

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE

Do justice to your brother (you can do that whether you love him or not), and you will come to love him. But do injustice to him, because you don't love him; and you will come to hate him.—RUSKIN.

## An Old Story.

THAT MUST BE RETOLD.

MANY years ago I had a quarrel with the late Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, of the West-London Mission, who afterwards became President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. Mr. Hughes published a book entitled *The Atheist Shoemaker*, in which he told the story of the conversion (by his own Mission, of course) of a very popular and eloquent young Free-thought lecturer in London. A fictitious name was given, but the narrative was very circumstantial; so much so, indeed, that the London Freethinkers were able to declare that the hero of Mr. Hughes's volume was an imaginary character. Charles Bradlaugh, as President of the National Secular Society, warned Mr. Hughes that a serious mistake had been made, and advised him to look into the matter more carefully. But the reverend gentleman took no notice. I then wrote a careful criticism of his story in the *Freethinker*, and reprinted it as a pamphlet. Thousands of copies were circulated, and even the great Pastor Spurgeon said that Mr. Hughes ought to give an explanation. But the reverend gentleman went on taking no notice. Bradlaugh died, but my pamphlet kept the field. It followed Mr. Hughes about everywhere, and at last he was stung into doing something. What he did was this. He got George Jacob Holyoake, privately, to make some sort of "investigation," and to write out a certificate of the truth of his *Atheist Shoemaker* story. Right on the heels of that certificate, however, I was lucky enough to come across the family to which the "converted Atheist" belonged. I took down their evidence and published it in the *Freethinker*. I brought the surviving male members of the family up to London and put them on the platform at a meeting of some fifteen hundred people at the Hall of Science. I proved that young Gibson (that was his real name) had never been a Free-thought lecturer, that he had never been a Freethinker at all, and that not very long before his death he had actually been in the Salvation Army. My "investigation" brought the real facts to light, and I published them in another pamphlet, which was circulated in myriads of copies all over Great Britain—just as the Torrey pamphlets were recently.

Mr. Holyoake's part in this affair was regretted and condemned by the whole Free-thought party. But years had rolled by and I was not minded to say anything about it just at present. Yet the Christians are forcing my hand. They are telling lies over Mr. Holyoake's grave, and I cannot allow them to pass unchallenged.

The following paragraphs appeared in "The Churches" column of the *Daily News* two days after Mr. Holyoake's decease:—

"No notice of the life and work of Mr. Holyoake would be complete without a reference to the famous 'Atheist Shoemaker' case. It will be remembered that

Mr. Hugh Price Hughes issued a small book, in which he gave the details of the conversion of an Atheistic shoemaker at the West London Mission. The facts were hotly disputed by the Freethinkers, and pamphlets were issued and distributed broadcast containing the vilest aspersions on Mr. Hughes, and bluntly contradicting the whole story. At first Mr. Hughes took no notice of these biting attacks, but ultimately the persecution became intolerable, and he decided to submit the whole of the facts, with all the documents in his possession, to Mr. Holyoake. The result was that the accuracy of Mr. Hughes' statements were abundantly confirmed by Mr. Holyoake.

One of the pleasing features of this painful controversy was the receipt of a most kindly and generous letter from the aged Co-operator by Mr. Hughes, a letter which was printed in full in the *Methodist Times*. Although Mr. Hughes received his vindication at the hands of Mr. Holyoake, we have never heard that those who traduced him apologised for their lack of charity and truth."

I was indignant at this attempt to deceive the public, and to insult the Free-thought party across Mr. Holyoake's coffin; and I wrote a private letter to the editor of the *Daily News*, which circumstances compel me to publish in self-defence. It ran as follows:—

PRIVATE.]

"2 Newcastle-street,  
Farringdon-street, E.C.

Jan. 24, 1906.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE 'DAILY NEWS.'

SIR,—

I have marked this letter private, because I cannot place any writing of mine at the mercy of your staff. You will please understand, then, that this letter is not for publication, either wholly or in part, or in any way whatsoever.

