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Truth is a thing to be shouted from the housetops, not to be whispered over rose-water after dinner when the ladies are gone away.—W. K. CLIFFORD.

Religion and Reform.

A PARSON on social reform is almost certain to be amusing, in a sense. He may be entertaining, and, on rare occasions, even instructive; but amusing, to a Freethinker, he is certain to be. For the hopeless way in which he flounders about, trying to avoid giving offence to the wealthy members of his church on the one hand, and to pose as a champion of the poor on the other; the solemn pretence of having in his possession a cure for all the social ills that flesh is heir to, and yet never coming within reasonable distance of a solution; the cloud of exaggerations, mis-statements, and illogicalities in which he gets involved before the conclusion of his sermon, all furnish material for humor—of a kind. Yet it would not be fair to be too hard upon the poor man. His position is a sad one. He is in the clutches of a creed that was never intended to be applied to a complex social or industrial society, and can, therefore, have no answer to the problems such a society presents. Men who were both wise and honest would recognise the absurdity of attempting to fix the round peg of Christian belief into the square hole of social science; and when men who are either not wise or not honest make the effort the result is what we see.

I will not attempt to classify Dr. R. F. Horton, but it is certain that in wildness of statement and absurdity of reasoning he is very hard to beat. Lecturing the other Sunday evening on "Spiritual Revival and Social Reform," he indulged in some characteristic exaggerations and mis-statements on the subject. Nor were these without a purpose. The object of the sermon was to show that social reform was impossible without a Christian "revival," and so "mere" social and political aspirations and results had to be accommodately belittled. Twenty-five years ago, he says, people were eager and enthusiastic about social reforms. To-day they are apathetic about them. Conditions in London (Kentish Town is mentioned specifically) have not improved, and certain forces that were then gathering for the betterment of the people are now dissipated. And this apathy and neglect is the more striking when we look over the reforms in the earlier portions of the nineteenth century—the abolition of slavery, the widening of the franchise, etc.

Now it would be absurd to claim that the ideals of the enthusiasts of twenty-five years ago—or of any other period for that matter—have been quite realised. It is in the nature of ideals that they should not be. But it is equally absurd to hold either that enthusiasm or devotion to an ideal is dead, or that no improvement has been effected. It is part of the verbal stock in trade of the loose thinking, or little thinking, social worker to cry out "society is rotten to the core," but it is not true, and never has been true. During the past generation a very great deal has been effected in housing, educating, in sanitation, and in other directions,

and not the least sign of the improvement effected is seen in the regret of people that more has not been done. If the word may be permitted, there is a divinity about discontent that is far more helpful than a contentment that sees no need and no opportunity for improvement. And when one bears in mind the many thousands of men and women in the various social, political, and educational movements, who, after a hard day's work, give up their spare hours, as well as their spare days, to some work that is wholly a labour of love, it is sheer nonsense to complain that ideals are dead and enthusiasm burnt out.

To do Dr. Horton justice, he would be ready to recognise the truth of what has been said—on a different occasion. If he were dealing with our position as a Christian country as against non-Christian nations he would exaggerate in the one direction as much as he has done in the other. But on this occasion it does not suit his argument, and so the reverse policy is adopted. Just when we are discouraged by our fruitless efforts something happens—the Revival in Wales—where the "conditions of life were as bad as in any London slum.....and where drink and immorality.....made those lovely valleys of South Wales as abominable as Seven Dials had ever been." And at once there is a wonderful transformation. "The power of drink is broken," immorality disappears, "a spirit has passed over that community which everyone can immediately recognise as the genuine spirit of social reform."

The same wild exaggeration again. In the first place it is not true that the conditions of life in South Wales were as bad as Seven Dials (which was the receptacle of the vice of a large city) had ever been. Such a thing is a sheer impossibility. There was, of course, plenty of evil, and it says little for Dr. Horton's religion, which has always been proportionately stronger in Wales than elsewhere, that this should be so. And it is not true that sin has disappeared since the revival. Naturally in the first flush of a strong emotional outbreak all other forms of dissipation are neglected. But, patience. There have been revivals before in Wales, and within a very little while things have settled down in their old grooves. And now that the revival fever in Wales is dying out the same phenomenon is being repeated.

Least of all does such an outbreak as the Welsh mania breathe the "genuine spirit of social reform." Young students neglected their classes, adults neglected political meetings, social gatherings, lectures on all varieties of subjects, even work was shunned in order to join in the general debauch of prayer, and no one can reasonably call the concentration of people's whole attention on praying and hymn-singing "social reform." Of course, it is good business for the parsons while it lasts, and this is what Dr. Horton really means, although he does not say so in as many words. Dr. Horton rails at the publicans for encouraging drinking, but it is hard to see any ethical difference between the worst kind of publican and the preacher whose only estimate of social growth is his own trade returns.

Incidentally Dr. Horton attributes the supposed decline of reforming energy to the influence of Darwinism. The result of Darwin's work "was to apply to social reform the Darwinian formula, and

the notion that environment makes the individual was treated as self-evident.....(and) on the lines of the Darwinian theory you had lost the impulse for improving the conditions." And on this one need only make two remarks. First, the Darwinian formula is *not* that environment makes the individual, and it is inexcusable to find a public teacher presenting such a caricature of a work that can be bought for a shilling or read in any public library. And, secondly, Dr. Horton need only consider the fact that the vast majority of leaders in the social and political field are believers in the theory of natural selection, to realise the absurdity of his own statement. Besides, if natural selection be a fact, and no one seriously disputes this, then the only method of social reform is to work along the lines indicated by that theory. All other attempts are bound to end in failure. Natural forces cannot be ignored or evaded, they can only be guided or controlled.

But all the time Dr. Horton is ignoring the fact that this is a Christian country—that is, that so far as any religious influence is operative, it is a Christian influence. And it really says but little for the effects of Christianity if Wales, where Nonconformity is so strong, is as bad as Seven Dials ever was, or if elsewhere the conditions of life are as gloomy as he depicts. Does it not suggest that during all these centuries Christianity has been inoperative for good, and perhaps operative for evil? A religion that can only claim to do good during periods of emotional outbursts, which must in the nature of the case be of brief duration, is neither a hopeful nor a helpful kind of a creed to hold. Dr. Horton is very fond of pointing to China or Turkey as examples of the evils of Confucianism or Mohammedanism. Is not one equally justified in pointing to our own evils as constituting an indictment of Christianity?

Dr. Horton's exaggerations cling to him to the end. It is a significant thing, he says, that the greatest lesson being taught in Christendom to-day "is being taught by a country that is non-Christian.Japan possesses in its national spirit a moral force which can carry the country very far.Every Japanese appears to be a Marcus Curtius.You have [in Japan] a country where the contractor would not dream of cheating the government. that a general will not be seeking to line his pockets or to increase his reputation," etc., etc. And he can "discern the work of God in raising up a non-Christian country to shame Christendom into Christianity."

Now, I must confess to having no more faith in the impeccable morality of the Japanese than I have in the terrible degradation and hopelessness of our own people. Close acquaintance would no doubt show that between nations there are many differences, but that when the sum is made up the general amount of good and evil is fairly level. But it is certain that in this war Japan has been served with an honesty by its contractors and a fidelity by its soldiers of which we cannot boast. And note the moral Japan is a country where the religious principle is a philosophical ancestor-worship, the main semi-religious philosophy Buddhism, the up-to-date thought mainly Agnosticism, with a general tendency to discard all religion. It is as far removed from Christianity as it can be. It has been cute enough to take Western science and reject Western religion. And the result is that its contractors are more honest than are Christian contractors here, who would send thousands of men to their death to gain an extra ten per cent., and its soldiers more loyal to their duties than those trained under the influence of Christianity. The moral is really too obvious to need further laboring.

The Japanese who should happen to read Dr. Horton's opinion that God is raising them up to make the other nations Christian, will smile. They may also reflect that if that is a fair sample of the intellectual output of a Christian nation, the East has nothing to fear from the West. Such silliness

cannot thrive except with a species of national weakening. The moral that other people will see in the rise of Japan will be that a nation's welfare does not depend upon its religion, but upon the industry, sobriety, and intelligence of its citizens. Japan will have given them an object lesson in the uselessness of religion, and will emphasise the fact that all along Christianity has been taking credit for forces and qualities that properly belong elsewhere.

C. COHEN.

The Phantom Trinity.

THE Trinity fares badly at the hands of modern Apologists. It has been reduced to a mere shadow of its former self. A few ignorant literalists may still believe in it, but all theological scholars explain it away, retaining only the mere word. The Trinity of the creeds is no longer the Trinity of progressive theology. The evolution of the orthodox doctrine covered several centuries; but it is now in the process of passing away. Our present-day apologists, while nominally defending, virtually deny it. We have an apt illustration of this in the twenty-eighth of the second series of the Manchester Lectures. The lecturer is the Rev. Principal Adeney, of the Lancashire Independent College, an eminent Biblical scholar, who has done much excellent work. But, in spite of his undoubted learning and natural insight, he has on this occasion proved unequal to the task assigned to him. The Trinity he advocates is unknown to orthodoxy, and utterly unintelligible to non-believers.

Professor Adeney naively confesses that "of all the ideas which come to us in the course of Christian thought the most mysterious, the most profound, the most unfathomable is the doctrine of the Trinity." How then does he know anything about it? He claims that the supreme mystery that surrounds it is not a reason for rejecting it; but surely it should be a sufficient reason for not affirming anything concerning it. If the doctrine is an insoluble mystery, it certainly has no right to be a doctrine at all. A mystery is beyond us, and we cannot describe it. The Principal practically makes such an admission himself, for he says that "this is the truth that lies at the basis of Agnosticism." Then he adds: "Therefore it must be understood at the outset that while I am about to speak about the Trinity, I do not dream of explaining the Trinity." Thus, on his own showing, he has undertaken the impossible task of explaining the absolutely unexplainable. And yet he has the temerity to maintain that "we cannot be expected to believe in the doctrine of the Trinity unless we know what it means." But to tell us what it means is equivalent to giving an explanation of it, which he admits to be impossible.

