with the man, and by-and-by asked him what he expected to get for his cattle. "Shure an' if I get £8 the head I'll not do badly," replied Pat. "Ah, that's a sample of your country. Now if you were enterprising enough to take these heifers to England you would average £14 a head at least." "Just so, yer honour," said the driver simply, "and av yez take the lakes of Killarney to hell yez get a guinea the dhrop."

An old Scotswoman was visited by the parish minister during her last illness. After he had made a few kind and consolatory remarks she said that she hoped soon to find herself "at rest in the bosom of Lazarus." On the minister quietly reminding her that she had inadvertently substituted Lazarus for Abraham, she replied as follows, "My dear minister, if you had been a lone woman as lang as me you wad hae been glad to tak' refuge in my man's bosom!"

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.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 3.15, Religious Freethought Parliament: Mr. Somerville, subject, "The Best Character in the Bible"; 7.30, Social Democratic Federation: H. Quelch.

EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Bromley Public Hall, Bow-road, E.): 7, H. Snell, "Savonarola, the Monk of Florence."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Liberal Hall, Broadway, Forest Gate, E.): 7.30, George Standring, "Charles Bradlaugh and his Work."

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): 11 (in the Bull Ring), H. Percy Ward, "Theism Confuted and Atheism Vindicated"; 3, "Christianity Doomed by Science"; 7, "An Impeachment of the Church of England." Thursday, Dec. 1, at 8, at the Coffee House, Bull Ring, W. T. Easthope, "Fiction."

FAIRSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, George Wier, "The Quackery called Vaccination."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, Discussion Class. Open Discussion; 6.30, A. G. Nostic, "American Scenery, as seen by the Geologist." With lantern illustrations.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): G. W. Foote, 3, "God, Man, Free-Will, and Morality: With Reference to Mr. Blatchford's New Crusade"; 7, "What Do We Know of God?" Monday, at 8, Social (tickets 6d. each).

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints): 6.30, "Christ, Christianity, and Socialism."

NEWCASTLE DEBATING SOCIETY (Lockhart's Cathedral Café): Thursday, Dec. 1, at 7.45, A. Howson, "Empire and Patriotism."

OLDHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Institute, Bankside-street): 7, Mr. Paton, "Mysteries of Science and Religion."

SOUTH SHIELDS (Tivoli, Laygate): John T. Lloyd, 11, "The Way to Heaven"; 7, "Ourselves and Our Relations to Nature."

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