I am sorry you have allowed your editor of 'The Churches' column to write that ridiculously false statement respecting Mr. G. J. Holyoake and Mr. Price Hughes. It forces upon me the odious task of renewing a painful old controversy over Mr. Holyoake's newly-opened grave.

I suspect that the writer in question is quite aware that I found the alleged 'Atheist Shoemaker's' family at Northampton, after Mr. Holyoake's 'vindication'; that I also found his old workmates at the old shoe-shop in London; and that I published the results of my investigation, which proved that Mr. Price Hughes's story, in all its really important features, was a work of fiction.

You can call his attention to the matter or not, as you please. I merely afford you the opportunity of being honest, for once in a way, where Freethinkers are concerned.

Yours obdtly,

G. W. FOOTE."

I knew the *Daily News* was bad enough, but I did not think it would violate the privacy of my communication. I thought it might possibly feel a little compunction, and tell the editor of "The Churches" column to look into the facts of the case again, with a view to correcting his own misstatement. But it did nothing of the kind. Two days later the following paragraph appeared in the same column:—

"We have received a letter from Mr. G. W. Foote taking objection to our references to Mr. G. J. Holyoake and the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes in the 'Atheist Shoemaker Case,' and reiterating the statement that Mr. Price Hughes's story, "in all its really important features, was a work of fiction." Our only comment on Mr. Foote's letter is that the late Mr. Holyoake never gave any other presentment of the case than that to which we referred."

It will be observed that the anonymous hireling responsible for this as well as the previous paragraphs shelters himself behind Mr. Holyoake's dead body. He tries to make out that Mr. Holyoake is responsible for the statements in the first paragraphs. But they were not Mr. Holyoake's statements at all. They were the writer's own statements. And this fact should be borne in mind in reading the following letter:—

PRIVATE.]

"2 Newcastle-street,  
London, E.C.

January 26, 1906.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE 'DAILY NEWS.'

SIR,—I see that you have outraged the common decencies of social intercourse by quoting from, as well as referring to, in this morning's issue of your paper, a private letter of mine which you received on the 24th inst.—in spite of the fact that I emphasised the 'private' by the additional statement (which seems to have been more than necessary in your case) that my letter was not for publication in any form whatsoever.

Anything more fatuously impudent than the 'comment' you add to the outrage it is difficult to conceive—as I shall have occasion to point out to the only public I care for.

Yours etc.,

G. W. FOOTE."

As the *Daily News* violated the privacy of my first letter, and took no notice of the second, I feel justified in printing them both; partly, as I have said, in self-defence, and partly as an object lesson in Christian ethics to my readers.

It is extremely distasteful to me to deal with this matter just now, but I must do my duty; and in the course of it I shall have to show what Mr. Holyoake actually did, and why he ought not to have done it—as, indeed, I showed at the time.

And there is another reason, which, added to the foregoing, makes it irresistible. Mr. Price Hughes's "Life" has been written by his daughter. Naturally she defends her father, and I have not the heart to blame her for that. But she adds embellishments of her own to the original story, and represents Mr. Hughes as a perfect martyr, who was only snatched, in the very nick of time, by the chivalrous Mr. Holyoake, from the devouring jaws of wild Secularists.

A new generation has arisen since my exposure of the "Atheist Shoemaker" story, and the scotched old lie is crawling forth again into the sun. So it must be scotched again. Killed it never will be while it is of any use to the serpentry of faith.

The story of that old "Atheist Shoemaker" falsehood, and how I managed to expose it, after Mr. Holyoake had voluntarily given it his blessing, will be told again in the *Freethinker*. After the long lapse of time I shall be able, as it were, to paint the picture with better perspective. All the principal facts will fall into their right order of importance; and some that were but of temporary interest may be dropped out altogether.

When I have finished this job—and I will not make it last too long—my older readers will, perhaps, not be sorry to have had it revived; and my newer readers will understand that "Torreyism" is an old tree with many vigorous branches.