It is pleasing to note the entire absence of anything like arrogance or bigotry in Principal Adeney's language. He always speaks with commendable humility, and shows great respect for opponents. He says: "We cannot brush aside the objections that have been raised against it (the doctrine of the Trinity) as impertinent and irrelevant. To do so is to take refuge in bigotry." Nothing could be more admirable than the spirit that pervades this lecture. But honesty compels us to say that having read the lecture with great care, we are utterly unable to understand what Principal Adeney means by the Trinity. Does not trinity etymologically signify three units treated as one? But *treating* three units as one does not *make* them one: they are still three in spite of the treatment. The teaching of theology is that three *are* one, which is contrary to all reason. Principal Adeney lays tremendous stress on the unity or oneness of God. This is to him "the primary, fundamental fact. Vast as the physical Universe is," he says, "there is not room in it for more than one God." Many are of opinion that there is not room in it even for one. Is not the existence of an infinite, immaterial being, who can

think without a brain, unthinkable? Is not the existence of three persons in one God more unthinkable still?

Principal Adeney holds that Trinity does not mean tri-theism. According to him, trinity "expresses a tri-une conception of God, that there is some three-foldness in the one God, while God in himself is one." I do not know what a triune conception means. Are we to understand by it three conceptions rolled into one? I have often heard of the tri-une blessing of the tri-une God—has the adjective *tri-une* the same signification before blessing as before God? If so, inasmuch as there are three blessings, there must also be three Gods, treated or regarded as one.

Let us consider the Principal's three negatives. "First," he says, "we cannot say that God is three in the same sense in which He is one. That would be an absurdity, an obvious contradiction, a mere stringing together of words without any meaning." We are in full agreement with that statement, because its truth is self-evident. Nothing could be more obvious. But the following takes one's breath away:—

"Yet there are ways in which three may be one. The shamrock, which has been taken as an emblem of the Trinity, appears to have three leaves arranged as one, or we may say one leaf divided into three. A ball may be a blue thing, a round thing, and a heavy thing. This three-foldness, in the one case of parts and in the other case of qualities, should bid us pause before we dismiss the Trinitarian idea as impossible and absurd. We do not think of it in either of these senses. God is not divided into three parts; and the three-foldness is more than that of three qualities. But should not such common facts of nature prepare us for other possible kinds of multiplication in unity?"

Before offering any comment on the above extract I must give the Principal's second negative:—

"We are not called upon to think of God as consisting of three persons in our modern sense of the word 'person.' Much of the difficulty people feel in thinking of the Trinity comes from stumbling at this term. The Greek Church, which was much more subtle and thorough in its discussion of the whole subject than the Western Church, did not use it. It is a Latin word (*persona*) only intelligible in Western Europe. When it was adopted it was in use for the characters of a drama, the impersonating, as we say, of the several characters. It did not contain our sense of personality, which is really quite a modern idea, springing from the immense individualism of modern times. With us nothing is so individual as personality. Each person is cut off from all other persons; in the depths of his consciousness he lives remote even from his nearest, most intimate friend. Husband and wife are described as one flesh; yet how distinct are the truest wedded people in actual personality!.....Now we have no reason to affirm a distinction of personality of God in that sense."

What, then, is the doctrine of the Trinity? This is the Principal's answer: "If He (God) has revealed himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we must conclude that there is that in him which corresponds to the three-foldness of the manifestation. This three-foldness is what we mean by the word 'Trinity.' We cannot understand it." Who ever could understand it? Now mark, there are distinctions in God; but they are not distinctions of parts, or qualities, or persons, but *folds*. Of these folds there are at least three—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In logic this would be sheer nonsense. In theology we are expected to accept it as the truth with "awe and reverence." You have a son called John; but he is not a distinct individual, but only a fold of yourself. When God gave his only begotten Son to be a ransom for the sins of the world, He did not give an individual distinct from himself, but only a fold of himself. According to Principal Adeney, God is eternally unfolding into Son and Spirit, and for all Dr. Adeney knows to the contrary, He may be eternally unfolding into a thousand other distinctions. Is not all this wonderful beyond description?

The second fold of God became man in Jesus of Nazareth, who "in his human life had full individual personality." After all said and done, folds are synonymous with parts, and so we may call Jesus Christ a part of God. When in the unbeginning eternity God said, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee," He merely addressed a fold of himself, which impersonal fold in due time became personal by an act or process of incarnation, and as a man lived and suffered and died and rose again on the earth. Surely this was the most astounding miracle ever performed. It is only fair to say that all theologians do not agree with Principal Adeney. The late Professor Shedd, for example, believed that Jesus Christ was an entirely new species of Being, whom he ventured to christen the Theanthropic Person. The root element in this new personality was the second Person in the Holy Trinity. And yet the creation or introduction of this novel individuality did not in the least disturb the original composition of the Trinity. Which of the two views is the more irrational I leave the reader to determine. One thing is certain, namely, that to the writers of the New Testament Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, were persons. They were persons to Athanasius and Augustine; and they are distinct persons to most simple-minded Christians to-day. I have heard it stated that true prayer is conveyed to the Father by the Spirit and through the Son. Christ is said to be seated on the right hand of the Father ever making intercession for his people. Each person has his own distinct work to do and his own distinct place to fill. All this is absolutely unthinkable, I grant; but it is undoubtedly the teaching of the Bible and orthodox theology.

Principal Adeney is wise enough not to dogmatise, and for this he deserves our sincerest thanks. But he is courageous enough to depart from orthodoxy. In his third negative he denies "the equality of what are called the three persons." That is to say, he rejects the most prominent feature of the Athanasian Creed. Nothing could be clearer than this from that Creed:—

"In this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater, or less than another; but the whole three persons are co-eternal together, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid: the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity."

Principal Adeney does not "thus think of the Trinity," and according to the Creed of Athanasius, he cannot be saved. This modern divine believes that the Son and the Spirit are in a state of subordination to the Father who is supreme over all. The Son's business on earth was to do his Father's will, and the Spirit's to continue and complete the Son's work, and thus the Spirit is in a sense subordinate to both the Father and the Son.

After reading Principal Adeney's lecture we are more deeply convinced than ever that all doctrines of God are alike worthless. All who believe in the existence of a Divine Being cherish their own conceptions of him; but not one possesses a single grain of knowledge. Each theologian paints his own picture of him; but at best it is only a fancy picture drawn from the painter's own imagination, or largely copied from other pictures similarly drawn. No God is known to mankind; no God has ever spoken or appeared to the race. The Riddle of the Universe is still unread and the mystery unsolved. Above and beyond ourselves lies unutterable darkness which has never yet been pierced. There may be beings of superior intelligence to ours in some other worlds; but no communication has ever come from them to us. So far as we know, there is and can be no intelligence, no thought, no emotion, no consciousness apart from nerve and brain. People may believe in superhuman and supernatural beings; but believers themselves cannot but admit that their faith is not based upon knowledge, but, in the first instance, on mere hearsay, and afterwards, though by no means in all cases, upon their own experience which is

the outcome and only reward of their faith. Principal Adeney believes in the alleged revelation of God contained in the Bible, and the doctrine which he embodies in his lecture is only his interpretation of that alleged revelation. We agree with Sir William Hamilton and Dean Mansel in the assertion that the Christian doctrine of God is self-contradictory, irrational, and intellectually unbelievable; but we differ from them in that we flatly refuse to believe the intellectually unbelievable on any testimony whatever that has yet been submitted to us. And this we do, not flippantly or thoughtlessly, but with genuine "awe and reverence."

J. T. LLOYD.

Free Salvation.

THERE is no subject more popular in the Churches than free salvation. Popular preachers, especially the evangelistic type, make frequent and telling use of it. It may not be heard often in aristocratic and middle-class congregations, as cheapness is not a tempting bait to them. But in Salvation Army temples, chapels where the poor worship, mission halls, and street corner gatherings, salvation gratis is a theme likely to be welcomed.

The bulk of the people being poor, because they are robbed and oppressed, it is no wonder that the preaching of salvation as a free gift should be popular amongst them. The poor are mostly ignorant, and, like children, are easily deluded. We have abundance of evidence of that, these days, in trade and speculations. Tea, soap, and insurance vie with each other in offering free gifts, which are no gifts at all, the value of them and more, being included always in the price of the articles sold. But the public swallow the bait, and receive as free gifts what they pay dearly for, to the great profit of the cunning traders.

The idea of free salvation very probably originated in the poverty of the people. Had all the people been in comfortable circumstances, with means to provide themselves with all they wanted, the idea of charity would have had no attraction for them. Free salvation is a scheme of charity to the poor. If ever the co-operative state or commonwealth is established, the idea of charity will become obnoxious and die.

To-day free salvation is a live doctrine in all the churches because the bulk of the masses are poor. Without it the missionary, class teacher, and revivalist would have no acceptable message to those that labor and are heavy laden. It is the following verses and the like that are hackneyed amongst the poor:—"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. xi. 28, 29, 30). And all is a free gift. There is no rest promised for the body, which needs it mostly, but there is for the soul and nothing to pay for all that will come to receive it.

Free salvation is supposed to be founded on the Bible. The following texts seem to favor the idea:—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah lv. 1); "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. x. 8); "But Peter said unto him, thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money" (Acts viii. 20); ".....even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. v. 18). The quoted verses are sufficient to justify Christians in preaching a free salvation. Salvation is a gift of God and costs nothing to men.

But is it true that salvation costs nothing? Is it not a fact that religion is one of the costliest things

on earth? It is no use quibbling, twisting sentences, and putting meanings in phrases, which they do not contain. We must apply the same rules and methods to religion as we do to any other matters. As a matter of fact we know of nothing made or maintained without cost. Even a gift free to the receiver costs something to the giver.

In estimating the cost of an institution, say the Bible Society, everything connected with its establishment and maintenance must be taken into account. The cost of the building or the rent of it, the wages of its officials, servants, and agents, printing and stationery, expenses of meetings and travelling, cost of printing and distributing its Bibles and so on, must be reckoned item by item, to get at the cost of the institution.

The same process must be applied to the Church, the institution that dispenses salvation to the people. We must suppose that the halls, chapels, churches, cathedrals, colleges, popes, bishops, priests, parsons, ministers and missionaries are all necessary or they would not be established. But whether necessary or not, as they are the depots where salvation is dispensed, the cost of all of them is the cost of salvation to the people. To get at the cost, even approximately, the expenditure in building the chapels, churches, and cathedrals, the furnishing of them, the houses of ministers and parsonages, the salaries of all the ministers, parsons, and bishops, and all other outlay connected therewith, must be reckoned. And when every item is counted, the total cost of salvation in the Protestant Churches alone will be found an almost fabulous sum.

An example of the cost of salvation is furnished by the amount spent to convert a Jew. The following paragraph appeared in the *Daily Dispatch*, Manchester, on May 2, 1904:—"It is not conversion but perversion—the conversion of bad Jews into worse Christians. That is the universal Hebrew, and, in many quarters, the Christian view. In support of this it is freely stated that it costs anything from £1,000 to £10,000 for every so-called conversion." The Rev. A. Wolf, Hebrew minister in Manchester, informed the representative of the *Dispatch* that he had heard of a well authenticated case in London, in which no less than £40,000 was spent by a rich lady to bring a single family into the Christian fold.