Meanwhile I beg my readers to observe the kind of tactics which highly virtuous Christian papers, like the *Daily News*, think it perfectly fair to use against Freethinkers. Not a word of rebuke did that journal utter when Dr. Torrey lied (as I happen to know the editor recognised that he lied) about the characters of Thomas Paine and Colonel Ingersoll. It let Mr. Stead, even, go on without a single word of encouragement. And now it publishes this falsehood about the "Atheist Shoemaker" story, and tries to run away from its own words when challenged, and publicly refers to and quotes from "private" letters. This is what Christian morality comes to, in a picked case, and in the twentieth century. G. W. FOOTE.

## Moral Miracles.

THE old method of defending miracles was a very simple one. The defender dwelt upon the obvious limitations of human knowledge, the impossibility of explaining all natural events by contemporary science; and having thus paved the way for the introduction of the supernatural, dragged in the testimony of people—who lived a long while ago—to prove that this had actually occurred. And as a belief in the supernatural always flourishes in inverse proportion to our understanding of the natural, the believer in miracles had for some time fairly easy running so far as the man in the street was concerned. But these conditions no longer obtain. An apprehension, if not an understanding of natural causation is fairly general; and even religious people are becoming aware, after constant lessons, that knowledge may reign to-morrow where ignorance prevails to-day, and that to rest their case upon mere temporary ignorance, is a very dangerous procedure. And finally, it is realised that the testimony of people is quite valueless unless it can be shown that the conditions precluded either conscious or unconscious delusion. And to show this is a manifest impossibility.

So with a strange confusion the apologist falls back upon what he is pleased to call "moral miracles." He parades a series of cases—the conversion of one man from inebriety to sobriety, of another from stealing to honesty, or of various improvements in society, all of which he declares are veritable miracles. Now all these things may be surprising—although surprise is conditioned by an ignorance of causes—but the surprising is not the miraculous, though the miraculous would be surprising. The defence is based upon a misuse of language, common enough in all directions, but finding its strongest expression in connection with religion.

There is a good example of this in the *Methodist Times* for January 25, in an article by the Rev. S. Yelland Richards on "The Logic of Miracles." Mr. Richards takes as his text the walking of Jesus on the water; and with unconscious sarcasm says that as the disciples had already witnessed the miracle of the loaves and fishes they had no right to be astonished at anything afterwards. And he sapiently remarks that "one miracle proves the possibility of another.....The second miracle is as likely as the first"—which is perfectly correct. To prove miracles *seriatim* is quite unnecessary. If one can be established then, *primâ facie*, all are established. To pick and choose among miracles is an absurdity. It shows that one is uneasy, that they do not altogether agree with one's digestion, and that there is a latent conviction that it is an unhealthy diet, and the less taken of it the better. In the case of the story of the saint who, after being beheaded, walked one hundred steps with his head under his arm, Voltaire said that he could believe ninety-nine of the steps; it was the first that he could not get over. Mr. Richards is obviously not a Voltaire; but the latter would have agreed with him that one miracle does prove the possibility of another—if you can only get the one to start with properly established.

This opening, however, is preliminary to the admonition that we of to-day are much like the disciples. We are surprised to the point of incredulity at the miraculous. We do not believe in miracles, and yet, says Mr. Richards, think of the miracles Christ has already worked for us. "Think of your mother's face, her voice, her smile. Your mother would have been less than a slave, an inferior creature, a creature without rights, if it were not for Jesus Christ! To-day woman is enthroned, a very Queen, in the home, and richly dowered with the strongest love that belongs to our humanity.....She owes it all to Jesus Christ. He has wrought the change. He has performed the miracle."