Again, in the missionary fields the cost of conversion which, of course, is the same as salvation, is very high. The four leading missionary societies spend over half a million of pounds annually to convert the heathen, with the result that in India every convert cost over £100, and in China over £60. The result everywhere else is much the same.

There is no free salvation. The money spent on all the Christian Churches, Protestant, Catholic, and Greek, is a huge sum. You cannot move on the road to heaven without paying heavy tolls. There are toll-bars all along the road from the cradle to the grave. The richer the church the heavier the tolls. And the tolls do not cease even with death. The largest section of the Christian Church follow the souls to the next world, and demand tolls before a soul can pass from purgatory to heaven.

And the cost of maintaining the huge army of salvation traders, the priests, is not the only cost of religion. All the priests are parasites, consuming wealth without producing. They are fed, clothed, housed, and enriched by the labor of others. But that is not all the cost. The value of their service and the wealth they could produce if usefully employed, must be added to get an approximate correct idea of the cost of salvation to the country.

Is it any wonder the many are poor when they have such huge armies of drones to maintain? And what do they get in return for all the wasteful outlay? Do they get anything of real value and usefulness? Are not all religions a hindrance to progress? A bulwark to oppression and exploitation? Do they not hypnotise the ignorant masses with errors,

delusions, and superstitions? Do they not foster divisions, create quarrels, and endanger enmity and persecution? On the other hand, is there any indirect good derived from them to counter balance the undoubted evils?

To help us to estimate the value of theological religions, let us take an example from a pagan one—say the religion of Jupiter, the supreme God of the Romans. He was believed to be a real almighty God. He had temples where he was worshiped with great pomp. If you would like to know what the worship was like, go to a Catholic church and you will see it. He had armies of priests to look after his interest and dispense his favors. The people believed in him, prayed to him, and made offerings to him through his priests. It was a very costly religion. Was there any good in it? Was it value for the price? Did anybody beside the priests and the rulers get any benefit from it? Is it possible that errors, delusions, superstitions, frauds, and impostures can do any real good?

Christians will admit that the theology of Jupiter was false, and his worship a sham. They tell us that paganism is wicked, and worshiping a false god is a great sin. They agree with us that Jupiter was a myth, and his theology and worship was nothing but superstition. The people got no value for the money spent and sacrifices made in his worship.

But is there any more truth in Christianity than there was in Jupiterism? It may be more refined, but is it more true? Some better moral precepts may be grafted on it, but is the foundation of it any firmer? If man never fell, if his soul is not immortal any more than his body, if there is no hell and no heaven in another world, and if there is no personal God, the whole system of salvation is as much a myth as any pagan religion, and the whole cost of it is money, time, and energy wasted for nothing of any real value.

There is a very real hell in this world owing to poverty and the crime and misery caused by it. There is also a very real heaven on earth to the few who bask in wealth produced by others, and by secular combined efforts it might be easily made a paradise for all. If the huge armies of priests were employed in some useful service to man in this world, and the money, time, talent, and energy given to religion were applied to fight oppression, reform the abuses, and improve the social conditions of the people, a real salvation would soon be won.

R. J. DERFEL.

The Strongest Atheism.

IN the occasional spars that take place between the respective patrons of atheism and agnosticism I can never whip up more than a passing interest. I call myself by one or the other name as may seem best suited to the persons I address. By "agnostic" I mean one who regards the origin of the universe as completely inconceivable. By "atheist" I mean one who disbelieves in all the gods hitherto presented by theology for human acceptance. It is not my purpose now to discuss the relative values of these terms; but I wish to say something about atheism which most readers will probably agree with by the time I have finished, though some may dislike the way in which I open my theme.

The object of atheistic propaganda is to exclude the gods from belief and practical life. It is a highly important and excellent object. My quarrel with much that passes under the guise of anti-theological zeal is that it is not atheistic enough. It is zeal, indeed; but it is not efficiency. It defies the gods, but does not expel them. It cries "Avaunt!" and still they strut sarcastically on the stage. Atheists are so accustomed to being abused for their extreme negations and reckless breaking with revered traditions, that they will feel a little astonished if I accuse them of over-timidity. But I do accuse them.

Let me clear away a possible misconception. I entertain a deep respect for the image-breakers who, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, have set aside even the god of Thomas Paine, and assailed by word and writing the articles of the popular creed. I should not dare to write in the *Freethinker* if I thought otherwise. It is true that, the older I grow, the more my mind is disinclined towards what may be called the Warrior Free-thought, and the more decisively I adopt the doctrines taught by Auguste Comte under the name of Positivism. But I fully appreciate the heroic qualities of the aggressive Freethinkers who have not only had the courage to abandon an ancient faith, but have dared to openly condemn and satirise its errors. They have received few enough tributes. From the Christians they have had malice; from the academic sceptics, superfine disdain. Herewith I hold out my hand and affirm that the world owes a vital benefit to these revolutionary spirits. Nor is their work yet done, and while supernatural conceptions survive, their function of assault is a necessary one. If I proceed to say anything that may seem unduly censorious, I point my argument rather at the rank-and-file atheists—the men who easily adopt the positions won by the wit and energy of iconoclastic leaders, and who are too indolent or too dull to see the logical sequel to these first conquests. It is to such men I address the reproach that they are not atheistic enough, even though they set down all priestly doctrine as humbug, and every idea of God as superstition.

You remove theology from a man's mind. Very good; you do right. I imagine you will then say to him, in effect, "Now, my friend, your business is to devote to this secular world the activity you once devoted to heaven." This also is well said. And what then? Is the task of emancipation fulfilled? Will you leave your recruit at that point, and seek for new victories? Do you consider that he can safely be left there? If so, I beg to differ, and I venture to describe your atheism as superficial. I should not be amazed if your precious convert lapsed into theosophy, or spiritualism, or indifference.

"We only destroy," said Comte, "that which we supply the place of." It is this idea I wish to enforce.

The problem before us is one of psychology, of the structure and operation of the mind. Human intellect, whether in the genius or the average person, demands a certain area to work in, to wander in, to speculate in. It occupies itself with food, sex, war, construction, ambition, vanity, affection, conception, comparison, systematising, expression in speech or writing, and practical energy displaying itself in courage, caution, persistence, and achievement. All this complex machinery of thought, will, and feeling is governed by some sort of general view, some philosophy, some connecting plan. The man believes in God, or the Trinity, or a pantheistic providence, or a spirit-world, or natural evolution. There must be a governing theory, however crude or confused or weak. That is the meaning of churches, chapels, and Secular halls. If you take away a man's governing theory, the old habit will remain; sooner or later he will go back to it, or he will seek another. Argue him out of Christian theology, he will still search more or less anxiously for another basis, and he will experience discomfort and mental laxity so far as he fails to attain it.

Somebody will no doubt say to me, "I see what you are driving at. You mean that it is not enough simply to remove theology from a man's view of the universe. You mean he must be more than a mere atheist. Very well, I agree to that; and I readily admit that an atheist must have a new foundation for his thought and action. We will give him such a foundation. We will give him the laws of nature; we will give him science."

Yes, of course. You will give him this, and you will give him that. But, until he has actually built

up his ideas, his emotions and his conduct on that foundation, you can never be sure he will not go back to the old faith, or to some other irrational basis. I may refer, in passing, to the cases of Mrs. Besant and the late Professor Romanes.

The interests of human life are four, namely, intellectual, political, economic and social. In other words, a healthy mind exercises itself in the study of the world and its history; in the administration of the village, town, and country; in the getting of a livelihood and the problem of wealth; and in the family and sexual and fraternal relations. In all these interests theology has, in times gone by, had a most powerful influence. Atheism banishes that influence, and it does right. But if you want to bar out supernaturalism for ever, you must train the human soul (that is, human thought, feeling and will) into a clear and definite attitude in each of the four spheres—intellectual, political, economic and social.

Take the intellectual interest. You must lead the mind through an adequate study (it need not be profound) of astronomy, physics, and biology; and, just as the writers of the old-fashioned Bridgewater treatises were always careful to point to the handiwork of God, so your science will display natural fact and law as independent of any interference from supernatural wills. Your atheist will know nature as free from super-nature. He becomes familiar with a world-machine or world-organism (the terms are only figures-of-speech) in which all the parts perform their function without any reference to a divine will.

Take the political interest. What politics has theology to teach us? It presents God to us as the head of the government, the priests as his executive, the Bible the statute-book, and this earth as a mere emigration-office to pass us on to very remote spiritual worlds. You will give your atheist a saner view of human history. Give him the record of political institutions. Show him how despotisms become limited monarchies, and limited monarchies merge into republics. Trace for him the decline of militarism, and the rise of industrialism. Acquaint him with the noble work done by the nations of western Europe—above all, England and France—for liberty and progress. Reveal to him the evolution of municipalities and Parliaments. Teach him to admire masters of policy—Cæsar, Cromwell, Frederick, William the Silent, Franklin, and the rest. He will then possess a sound conception of a development of politics in which the achievement is all due to human wit and human heroism, and the gods are mere poetic images of human genius and volition.

Take the economic interest. Theological tutors will teach the young that God is the providence of our race, and that he appoints the rich to bestow alms on the poor. You will tell your atheist a different story. You will recount to him the origin and growth of capital; the glory of human labor; the influence of the family affections in stimulating ingenuity in the arts and crafts; the gradual modification of slavery into serfdom, the disappearance of serfdom in the wholesome explosion of the French Revolution; the rise of the proletariat to political importance, and the significance of the labor movement as a demand for a better material and intellectual life. The gods are of no account in this long tale of human purgatory. Man is achieving his paradise without the aid of divine miracle or divine oracle.

Take the social interest. Open to your atheist the immense treasury of literature, art, poetry, music, architecture, invention, discovery, imagination, collected from the days of the Pyramids till the days of Comte, Spencer, and Darwin. Relate to him the history of morals and the march of manners, the gradual rise of womanhood, the expansion of education, the birth of the grand idea of a universal humanity and world-republic; and by the time you have recited only an outline of the magnificent epic

of human advance from brutality to culture, your atheist will have lost for ever any faith in a God whose arbitrary command can shape the ethics of the nations.

The human mind is a structure. In its early stage, it made for itself a theological or metaphysical structure; but the gods and the "essences" have served their turn, and can be dismissed as Ariel was dismissed by the master-genius of Prospero. But when theology has vanished, the instinct of structure remains. The mind must still build a habitation for itself—a complex of serviceable theories of science, politics, economics and social life and duty. The strongest atheism is the result of an education which supplies this structure, and leaves no foothold for gods to occupy.

F. J. GOULD.

Human Gullibility.

Is there no end to the credulity of humanity? Is there an ineradicable element in human nature that will for ever render us prone to grovel before the dealer in mysteries and the charlatan in various walks of life, despite all that can be done to counteract the baneful influence of such impostors? Are we extricating the people from the clutch of the priest and shattering their one-time reverence for the Bible only that they may transfer their allegiance from one imposture to another? How else, save on the hypothesis of the innate gullibility of mankind, can we account for the ease with which every plausible trickster and every religious mountebank secures a following?

The past history of the world swarms with mountebanks, fanatics, and jugglers of all kinds who have hypnotised and befooled and fattened upon the multitude century after century. And notwithstanding the advance we claim to have made in civilisation and enlightenment, the trade in supernaturalism is still a lucrative one. Time after time—times innumerable—have these frauds and pests of society been exposed, but the public appetite for the class of wonders in which they deal seemingly continues with but little abatement of zest. Indeed, we may with perfect justice adapt and apply the words that Paul is alleged to have addressed long ago to the Athenian citizens. "Ye men of Britain, I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious." The form of the superstition may change, but the superstitious-minded are ever with us, and would appear to be as difficult to get rid of as the poor, who are regarded by many Christians as constituting a perpetual legacy from Christ. Be it remarked in passing that perhaps the abolition of poverty depends much more on the complete overthrow of superstition than a great many of our social reformers are willing to admit.

There is only one circumstance more extraordinary than the nature of the pretensions put forward by the quacks of earlier generations, and that is the widespread acceptance accorded them by credulous contemporaries. And taking into account the records of the last few decades of human progress, can we flatter ourselves that in this respect there is any phenomenal improvement to chronicle? Such a measure of improvement, for instance, as would warrant the *Freethinker* and the Secular Society placing themselves on the retired list—with or without a pension? We trow not. People to-day who would smile in a superior and pitying fashion when reminded of the foolish superstitions of our ancestors are as likely as not to be found patronising the Palmist and the Clairvoyant, or being imposed upon by some professional stage mesmerist. And we cannot see that people who are led away by a Dowie, or a Torrey, or an Evan Roberts, have made much intellectual advance on the deluded followers of a Joseph Smith or Joanna Southcott.

In fact, we know no more eloquent proof of the optimistic spirit animating Agnostics and Secularists—Christians would have it we are all necessarily

sunk in pessimism—we know no stronger evidence that the Secularist gospel is the gospel of hope than the indomitable persistence with which the campaign against superstition is carried on in the face of so much that is discouraging in human annals. We are not gainsaying that progress is being made—sufficient at least to justify faith in human nature when the latter is given reasonable scope and is not unduly hampered by cramping conditions. But we may readily admit that our chief hope and confidence is grounded not so much in what we have achieved or are within measurable distance of achieving, as in the increasing activity of the moral consciousness of the race as the world grows older, and the continuous striving after the ideal which characterises each successive generation. The very circumstance that we are growingly conscious of the shortcomings of our civilisation is itself an indication of progress. We need never despair of reform so long as we realise our deficiencies. Did it not suggest an Hibernicism, we might say that the only justification for despondency would be if the race of men universally regarded with complacent acquiescence the existent condition of things. But—*revenons a nos moutons*.

Our opening remarks were prompted by a small experience of Spiritualistic methods with which we were favored some time back. Partly at the instigation of an acquaintance, we went to witness the performance of a Clairvoyant Medium of some reputation who was practising her art in our neighborhood for several evenings. We went with the anticipation that we would at least see or hear something of a slightly puzzling nature. Such was our expectation. In the result we were staggered—at the transparent trickery of it all. It should not have deceived the proverbial schoolboy of Macaulay. Let us endeavor to give a mildly impressionist account of the proceedings.

Spiritualism is evidently fast on the way to become a religion. Judging from the hymns we heard sung and the prayer that was put up, we might be pardoned for imagining we had dropped into a Gospel meeting. The Chairman—there was a Chairman—wore an abstracted and even bored expression during the evening. He was apparently familiar enough with the course of procedure to have developed a complete lack of interest in the whole affair. Much the same criticism falls to be passed on the prepossessing young lady who presided at the harmonium for the purpose of accompanying the hymns. We noticed she paid small regard to the platform operations and was much more interested in the “hims” sprinkled throughout the hall. Which we consider reflected favorably on her good sense.

After a preliminary exhortation by the Chairman, and the singing of a hymn, the Medium rose to her feet—with her eyes shut. She was an ordinary-looking female of perhaps about middle age. Her appearance did not suggest that her close communion with the Spirits was good for her health. She also offered up a prayer to the deity of Spiritualism—whoever he may be. The prayer was of the nebulous order, and did not commit us to much. We take it that she was supposed to be wrapt in a mystic trance while elaborating her petition to the unseen. At any rate, when she had come to a finish she stood motionless for a few seconds, with closed eyes. Then she slowly opened her eyes, gazed vacantly round the hall, realised where she was with a dramatic start, and resumed her seat. It was not badly acted.

After another hymn had been rendered the Medium was on her feet again. This time she did not speak in her own person, but lent herself as the mouth-piece of some denizen of the Spirit world, who seemingly was anxious to address the gathering. The oration of the departed Spirit, delivered through the Medium in an irritating monotone, was (like the aforementioned prayer) almost insufferable. The most sublime truths would fall flat if revealed

to the world in such fashion. As it was, this particular Spirit had nothing whatever to tell, and told it very badly at considerable length. We heard a great deal about coming to the *Teruth*, the word being pronounced and reiterated after the pattern of the late Mr. Chadband of pious memory. Perhaps it was the spirit of Chadband that had taken the use of the Medium's vocal apparatus. There ought to be a natural affinity between humbugs. But whatever the nature of the Spirit that spoke, he, or she, or it had no information to impart respecting life in Spiritland. And although there was much talk of *Teruth*, the question of Pilate remained unanswered.

It is, we understand, a tenet of Spiritualism that the disembodied ghost has the power of reading what passes in the minds of those who are still tenants of a fleshly tabernacle. If that be so the Spirit which addressed us on the evening referred to had certainly not attained the height of omniscience. It told us in a tone of assurance—through the Medium—that it knew everyone present desired to be where *it* was, and to be engaged in loving God. Well, there was at least one person present who had not the slightest notion of it.

The supreme farce of the evening came on when the Medium opened her eyes, fell back upon her natural speech, and began to describe the various Spirits whom she saw standing beside members of the audience. Either we were not so fortunate as to “catch the speaker's eye” or there were no shades of the departed hovering around us. At any rate, the good offices of the Medium were not exercised on our behalf, and we are still without a message from the Spirit world. But it was interesting and instructive to observe and listen. With a little practice, a good memory, and unlimited assurance, anyone could imitate the performance we witnessed.

The Medium singled out an individual in the audience and proceeded to detail the appearance of some spirit which, she alleged, was immediately behind or alongside the person indicated. We have said it was farcical, and so it was. Only in one or two instances could the Medium induce anyone to admit that the Spirit she described bore any resemblance to some one remembered in life. She was crafty enough, of course, not to afford anyone the opportunity to contradict her outright. It would have been dangerous, for instance, to describe the Spirit of someone's wife. He might have risen up and informed the audience that she was safe at home cooking his supper. Nearly all the incorporeal visitants to the hall that night were evidently either far-out relatives of those present, or merely former acquaintances. They were so vaguely delineated and had “passed into Spirit land” so many years back that if they were difficult to identify they were equally difficult to repudiate. The Medium knew her business.

One would have thought that one's near and dear ones would have been more anxious than these unrecognisable outsiders to convey the fact of their continued existence beyond the grave. But it would have been too risky a venture for the Medium to depict a near relation. Another remarkable thing was that while the Medium could obtain for you the *Christian* name of the Spirit present (always, by the way, a common one, such as John, Tom, Kate or Bella) the *surname* was never forthcoming. And, after all, it was only the surname that could be of real value for purposes of identification. But the whole proceedings were so puerile as to be unworthy of serious notice were it not for the number of people who are hounded by similar exhibitions all over the country. Those who are regular attenders at meetings of this kind must be infatuated indeed.

There was one circumstance attaching to the performance of the Medium which doubtless was regarded by many of her auditors as conclusive proof of the genuineness of her manifestations.

When she spoke as her natural self she used pretty broad Scotch, with an East Coast accent, and some of her expressions were positively vulgar. But when she voiced the sentiments of the Spirits she was equal to very fair English, and adopted an entirely different intonation. It was decidedly remarkable, however, that although uttering much better language and with a choicer accent, the Spirit should be guilty of grammatical errors similar to those made by the Medium when she spoke in *propria persona*. It was curious and suggestive; but we fear very few in the audience would succeed in drawing the obvious inference.

G. SCOTT.

A Marriage—and a Moral.

WILLIAM KINGDON CLIFFORD, Professor of Mathematics at London University, was also a thinker of rare originality and boldness. His collected Essays are an ample proof of this statement. His uncompromising Atheism was expressed with literary power and charm, which sometimes rose into very noble eloquence. Unfortunately for the world he died at the early age of thirty-four. He perished for want of that physical vitality which nature lavishes on pigs and fools. He was born at Exeter on May 4, 1845. His death occurred at Madeira on March 3, 1879.

Ashton Wentworth Dilke owned and edited the *Weekly Dispatch*. He was also member of parliament for Newcastle-on-Tyne; but, owing to ill health, he resigned in favor of Mr. John Morley, and died at Algiers on March 12, 1883, at the age of thirty-three. He also was a Freethinker. He openly confessed his Freethought in a pathetic speech in the House of Commons. The last time we saw him was at St. James's Hall during the great Bradlaugh struggle. He looked weak and ill, and had indeed got out of his bed to attend the meeting. The hand of death was even then upon him, but he crawled to his post of duty rather than see it deserted, for he knew that the cause of truth and justice needed the presence and voice of every one of its handful of friends.