Probably Mr. Richards believes what he writes. If so, he betrays a most comprehensive non-

acquaintance with the facts of the case. And if he does not—well, in that case, my readers will be at no loss to discover an accurately descriptive epithet. But with the most charitable inclinations it is hard to really believe that a Christian minister can be unaware that both in the New Testament and in patristic and Church teaching woman always has been ranked as an inferior creature, one divinely ordered to be in submission to her lord and master, man. The passages proving this are too well known to need detailed quotation, but the following from Lecky, as bearing upon Christian teaching, may be cited. There are, he says, two or three beautiful descriptions of marriage among the early Christian writings, "but in general it would be difficult to conceive anything more coarse or more repulsive than the manner in which they regarded it.... Marriage was regarded almost exclusively in its lowest aspect. The tender love which it elicits, the holy and beautiful domestic qualities that follow in its train, were almost absolutely omitted from consideration." The only comment that need be added is to point to the fact that for centuries a very large proportion of the better natures in society were kept celibate by Christian influences.

One may, with a little charity, believe that Mr. Richards honestly believes women were benefited by Christianity. Preachers are so apt to take their history from text books compiled to bolster up certain prejudices, and so seldom capable of independent thinking that this may be so. But this will not make the statement credible. Another Christian, who did examine the subject independently, the Rev. Principal Donaldson, has left it on record that the Roman Marriage "was a community in all affairs, and within the home the utmost diligence, reverence, and harmony prevailed." Professor Dill, whose authority will hardly be questioned, also writes that, "The Roman matron, from the earliest times had secured to her by family religion a dignified and respected position.... In the early years of the Empire, her status.... both in law and in fact, really rose. There can be no doubt that the Roman lady of the better sort, without becoming less virtuous and respected, became far more accomplished and attractive. She became more and more the equal and companion of her husband, and her influence on public affairs became more decided." And in a later work, the same writer adds that under the Empire, female morality "was as high as the average morality of any age." And one may add that Christian England, eighteen centuries later saw women working underground, almost divested of clothing, dragging coal trucks like beasts of burden, to fill the pockets of their Christian employers. Certainly the Romans would never have served their women thus, nor can we conceive the Romans tolerating women working as those in the Cradly Heath chain works labored until only a few years ago.

From women, Mr. Richards passes to children. People wonder why children are so dear to them. It is because of Jesus. "Did a Roman father, two thousand years ago love his child? Not as you have been taught to love. If that Roman's child were sickly, or deformed, or even unwelcome, that father would abandon it upon the hill tops or in the forest shades. And no penalty fell upon the father. Childhood owes all its wealth to Jesus Christ." It is really almost incredible that a man should at this time of day publicly preach a doctrine that involves the statement that parental love for children practically began with Christianity. What is going to be done with Japan and Burma, said by observers to be a perfect children's paradise, it is difficult to see. Of course infanticide existed in Rome, but so it does in Christian England in 1906. But there are laws against it in England! Quite so, and so there were in Rome, although Mr. Richards either is not aware of the fact or does not care to mention it. Moreover, let me remind Mr. Richards of two things. First, we have in existence a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. It is an admirable institution, it brings some thousands of cases of ill-treatment to light every

year, and prevents even a larger number. But cannot anyone see that the mere existence of such an organisation is in itself sufficient proof of how little Christianity has done during its long history to really refine and elevate human nature.

And the second fact is this. Less than a hundred years ago the Factory System was in full swing. Nearly everyone knows, although nearly everyone appears to forget, that less than a century since, children as young as seven years were dragged from their miserable beds at six o'clock in the morning, and ill fed and ill clad kept at the looms until they dropped from exhaustion, and often beaten to work again for a shilling or two per week. And their employers were Christians and staunch supporters of church and chapel. Infanticide may have been practiced at Rome and elsewhere, but what was this? Why killing a new born child was an act of mercy at the side of the systematic doing to death of thousands of young children for the sake of mere gain. No other country in the world but a Christian country has ever done this. And in any just estimate of things this would stand out as the vilest of crimes against the individual and the race.