Clifford left a widow and a little girl. Dilke left a widow and a little boy. On Wednesday in last week (June 7) Miss Ethel Clifford and Mr. Fisher Wentworth Dilke married each other. The wedding took place at St. Margaret's Church, Westminster. "Many distinguished writers," a newspaper report said, "were present at the ceremony." Very likely. But two distinguished writers, who happened to be dead, would have had their own opinion of the ceremony, if they could have witnessed it; namely, the fathers of the bride and bridegroom. Their widows did not succeed in bringing up these two children in their fathers' philosophy. Did they try to, we wonder; or did they fall themselves into the orthodoxies of the shallow, hypocritical world—as apparently Mary Shelley herself did when the bright, beautiful, and daring poet-husband was removed from her side? Anyhow, there is surely a lesson here for Freethinkers, if they would only dig it out. How insecure are the conquests of Freethought while what is called "the world"—with its interests, traditions, conventions, and hereditaries—sweeps over them one by one like a deluge! It is only in the bold, original spirits here and there that Freethought really lives. It shines for a moment in a Clifford or a Dilke, and then comes the darkness again—at St. Margaret's Church. Yes, the victory is sure in the end; light will triumph over darkness eventually; but what dismays and repulses before the final victory!

G. W. FOOTE.

O, unblest falsehood! Mother of all evil!
Thou misery-making demon, it is thou
That sink'st us in perdition. Simple truth,
Sustainer of the world, had saved us all!

—Schiller.

My Willow—A Suburban Reverie.

OLD shadowy willow, you and I
Have lived together many a year.
I planted you there in the days flown by
When we were very small and queer.
The tree whence you fell in the autumn storm
Waved o'er the brink of Effra's stream.
Maybe my forbears loved that form
Reflected in her old-time gleam.
Alas! you're a trysting place for cats
To learn their song of desolation.
Your wood may form fine cricket-bats
Meet for the coming generation.
You sing the song of the Effra now
Over the banks of an unseen river.
Your branches like fishing-rods bend and bow—
Your boat-shaped leaves all tremble and quiver.
Soft in the summer evening breeze
They rattle and patter on to each other,
And shine with a glisten unlike all trees,
As if the rain were pelting over.
What a clang from the Christian laundry there!
Think of the work-girls packed inside,
Working for longer than men would bear,
To provide the beer for the men outside.
But your boughs are brittle and seem to weep
Where Iris flaunts o'er Forget-me-not's grave;
I might be sitting here half asleep
In a boat adrift on old Effra's wave.
But that churchyard gong sets my soul in a shiver
As it wrings a toll from some credulous crank,
While the parson snuffles "Life's but a river."
He goes with the stream and keeps close to the bank.
Well! I'll pound from thy bark a fine cascarilla,
I'll carve me a pipe from thy mellowest fronds,
To smoke when I'm old, like the jolliest miller,
'Neath thy shade in a chair of thy withies and wands.

GEORGE WOODWARD.

The *Christian Age* of June 7 reports the conversion of the "ringleader of the opposition" to Dr. Torrey at Bristol. This fabulous conversion has been exposed in the *Freethinker* and is dealt with, amongst others, in our pamphlet on *Dr. Torrey's Converts*. The name of the alleged convert is Robert Pitman. This "ringleader" of the "infidel" opposition was a lad of some seventeen years of age when Dr. Torrey was conducting his revival at Bristol. The whole storey of his conversion is a pack of silly falsehoods. But telling a lie is one thing, and running it down is quite another. We dare say this particular lie will do duty in orthodox circles for the next ten or twenty years. Papers like the *Christian Age* are not too fastidious in the matter of veracity.

Mr. Laurence Hutton, a well-known American literary man lately deceased, said that he heard James Russell Lowell, at a Savage Club dinner in London, denounce those responsible for refusing room for a Byron monument in "the Abbey." "The Dean and Chapter of your great Abbey of Westminster," Lowell said, "have refused a resting-place to the pedestal of a statue of one of the greatest of your poets, in the ground which is polluted by the rotten ashes of the mistresses of your Kings!" There was a moment's silence, and then a wild outburst of cheering.

We are told that it is our duty to love this God. Can we love the unknown, the inconceivable? Can it be our duty to love anybody? It is our duty to act justly, honestly, but it cannot be our duty to love. We cannot be under obligation to admire a painting—to be charmed with a poem—or thrilled with music. Admiration cannot be controlled. Taste and love are not the servants of the will. Love is, and must be, free. It rises from the heart like perfume from a flower.—*Ingersoll*.

The absolute we cannot know—beyond the horizon of the natural we cannot go. All our duties are within our reach—all our obligations must be discharged here, in this world. Let us love and labor. Let us work and wait. Let us cultivate courage and cheerfulness—open our hearts to the good—our minds to the true. Let us live free lives. Let us hope that the future will bring peace and joy to all the children of men, and above all, let us preserve the veracity of our souls.—*Ingersoll*.

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

(Suspended during the Summer.)

To Correspondents.

OUR ANTI-TORREY MISSION FUND.—Previously acknowledged:—£123 6s. 8d. Received this week:—C. T. Beesley 2s. 6d., A. S. W. 1s., E. Jagger £1, A. McKinven 2s. 6d., H. S. Ashford 2s. 6d., W. H. West 1s., R. Driver 10s., R. Gibbon 2s. 10d., J. Morrison 1s., N. D. 5s., J. Halliwell 1s., W. 5s., E. C. C. 1s., A. Murray 2s. 6d., J. A. S. 2s., A. Scotch Friend £5, Two Manchester Postmen 3s., M. Christopher 5s., J. Hammond 5s., A. Hurcum 5s., Incog. 2s. 6d., J. Bryce 2s., Rank-and-Filer 3s., Gavin Cook 1s., R. O. L. (India) £1, A. E. J. Mohr 8s., Allbrow 6d.

A. MCKINVEN.—We have put your 2s. 6d. to the Fund. Miss Vance is sending you the parcel of Torrey pamphlets carriage paid. Glad to hear they can be made good use of at Dumbarton.

A. R. WAUGH.—Glad to hear that the distributors of our pamphlets at the Torrey-Alexander Mission in the Strand found the people rather anxious to obtain them than otherwise, only a very few copies being destroyed.

C. T. BEESLEY.—Pleased to know that the *Freethinker* gives you "just the intellectual food you were trying to find" and that you especially appreciate "its manly tone"—as you are good enough to call it.

A. S. W.—Thanks for your good wishes. We wish our pen were as powerful as you think it, for it is one of the two weapons with which we fight the most villainous and hypocritical superstition on earth.

J. BLACKHALL.—The case of Robert Pitman is dealt with in our pamphlet on *Dr. Torrey's Converts*. Freethinkers should distribute this exposure as widely as possible, and assist us financially to print large numbers of them. If they only knew what a grand opportunity this is the very rank and file would send in their small subscriptions by the hundred, and have our Torrey pamphlets circulated in hundred thousands, instead of in myriads.

A. MURRAY.—Glad you are "much interested in the first-class articles appearing in the *Freethinker* from week to week." Torrey pamphlets sent.

J. A. S. (Liverpool) sends a second sub. for the "Education of Dr. Torrey," and says our pamphlets are "extremely telling."

J. A. McCORRIE.—Will look through it and see.

J. BALL (New Zealand).—Torrey pamphlets sent. Thanks for your interesting letter. We quite understand that the Christian fanatics and designers want to get Bible-reading established in your schools, but it would be a monstrous thing if woman suffrage led to that.

J. BROUGH.—No room to deal with it this week.

J. BRUCE writes: "I make use of my *Freethinker* for propagandist purposes, and recently posted one to a friend, who wrote me some time later: 'I do not find the *Freethinker* such a vile paper as it has usually been represented to me, but on the contrary well worth reading, and I have purchased each subsequent number.'" This should encourage our friends to persevere in placing this journal in fresh hands. We are still open to receive addresses to which we may post a copy gratuitously for six weeks.

T. GIBBON.—See this week's list; thanks.

E. LARKINS.—Will deal with it in "Acid Drops" next week.

A. E. J. MOHR, of the Barry Dock Branch of the National Sailor's and Firemen's Union, applies for 200 of each of the Torrey pamphlets, which have been forwarded. In sending a further donation to the Fund, he says he is astonished that so few subscribe towards the circulation of the pamphlets round the country, and thinks there ought to be "more push and earnestness" among the rank and file of the Freethought party.

Partly owing to the holidays, and partly to Mr. Foote's absence from London, some correspondence has to stand over till next week.

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

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

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

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.

PERSONS remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send *halfpenny stamps*.

THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS: Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

Sugar Plums.

Owing to the work thrown upon Mr. Foote by the Conference, and his three days' absence from London, this week's *Freethinker* is without the usual supply of "Acid Drops," which will abundantly reappear in the next issue. We venture to think, however, that the present number of the *Freethinker* is far from being uninteresting.

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference at Liverpool on Sunday was a gratifying success. The weather was favorable, and delegates and friends came from all parts of the country. England, Scotland, and Wales were all well represented. We shall give next week a full report of the business sessions of the Conference. This week we can only insert the Annual Report, read to the Conference by the President, and a report by a local hand of the evening public meeting in the Picton Hall.

Nothing can be said here about the President's speech on Sunday evening, for, as is well known, his pen is responsible for these paragraphs. But it may be said that he could not wish for a more responsive and stimulating audience. Mr. Percy Ward, the second speaker, was the recipient of loud and hearty cheers, showing that he has won golden opinions by his work at Liverpool. He has rapidly improved as a speaker, he has admirable command of an excellent voice, he puts his points with force and precision, he knows how to lead up to a telling climax, and he has a saving sense of humor. Mr. Cohen's speech, philosophical in character and illuminative in style, was delivered with impressive power, and merited the marked applause it won from the audience. Mr. Davies's homely and pointed address was cordially welcomed and added to the clarity of the exposition of Secularism. Mr. John Lloyd was in his best form, and his beautiful, impassioned speech, perfectly delivered, was a fitting close to the evening's eloquence.

The Liverpool newspapers could not condescend to report the splendid public meeting in the Picton Hall on Sunday evening, in connection with the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society. The hall was packed with a magnificent and sympathetic crowd, and at least five hundred people had to be turned away from the doors. On the platform were some of the finest speakers in England, and the enthusiasm of the great meeting was sustained for two hours. The collection, too, was the largest ever taken up at these yearly assemblies. From every point of view it was a grand success. But with the newspapers it was "Mum's the word." The *Evening Express* broke the conspiracy of silence only to say that anti-infidels delivered "Christian Evidence literature" (heaven save the mark!) outside. What went on inside didn't matter. Well, the press does not help to make Secular meetings; but, on the other hand, it cannot unmake them. And there is some comfort in that.