I must pass over Mr. Richards' fatuous claim that Christ worked a miracle in abolishing slavery—which is not yet abolished, and which was only partly given up by Christians when it was found more profitable to substitute another form of servitude that treats human beings as mere pieces of machinery. Or the claim that Christ worked a miracle in spreading peace when war prevailed, when the most warlike nations in existence are Christian nations, conducting many of their wars from the meanest of motives. Mr. Richards asks "is the lustful and licentious Turk to be made master of his passions? Is the Chinaman to be made decent, and the Indian truthful?" and answers, inferentially, yes, by Jesus. If so, one would ask why Jesus does not set to work here at home. Surely there is plenty of material to work on. And one has to learn that the Turk is more lustful and licentious than the Christian. It is true he is allowed by his religion to practise polygamy, but so is the Christian, if the opinions of great Christian writers is worth anything. And the difference between the two is largely, as an American writer put it, that while the Turk is allowed four legitimate wives, the Christian takes one legitimate spouse and half-a-dozen illegitimate ones. Or is the Chinaman less decent or the Indian really less truthful than the average Christian? The evidence is not so conclusive as Mr. Richards thinks. Would it not be well, anyhow, for Christian preachers to cease to brand others as sensual, indecent, and untruthful, merely because they differ from them in religion? Would it not be as well for them to try to judge human nature honestly, and represent historic facts fairly? It would, it is true, be quite a new departure in the pulpit, but as a novelty it might attract congregations. Anyway, I present the idea to Mr. Richards for what it is worth. And I really think it is deserving of consideration.

C. COHEN.

### "The Theological Outlook for the New Time."

READERS of the *Hibbert Journal* are aware that the editor, the Rev. L. P. Jacks, M.A., represents the extreme wing of the modern liberal school of theology. Between him and orthodoxy there is absolutely no affinity. His motto is reform, progress; and it is to the conversion of this motto into reality that he bends all his brilliant faculties. His recent article in the *Hibbert Journal*, entitled "Is the Moral Supremacy of Christendom in Danger?" must have caused great alarm among conservative theologians; and he must have reaped a plentiful harvest of abuse in consequence. When we remember that Mr. Jacks is a son-in-law of the distinguished Unitarian minister and literary critic, Mr. Stopford Brooke, we

are not surprised at the courage he displays in the expression of his convictions. It required an exceptionally brave man to assert, in a theological magazine, that Christianity is not essential to the production of the best and noblest type of character. "It is indeed the conviction of the writer," he said, "that the present hour is the fullest of hope for humanity which the world has seen for long ages. Not the least element of that hope is the prospect of a union between the forces of Christianity and Buddhism for the uplifting of mankind."

The emphatic note is that Christianity stands in need of reformation. As at present constructed it cannot adapt itself to the requirements of the new time. It has become obsolete. And is it not true in this case also, that "that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away?" In a brief article, entitled "The Theological Outlook of the New Time," which appears in a monthly publication called the *Seed Sower*, Mr. Jacks expresses the opinion "that religious changes are coming over the world with greater rapidity than ever." Then he adds:—

"We spoke of the last century as a century of change; but in my judgment its work was little more than preparation for what is soon to come, for what is coming even now. The movement is world-wide in its origin and world-wide in its operation. There is no sect or church, nor any group of such, which can say 'this is our doing.' A new breath of the spirit is animating the human heart all over the world, and none can tell whence it came nor whither it goeth. But its fruit, we believe, must be a higher morality and a purer religion."

With much in that extract I am in perfect agreement. I am fully convinced that the religious changes now taking place will make for a higher morality. But Mr. Jacks does not seem to have an adequate conception of the true nature of these changes. I regard them as inevitably making for the complete extinction of religion, while he thinks they are the means by which a purer religion will be produced. But what does Mr. Jacks mean by "a purer religion?" According to the apostle James, "pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows, and keep himself unspotted from the world"; that is to say, pure religion is high morality. But since Mr. Jacks distinguishes between religion and morality, we are bound to infer that by religion he means supernatural beliefs, with the rites and ceremonies to which they give rise; that is to say, religion implies theology. I maintain that the religious changes spoken of will eventuate in the total disappearance of religion.

Mr. Jacks believes that God is in the habit of visiting the earth, and that each time He does visit it there occurs a glorious revival of high morality and pure religion. There is something radically wrong about that belief. To say the very least, it is not very complimentary to the Supreme Being. Let Mr. Jacks reconsider this point. If pure religion and high morality spring up like summer flowers whenever God pays the earth a visit, the question naturally arises: Why, then, does God ever leave the earth, when He knows that his absence from it is so disastrous? And where was He during all the Dark Ages, when the theology which Mr. Jacks so cordially detests was being elaborated? Did He stay away through the whole of that dismal time? If He did, cannot He be justly held responsible for all the consequences? It seems to me that, if Mr. Jacks' view is correct, we are bound to regard God as the chief of sinners. If He were only here continuously we should have a perpetual paradise, being free from low morality and corrupt religion and debasing theology, but because of his frequent absences our world is more like a hell than a heaven, and it is He who is to blame.

Mr. Jacks rejoices in the fact that "the process of disintegration in the fabric of mediæval theology has now gone so far that large masses of masonry are continually falling." That is a true and faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance. But if God be retained some kind of theology must be held, for

theology means discourse or teaching concerning God. You cannot preach an unknown and unknowable Being. You are bound to describe the God in whom you believe in some form of words. In other terms, you cannot have God without manufacturing some system of theology. But where is the infallible judge of theologies? The world has always teemed with conflicting systems of belief; and it has been invariably the rule for the majority to pronounce their own theology orthodox, and for the minority to be tortured and slain for advocating damnable heresies. It is easy enough to denounce so-called mediæval dogmas; but who is competent to offer more credible ones? Has Mr. Jacks more reliable data on which to judge than Thomas Aquinas possessed? Is it not undeniably true that there are not, and never have been, any data in the realm of theology? Theology is composed of unverified and unverifiable hypotheses, of dogmas not one of which can be proved, or of mere beliefs which generate and then nourish certain emotions.

Mr. Jacks is of opinion that "men are so constituted that moral issues are always recognised as supreme the moment the mind is turned upon them," and that "there is no more effectual way of accomplishing a theological reformation than by compelling attention to some greater moral issue lying behind theological belief." Surely there is some strange confusion here. Is not God at once the source and the sanction of morality? If He is, then to acquire a true knowledge of him is our first and supreme duty. How else is it possible to discover what morality He requires of us? But if we are to give the pre-eminence to morality, as Mr. Jacks seems to think we should, what need of God is there at all? If our reformation is to begin on the moral plane, why should it ever seek to complete itself on any other zone? Is not the moral reformation sufficient? Why should we not have morality without God, just as once the world had God without or apart from morality? Mr. Jacks tells us that "the rise of Japan is helping us to forget our religious controversies by directing our attention to the greatness of the moral backbone of the nation..... The effect is to bring the moral issue into prominence, and to leave mere theological difference unnoticed." But the mischief is that as long as theology exists you must admit, either that some one system of it is true, while all other systems are more or less false, or that all systems alike are wholly untrue. Would it not be well, therefore, even in the interest of morality, to forget, not only religious controversy, but religion itself, which is the cause of all the bitter controversies, and to direct our undivided attention to the great moral issues by which we are now confronted in daily life?

The idea of reforming theology is simply preposterous, because the doctrines of Christianity are either a revelation from heaven or human inventions. If they are a revelation from heaven even to suggest that they should be modified is to be guilty of blasphemy. Jesus Christ claimed to be the Revealer of the Father, and the Epistles describe him as "God manifested in the flesh." The revelation of the Father which Jesus was and made was entrusted to the twelve Apostles, who were commissioned to make it known to the whole world. In themselves the Apostles were ignorant and fallible men; but their Lord and Master assured them that, after his resurrection and ascension, and in his name, the Father would send to them the Holy Spirit, who would abide with them and their successors to the end of the world. "He shall teach you all things," he said, "and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you." At another time He said: "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth." Well, the Church was to be the Lamb's bride, the body of Christ, the house of God, the medium of the Spirit's operation. If this is true, if Christ knew what He was talking about, if his promise has been fulfilled and all his disciples, especially his ordained ministers, are Spirit-filled, what a gross insult to the Holy

Trinity any attempt to reform theology must be! Such an attempt involves a charge of conspiring to deceive and mislead mankind against the three Supernatural Persons. But if the Christian doctrines were not revealed from heaven, what is the use of meddling with them at all? It would be a pure waste of time and energy.