The local bigots did their dirty worst to rob the Secularists of the use of the Picton Hall. The so-called Protestant party, headed by a man who is bound over to keep the peace on account of his riotous behavior, met and passed a resolution calling upon the Committee to shut the doors upon the National Secular Society. They did not succeed in this fanatical attempt, but the Chief Librarian was instructed to inform Mr. Pearson, the Branch secretary, that no literature was to be sold at Sunday evening's meeting. We understand that such a restriction was unprecedented. It appears, therefore, to be a part of the boycott of which we have to complain so frequently. How the Committee reconcile it with free and equal citizenship is a point on which they owe the public an explanation.

"Thank you," a correspondent writes, "for sample *Freethinkers*. Have given an order to my newsagent for same. I wish you and your paper every success." Letters like this show the value of what we called "The Underground Movement." Our readers can all aid in extending the circulation of Freethought literature; first, by placing this journal into the hands of their friends and acquaintances; secondly, by sending us the names and addresses of persons who might become subscribers if it were introduced to them. We will send a free copy regularly to such addresses for six consecutive weeks.

Our three pamphlets, as advertised on the back of the *Freethinker*, are being distributed outside the Torrey-Alexander mission in the Strand nightly. A few copies, only a few, come back to us by post, scrawled all over with sweet Torreyisms, or accompanied by letters of most amazing vulgarity. Of course they don't disturb our sleep or impair

our digestion. We only shrug our shoulders at them. We can afford to look cheerful, for the pamphlets are doing their work. Our readers, all over the country, are invited to go on circulating them as widely as possible.

Mr. Foote's second and final article on the Ingersoll-Dixon case unavoidably stands over till next week. The gist of the matter appeared in the first article. What remains is detail and amplification.

National Secular Society's Annual Conference.

INTRODUCTION.

THE National Secular Society's Annual Conference was held on Whit-Sunday at Liverpool. The Alexandra Hall, Islington-square, the local Branch's meeting-place, was arranged and decorated for the occasion. The business opened at 10.30 a.m., when the President (Mr. G. W. Foote) knocked with the historic hammer upon the table in front of him. The general secretary (Miss E. M. Vance) then called the roll; the result showing a good attendance of delegates from England, Scotland, and Wales—a list of whom will appear in next week's *Freethinker*, when a full report of the morning and afternoon sessions of the Conference will be printed in our columns. Letters were mentioned by the President from Mr. Victor Roger, a vice-president, and one of the special delegates to the Rome Congress, regretting that he was unable to get away from London, and wishing the Conference all success; and from Mr. George Weir, of Leeds, regretting that Mr. Greeves Fisher was detained in Berkshire and unable to attend. A telegram was also read from one of Charles Bradlaugh's sisters: "My best wishes for the Conference, too ill to come, grateful love to all.—EMMA BRADLAUGH."

Mr. Foote, as President, then read the following Annual Report:—

ANNUAL REPORT.

THE year which has just passed may be called the year of revival. Religious excitement has been in the very atmosphere. North Britain has been agitated by the great struggle between the "Wee Kirkers" and the "Free Kirkers" for the control of the funds and property of the Free Church of Scotland. Wales has been agitated by the revival which is expected there every half century, and which has displayed the usual forms of religious hysteria. London has been the scene of the Torrey-Alexander mission, organised by the Evangelistic Churches of the metropolis, and financed by them to the extent of £17,000. And over all the country south of the Tweed has brooded the thunderstorm of the Education struggle, with its lightning flashes in the shape of Passive Resistance, the Welsh revolt, and the bitter controversy between the Establishment and the Free Churches.

All this religious agitation has been favorable to the cause of Freethought. Our greatest enemy is not fervor and conviction but apathy and indifference. What we have to dread is not persecution or intolerance so much as the careful conspiracy of silence. For a long while that conspiracy was almost scientifically comprehensive and miraculously effective. Religion went on its quiet old way as if the peace of orthodoxy were never more to be broken. But the peace has been broken, and broken with a vengeance. Even the inner sanctuary of belief has been disturbed by the contention of the so-called Higher Critics and their more vehement opponents. The very man in the street is called upon to note that one set of clergymen regard as legend what another set regard as history, and that some regard as childish superstition what others regard as the infallible truth of God. The Bible itself is under fierce discussion in the house of its friends. The theory of its inspiration has no longer any firm outlines, but is like a dissolving view in cloudland. Common people are invited every now and then by the newspapers to take note of these things. And it is evident that they are doing so—with the worst results to the Christian faith. A shudder of fear is running through the orthodox part of the Churches, while the heterodox part is engaged in making the best possible terms with scientific criticism. Distinguished men like Sir Oliver Lodge suggest new interpretations of Christian doctrine—hint that the common doctrine of the Atonement is a relic of barbarism—and recommend that Christ should be provided with two human parents instead of one. Not only is the Virgin Birth considered by some as an open question, but there are professed and even professional Christians, like Canon Henson, who maintain that the Resurrection should also be viewed in the same light. In short, there is no Christian belief, except the belief in God, which is pre-Christian, that is not under serious re-

consideration. And the average Christian is beginning to wonder how little he will be expected to believe when his religious teachers have repaired and refitted the old ship of faith for a fresh voyage on the ocean of modern life. This apprehension has, indeed, been splendidly hit off by Thomas Hardy in one of his poems entitled "The Respectable Burgher on the Higher Criticism." Since the reverend doctors are declaring that so many things once sternly taught and faithfully believed are only ancient legend or romantic fiction, the respectable burgher decides as follows:—

Since thus they hint, nor turn a hair,
All churchgoing will I forswear,
And sit on Sundays in my chair,
And read that moderate man Voltaire.

But behind all these things looms something vaster and more portentous—namely, the conflict between Holy Russia and Heathen Japan, in which all the victory and glory has been won by unbelievers and all the defeat and humiliation has fallen to the worshipers of Christ. This spectacle—the first of its kind in really modern history—has set thousands of people in this country thinking. The triumph of Japan is not only altering the balance of political power, it is altering the balance of religious argument. Can it be that Christ is God when he lets his worshipers be smitten into hopeless ruin by his non-worshipers? Can it be true that Christianity is the secret of civilisation when a Heathen nation not only beats a Christian nation in fair fight, but displays a more resolute patriotism and a finer humanity? Can religion, in the Western sense of the word, be so necessary, after all, when a nation like Japan can be brave and upright, and even chivalrous, without an ethic resting on any kind of supernaturalism—not even on the ultimate belief in God? Such questions are working in the minds of myriads of Englishmen. They behold a great object-lesson to the contrary of all that they were taught in church, chapel, and Sunday-school. Their faith is naturally becoming unsettled. And as the fact is getting abroad that the educated Japanese are strongly inclined to the philosophy of Naturalism—with Darwin as its scientific chief and Spencer as its head teacher—it may be said that the whole weight of the Anglo-Japanese alliance is telling in favor of a new idea as to the value and indispensability of religious conceptions.

It is only natural that Freethought should profit by all these incidents. Freethought has profited by them in many ways. Audiences at Freethought lectures have considerably improved, and the circulation of Freethought literature has distinctly increased. There is a forward movement along the whole of our fighting line, which should lead to fresh successes in the coming year.

Freethought has gained a wide advertisement by the circulation of your President's pamphlets exposing the tactics of Dr. Torrey, the American evangelist who left his native land in a fit of generosity and has for some time been laboring at the colossal task of saving the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. This gentleman's policy included all the time-honored attacks upon the character of what he and his like are pleased to call "infidelity." In various parts of the country, and in several of his publications, he made statements, which are as true as they are novel, concerning the way in which infidelity and immorality always go together. When he came to London he started his mission with the declaration over his own signature in the *Daily Chronicle* that infidelity and immorality were "Siamese twins" that "always exist and always grow and always fatten together." This, of course, is a species of Christian urbanity which Freethinkers are accustomed to. There was no need to be passionate with Dr. Torrey over such playful exercises of his notorious humor. But it was time to challenge him boldly and squarely when he pointedly libelled two dead heroes of Freethought, who were as noble in their manhood as they were splendid in their intelligence. It was not right to let this revivalist carry on his dirty work with impunity. In himself he was utterly unworthy of attention. His insults might be treated with the most utter disdain. But when the Churches put him forward as a representative, when they co-operated in promoting his mission, and guaranteed large sums of money for its expenses, they gave him a certain accidental importance that could not be overlooked. It is not for us to dictate what champion the enemy shall put forward. They appoint their own. Our business is to meet him when he advances with the proper credentials. In this spirit Dr. Torrey has been met. It was of little use to deal with him in any provincial city. The place to strike him effectively was London. Accordingly your President waited until Dr. Torrey opened his metropolitan mission. Refutations of his filthy slanders on Thomas Paine and Colonel Ingersoll were printed and distributed in tens of thousands outside the Albert Hall and at Brixton, while other tens of thousands were distributed in all parts of the kingdom. Other pamphlets have followed continuing the

exposure of this moral assassin. And it is good to know that they have produced a great effect. The republication of the first pamphlet in the *Clarion* introduced it to a wide circle of readers whose indignation was worth cultivating. It is well-known, too, behind the scenes, that the better sort of Christians have remonstrated with Dr. Torrey. Some of them have called upon him to justify or withdraw his accusations against Paine and Ingersoll. Your President has told these, when they broached the matter to him, that Dr. Torrey cannot afford to do either the one or the other; and your President's judgment is corroborated by the course of events. Never was there a more pitiful spectacle than this detected libeller, with his paltry shifts and shuffles and ignominious evasions. We should all be happy that such a wretched creature does not dishonor Freethought by his adherence. He is but the last of a long line of malicious bigots, who have tried to poison the public mind against every man who has had the brains and courage to think for himself. He is no worse than the rest—only he has had the misfortune to be caught red-handed and exhibited as a controversial criminal. This very fact shows that Freethought is strong enough not to take insults any longer "lying down"—as the saying is; and the recognition of it may help to clear the way for a more honest and fruitful discussion of great questions in religion, ethics, and philosophy. But in any case the characters of two of the finest Freethinkers who ever lived have been cleared of orthodox calumny. They have been so successfully cleared, indeed, that the libeller has found discretion the better part of valor, and feels it judicious to breathe not another word against them.

Another feature of the past year, that may be contemplated with unalloyed pleasure, is the International Freethought Congress that was held at Rome in September. As a Congress it was a failure; as a Demonstration it was a magnificent success. And really the two things were incompatible. It was the dramatic character of the gathering that gave it its importance by attracting the attention of the civilised world. Thousands of Freethinkers from Europe and America, and a few from other parts of the globe, assembled for the first time in history at the historic centre of Christendom, and affirmed there the principles of intellectual freedom which Christianity had ever sought to suppress by bloodshed, imprisonment, political and social ostracism, and the nefarious control of all the means of education. A salute in the name of humanity was paid to Giordano Bruno, the martyr of martyrs, at the very spot where his statue commemorates his sufferings at the hands of "the priests of the bloody faith." On the ground where his noble figure was burnt to ashes, where, as Tennyson said, he died the most desolate of deaths, is raised the monument of his vindication. Another salute was paid to Garibaldi, the paladin of modern freedom, where his equestrian statue stands on the summit of the Janiculum, whence the great Liberator looks forth over the city he redeemed. And the impassioned speeches delivered there did not lose sight of the fact that Garibaldi, the simplest and purest of heroes, was a declared Atheist; one who, in the words of Swinburne, hated "the blood on the hands of the king and the lie at the lips of the priest." Nor must it be forgotten that the principal and most charming figure at the Congress was the great biologist and philosopher who is sometimes called the Darwin of Germany. And Ernest Haeckel is also an Atheist.

A fairly large party of delegates to the Rome Congress represented the National Secular Society, including four special delegates—Messrs. Foote, Cohen, Lloyd, and Roger—who definitely represented the Society according to the resolution carried at the Leeds Conference; their expenses being defrayed from the Fund raised by your President through the *Freethinker*. It is to be hoped that a still larger party will attend the Paris Congress next September. At Rome the Congress held its sittings in the Collegio Romano, the use of which was granted by the Italian government. Such a thing would have been deemed impossible fifty years ago. But the world moves, as Galileo said, and similar consideration may be shown at Paris. At any rate the public buildings and art treasures of the City of Light will not be closed to the Congressists, as the Vatican was closed by the Pope's orders to the Congressists at Rome.

Your Executive endeavored to co-operate, nearer home, with the Friends of Russian Freedom Committee, who invited general assistance in organising a meeting at Queen's Hall, London, after the "Bloody Sunday" in St. Petersburg. Your Executive offered speakers (if necessary) and other assistance, but the Secretary's letter to that effect was ignored. All your Executive could do, therefore, was to send to the papers its own resolution, trusting that the Russian people would soon win that right of free speech and free association which is the first necessity of progressive civilisation. This is mentioned in order to

show the kind of boycott that still obtains against militant Freethought.

In looking at the Society's balance-sheet it must be borne in mind that our financial resources were always small in proportion to our work; also that the Society's Branches have each their own autonomy, their own incomes, and their own balance-sheets; and further that a good deal of expenditure, under N. S. S. auspices, has been incurred by the Secular Society, Limited. Meetings financed by the latter Society have taken place in London, South Shields, and several places in South Lancashire. At Wigan a new Branch was formed after Mr. Ward's lectures. New Branches have always been formed, partly in consequence of the Welsh revival, at Cardiff and Mountain Ash. At the latter place successful meetings have been held by Mr. Lloyd.

The Glasgow Branch has had an extremely prosperous winter season, characterised by overflowing meetings and great enthusiasm, a steadily growing list of members, and a continuously flourishing exchequer. The Liverpool Branch has also been making great headway. Mr. Ward's services as lecturer and organiser are highly appreciated and have been very successful; the Committee are zealous and hard working; and here again there is an ever-increasing membership and a welcome financial improvement. Meetings have been larger than usual at Manchester, where it is to be hoped that Freethought will achieve an organisation equal to its opportunities. At Birmingham the Branch has had to work in the saddest unfavorable conditions, created by the malice of local bigotry. What could be done there under fairer conditions may be seen from the meetings addressed by your President in the Town Hall, which has been granted to the local Branch once a year by the Lord Mayor. The attendance at the last lectures, early in the present year, was quite remarkable; so much so, indeed, that the local bigots, having deprived the Branch of the use of any Council schoolroom, are now seeking to deprive it of the use of the Town Hall. In one sense this is a compliment; in another sense it may be a calamity. Certainly the situation will require careful handling; which, fortunately, it is likely to receive. Meanwhile the Birmingham workers have been taking an ancient piece of advice to go to Coventry. They have gone over to help the Coventry Branch with some excellent meetings, addressed by Mr. Cohen, Mr. Ward, and your President. This new Branch has an energetic secretary, and some good workers, but is hampered by want of financial resources. Some capital meetings have been held at South Shields—two of them record meetings. And there is some prospect of more favorable conditions arising at Newcastle-on-Tyne, where the great drawback for a considerable time has been the difficulty in obtaining a suitable hall for lectures.

Turning to London, it is pleasant to record that the Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the Executive, was an unprecedented success. Courses of lectures have taken place at Queen's Hall in the West and Stanley Hall in the North. Away in the far East, at West Ham, three fine audiences were drawn together in the Stratford Town Hall, the place being packed on the last occasion. Here again it may be seen how successfully Freethought propaganda might be carried on if first-class public halls were more generally available.

During the past year an old chapter of Secular history has been closed. For ever so many years the balance of the half-forgotten Bradlaugh Memorial Fund has been lying at the Birkbeck Bank. Twice the subscribers had been consulted by circular and through the *Freethinker* as to the disposition of their money. The second and last time it was intimated that those who so desired would have their subscriptions returned, and those who made no sign would be understood to agree that the final balance would pass over to the National Secular Society. When the three gentlemen appointed by the Executive as nominal trustees for the Memorial Fund (that is to say, whose signatures were necessary for withdrawing any part of it) were called upon to sign a cheque, one of them refused to do so. Mr. W. H. Reynolds had left the Society, and should have resigned his nominal trusteeship; but he did not resign, and he would not carry out the Executive's instructions, although the two other "trustees"—Messrs. G. W. Foote and George Anderson—were ready to fulfil their obvious duty. An intolerable situation was thus created. It illustrated the danger of trusteeships, and was one of the reasons why your President devised the Secular Society, Limited. Years rolled by and Mr. Reynolds still maintained his attitude of cheap "independence." Towards the end of 1904 Mr. Sydney Gimson, president of the Leicester Secular Society, approached your President with a suggestion that the balance of the Bradlaugh Memorial Fund at the Birkbeck Bank should be divided between Charles Bradlaugh's two sisters, Mrs. Norman and Miss Emma Bradlaugh, who were advanced in years, infirm, and in need of assistance. It was suggested that

Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Anderson could be induced to sign two cheques for this purpose. Your President had to inform Mr. Gimson that the money at the Birkbeck Bank really belonged to the National Secular Society, that the Society's Executive appointed the nominal trustees, whose position in the matter was only technical; that it was impossible for the President to act in disregard of the Executive's authority; and that it was also impossible for the President to give a tacit sanction, after all that lapse of time, to the mischievous principle that Mr. Reynolds had practically asserted. Mr. Gimson saw the difficulty, but hoped it might be overcome. It is right to say that he showed the best possible spirit. Subsequently he suggested that cheques might be drawn and signed in favor of Mrs. Norman and Miss Bradlaugh, and handed over to them by the N. S. S. secretary. Your President, while willing to meet Mr. Gimson as far as possible, and quite willing personally to see the money thus devoted, was obliged to say that he could not in honor dissociate himself from his colleagues. The matter was then discussed at an Executive meeting, and it was decided that the money would have to come under the absolute control of the N. S. S. before any decision could be arrived at as to its disposition. Mr. Gimson then managed to obtain the signatures of Messrs. Reynolds and Anderson to a cheque in favor of the N. S. S., your President's signature was then added, and the money passed into the N. S. S. bank account. That being done the Executive had no difficulty in agreeing to make a present of the money to Charles Bradlaugh's sisters. The sum of £84 13s. was divided between them—as a present from the N. S. S., which the two ladies suitably acknowledged. Thus the matter ended—thanks in great part to Mr. Gimson's tact and good temper. But the danger of trusteeship is just as obvious as ever.

This report must not close without a reference to the Society's loss in the death of Mr. J. Umpleby of Blackburn, the oldest of our vice-presidents. Mr. Umpleby was a man of great strength of mind and character; with a vein of subtle facetiousness that rather endeared him to those who had the honor of his friendship. He lived to be ninety years of age, when death can hardly come as a calamity. Those who met him at our annual Conferences, which he attended up to a very few years before his decease, will always remember that veteran figure, with the fine old head, the Voltairian eyes, and the resolute mouth.

At the antipodes one of your vice-presidents, Mr. Joseph Symes, having had to drop his *Liberator* after twenty years' effort, has taken to farming, like another Diocletian. Readers of the *Freethinker* hear from him occasionally. He will always have a warm place in the hearts of his old friends.

In America the dead *Freethought Magazine* has been succeeded by the *Liberal Review* at Chicago. This monthly publication is ably conducted by Mr. Mangasarian, lecturer to the Free Religious Association, a body with a smooth name covering a serious purpose. Mr. Mangasarian's addresses are perfectly outspoken and would satisfy any Secular audience in Great Britain. The New York *Truth-seeker*, conducted by Mr. E. M. Macdonald, is as bold and interesting as of old. But there seems to be very little Freethought lecturing in America now that the voice of Ingersoll is still.

This report may close appropriately by a reference to the struggles in France and England with regard to the attitude of the State towards religion. The French Freethinkers, who are now in the ascendant politically, are determined to effect a complete separation between Church and State; and, although M. Combes has fallen, the policy of separation still holds the field. In England the struggle between Church and Chapel for the control of elementary education is slowly, but surely, forcing forward the "secular solution," as the *Daily News* calls it in order to avoid the hateful words Secular Education. To this complexion they must come at last. Secular Education will come some day, and it may come with a rush when the Nonconformists recognise that Passive Resistance cannot break down the Education Act, and that, if it could, the Passive Resistance of the Church party would as easily break down any other Education Act that the Free Churches might carry. Yes, the triumph of Secular Education is sure. It is only a question of time—and maybe a short time. And when the priest, and his proxy the religious teacher, are swept out of the nation's schools; when we have realised that system of "godless education" which the clergy of all denominations delight in denouncing; we shall have an infinitely better educational system, on the one side, and, on the other side, the minds of children being less cramped and perverted by superstitious training, the break-up of Christianity will go on more rapidly, and the way will be more speedily prepared for that universal Humanism which is destined to take the place of the supernatural religions of the world.

THE PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION.

THE public demonstration in connection with the above-named Conference was held in the Picton Lecture Hall, Liverpool, on Sunday evening, June 11. The big hall was crowded to the doors, and hundreds of people were unable to gain admission. A pleasing feature was the presence of a large number of ladies. The "congregation" was particularly enthusiastic, and displayed its practical sympathy by contributing liberally to the "offertory."

The President, Mr. G. W. Foote, occupied the chair, and his constantly-applauded speech kindled in the meeting a spirit of fiery harmony that lasted to the chairman's benediction.

Mr. Foote referred to an anonymous letter from some pious bigot that had appeared in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, protesting against the action of the City Council in granting the use of the Picton Hall to "infidels." No doubt the letter had done good by advertising the meeting. Further, it showed that there was still an important work to be done in teaching people to think for themselves. A large number put their thinking out—as people did their washing. He recently had been amused by hearing an Irishman say, "If you want to get to heaven, the Roman Catholic road there is the only true one—but, mind you, no sectarianism." He submitted that if a Christian had a right to differ from a Secularist, then a Secularist, too, had an equal right to differ from the Christian. Regarding the unwarrantable assumption made by Christians that morality could not exist apart from their religion, Mr. Foote pointed to the humanity and magnanimity displayed by the heathen Japs in their successful war with Holy Russia. True morality was non-theological. Men found out what was good in conduct as they found out what was good to eat—by experience. Secularists agreed with Ingersoll's simple yet sublime statement: "Happiness is the only good; the place to be happy is here; the time to be happy is now; and the way to be happy is to try to make others so." They did not want angels with wings; when a man felt his child's arms around him, he had what was grander—an angel without wings. In concluding, Mr. Foote quoted Thomas Paine's words: "The world is my country; mankind are my brethren; and to do good is my religion"; and he safely challenged anyone to find anything better in the Bible of any religion in the world. After the loud and long applause called forth by his speech, Mr. Foote called upon

Mr. H. PERCY WARD who was loudly cheered on rising. Mr. Ward spoke about the mental disease of "revivalists" which had spread far and wide throughout the country. The very fact that there was a need for a revival was a sign of the decay of religion. It was also a humiliating admission that the ordinary preacher was a failure. If the average parson had been successful there would have been no need for the revivalist. Revivalism could be explained without a supernatural theory. The conversions reported were simply reversions to a religion that the converts had sucked in with their mother's milk. In the case of moral conversions the change was due to the operation of the holy spirit of humanity, not to that of the third person of the holy trinity. A man's love for a good woman had effected greater reformations in character than his love for an imaginary God. The evil of revivalism was that it diverted human attention from earthly affairs.

Mr. C. COHEN, who received a very hearty greeting, said that Christians didn't object to a man disbelieving in their religion, what they objected to was his announcing the fact. The Christian religion, throughout its history, had practised a system of persistent and bitter persecution that had bred hypocrites and manufactured cowards. Persecution didn't affect the hypocrite or the coward; it affected only the honest man. How could a persecuting religion trouble a man—it might be an archbishop—who did not believe in a God and never revealed his disbelief to others. Persecution injured the honorable heretic—the man who disbelieved in a deity and said so to his fellows. The theology a man professed with his lips rarely had any practical effect on his daily conduct. The most rabid believer in a future life, for example, was never in a hurry to leave the present one. In answer to the objection that Secularism was merely a "pulling down" system, Mr. Cohen pointed out that destruction was a law of growth. The chicken's breaking of its shell was a road to a higher development of its life. So, by bursting the shell of religion, Humanity would be able to put forth its fullest potentialities. Let them make the best use of the present life and bravely face death without a lie on the mouth or a mask on the face.

Mr. F. A. DAVIES, who was warmly applauded, "went for" the so-called Christian Socialists. If God governed human affairs the present state of society was as God intended it to be. The Christian Socialist, then, was working against God's will. If the earth was the Lord's, it followed that the landlord's were God's agents. As he

didn't eject them, he couldn't disapprove of their management, or, rather, mismanagement. Christianity was the religion of despair. It taught that there was a hell for the many and a heaven for the few. On the other hand, Free-thought offered a gospel of joy and hope and built its castle on the earth, not in the clouds.

Mr. J. T. LLOYD delivered the concluding speech and spoke with a fervor that was infectious. Taking the phenomenon of conversion as his text, he pointed out that it was caused, not by an alleged God, but by the belief in an alleged God. If God was seeking to save man how was it that two-thirds of the converts he was successful in finding at religious revivals were ultimately lost by him; how was it they reverted to their old way of life. If man was too weak to hold on to God, surely God was strong enough to keep a good grip of man. But the power that worked the changes in men at revivals was due to the converts mistaking a subjective experience for an objective reality. We were on the eve of a Freethought revival. We needed a revival that would remedy social evils, that would remove social wrongs—a revival that would realise the grand ideal of liberty, equality, and fraternity and band men and women together in an union of all who loved for service of all who suffered.

The CHAIRMAN then dismissed the fine audience—fine in both quantity and in quality—with a Freethought blessing, and doubtless most of the Secular "saints" present breathed a silent prayer that one result of the scattering of seeds of truth that night in mental soil would be a rich and golden Freethought harvest.

W. P.

Open Air Christianity.

THERE are several swollen-headed swashbucklers on the Christian Evidence platform. One of these, a brazen-faced braggart, whose name is suggestive of the staff of life, and who would be better employed in making it than in trying to take it out of the people's mouths by teaching them to believe in a book which says: "Take no thought of the morrow, what ye shall eat," etc., assures his hearers, with that priestly pathos and sanctimonious accents which are peculiar to this young enthusiast, that he has been offered large sums to go elsewhere and be a preacher, but that he has refused, being content with a smaller salary in the Lord's vineyard amongst the young men "in the east of London."

One of the "arguments" of this solemn Solomon of wisdom, in "proving" man to be a living soul, is as follows: The human ear is merely a telephone or a speaking tube, into which you might shout, however, till doomsday, and never be understood, much less receive a reply, if "I," "the Ego," were not at the other end of the tube a-listening. (He has evidently no idea that his ear is part of himself, otherwise he would not talk of sitting at the other end of his own ear). Likewise the eye is the telescope by the aid of which "I," the soul, see the world around me; but the whole world might be reflected upon the retina of my eye without being observed by me, were I not at the other end of the telescope. (Fancy, again, this unconscious humorist sitting at the other, inner, end of his eye peeping out at the world). The large crowds who, with open-mouthed wonder, listen to such stuff in the London parks are to be pitied. But to proceed with the argument, the logical conclusion of which is yet to come. But if you destroy my ear you have not destroyed me. I am still alive. I have but lost my hearing. In like manner, destroy my eye, and I have but lost my sight, and—here comes the crux of the thing—destroy my brain, and I am likewise not destroyed. But what would be the use of an existence after death, if I am deprived of the power of thinking? Cannot this wit-less fellow see that the logical conclusion of his own argument leads to that? As the hearing is destroyed with the instrument of hearing, and the power of sight with our optics, so the destruction of our vehicle of thinking involves the destruction of our power of thought. In other words, this is his logic. Pluck my eye out and I cannot see. Dig my ear out and I cannot hear; ergo, cut my brain out and I can think.

And this is one of the teachers of the British public. In fact, his friends call him the second Barnato of the East End. God and his holy angels defend us!

Another statement of his is that the human embryo has been observed at work, and he describes how the infinite net of nerves is being woven as if it were on a loom, and then he exclaims: "It is the invisible hand of God!" Just fancy, for the sake of argument, God Almighty and Allwise, of malice aforethought, deliberately and wilfully shaping and fashioning, one after another, all the monstrosities of the Barnum and Bailey show! How he must have grinned to himself after having woven the nerve-net of the Roman Emperors with the fore-knowledge that these same Emperors were to torture his Christian children with a thousand torments! With what glee must he not have set to work when he wove Charlie Peace's body together, knowing, as he did, what a lovely creature he was destined to be! O, let such arguments be a standing warning to future generations of Christians, if such there are to be, not to attempt to reason people into Christianity, seeing what a mess the attempt always proves to be.

And how, think you, does our hero prove the truth of the miracles of the Bible? He simply proves the existence of miracles by proving that there are no miracles, and when he has accomplished that feat he retraces his steps and proves that all phenomena are miraculous. Thuswise: Two eagles, one of whom is an Agnostic eagle, fly through the air over the head of a man with a gun in his hand. The other eagle, who was presumably a Christian one, says: "Don't go too near to the man," but the Agnostic one defies the supposed impotency of the man, and falls a victim to his own Agnosticism by the superior, and, as it would seem to eagles, supernatural intellect of man in making a far-shooting weapon. A miracle! And after this stupendous parable there was applause! And yet all it argued was that shooting was no miracle—except to eagles. Again, once upon a time, the sun rose the first time. (Good God! We shall next hear that once upon a time there was no time). There were two men upon the earth. (But what about Adam and Eve?) Even when arguing to prove Christianity, present-day Christians are unable to get away from science and cling to their creed. But the first day the sun arose it was a miracle, the second and third day a lesser one, and, at last, when man got accustomed to the phenomenon, it was no miracle. This leads of course, to the second chapter, that of showing that all is miracle, after having shown that really there are no miracles. And thus the only thing which is really proved is that Christians cannot make one speech without contradicting themselves. As the Bible is one mass of self-contradictory statements, so is the talk of its adherents a mass of incoherent babble.

J. K. MAAGAARD.

A RECUSANT.

The Church stands there beyond the orchard-blooms:

How yearningly I gaze upon its spire!
Lifted mysterious through the twilight glooms,
Dissolving in the sunset's golden fire,
Or dim as slender incense morn by morn
Ascending to the blue and open sky.
For ever when my heart feels most forlorn
It murmurs to me with a weary sigh,
How sweet to enter in, to kneel and pray
With all the others whom we love so well!
All disbelief and doubt might pass away,
All peace float to us with its Sabbath bell.
Conscience replies, There is but one good rest,
Whose head is pillowed upon Truth's pure breast.

—James Thomson ("B. V.")

Ministers say that they teach charity. This is natural. They live on alms. All beggars teach that others should give.—Ingersoll.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

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

LONDON.**OUTDOOR.**

BATTERSEA BRANCH N. S. S. (Battersea Park Gates): 11.30, a Lecture.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 3.15 and 6.15, Mr. Davies, a Lecture.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Station-road, at 11.30, R. P. Edwards; Brockwell Park, 3.15, R. P. Edwards; 6.30, R. P. Edwards.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (The Grove, Stratford): 7, W. Gregory, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Coffee House, Bull Ring): Thursday, June 22, at 8, A. Barber, "The Truth Seeker."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, H. Percy Ward, "The Liverpool City Council and the Secularising of Sunday." Outdoor Meetings: 3, Islington-square; Wednesday, 8, Edgehill Church; Thursday, 8, Birkenhead Haymarket.

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