Mr. Jacks must be aware that ever since the Revival of Learning in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, theology has been in a slow process of annihilation. For four or five hundred years the foundations of the Christian Church have been in a perilous condition. As is well-known, the triumph of Christianity in the fourth century resulted in the complete arrest of the spirit of scientific inquiry, and in the forcible suppression of all fair criticism. In the fifteenth century the order of things was reversed. The re-birth of Science, after being in a state of suspended animation for a thousand years, carried with it the dethronement and final destruction of Christianity. The Renaissance meant the struggle for the emancipation of the Reason, the crowning of the Intellect, and the naturalisation of the Heart of Europe. It was an effort, often unconsciously, to re-find and re-endow this world and its life, the body and its organs, to break up ecclesiastical tyranny, to abolish all forms of religious authority, and to restore Nature to her rightful position. The Renaissance covered the period of transition from the mediæval to the modern world. What the mediæval world craved for was faith, more faith and fuller, faith all-conquering; what the modern world yearns after is knowledge, more knowledge and fuller, knowledge all-conquering and all-healing. In the Dark Ages, knowledge was under a ban because of its inherent hostility to faith. In other words, faith crushed knowledge to death in order to save its own head. In the modern world, it is faith that is in retreat, because it cannot bear the light of knowledge. There is no resisting knowledge, when it has gained volume and momentum. Already, its flood has swept away a large number of doctrines that were previously considered essential to the Faith. Mr. Jacks advocates "a theological reformation" and believes that it is now in progress. He is quite mistaken. What is now in progress is, not "theological reformation," but theological retreat after colossal defeat. Mr. Jacks speaks of the religious changes which are now "coming over the world with greater rapidity than ever"; but does he not know that all the theological changes made have been forced upon the Church by the irresistible march of natural knowledge? It was Astronomy and Geology that gave the lie to the Genesis Cosmogony, not the spirit of reform within the Church. It was Evolution that discredited the Biblical story of man's creation and fall, not the growing wisdom of theologians. It was the comparative study of religions that brought Christianity down to the level of the others, not the enlarged discernment of modern divines. Mr. Jacks admits that large masses of masonry are continually falling from "the fabric of mediæval theology." As a matter of fact, however, the whole fabric, the theological house the erection of which extended over so many painful ages, is now a confused heap of ruins. What theologians are attempting at present is, not the reformation, but the transformation, of theology, not the restating of old dogmas, but the formulation of new ones to suit the new time, not the re-building of the ancient house, but the erection of another on a different foundation. In other words, they are trying to make a new religion, and seeking to win acceptance for it in the world by calling it Christianity. In other words still, they are unconsciously lending a helping-hand to the Secularists. The current of evolution is at last irrevocably set towards Humanism, and, as Mr. Jacks says, "we are all in the condition of being carried along by this current."

J. T. LLOYD.

### Mr. Gould's View of Christianity.

MR. GOULD is quite impenitent and lays about him with much vigor with his literary weapons, and although he has a poor opinion of my literary taste, I must pay him the tribute of saying that I always enjoy the literary charm of his writings, even when I utterly dissent from the view he advocates.

By the way, I wish that Mr. Gould had made it clear that he was dealing with the literary character of the *Imitation*; I quite understood that he was dealing with the teaching of that work and I criticised it accordingly.

Mr. Gould says that in regard to Christianity I am "timid" and "intolerant"—rather an unusual combination. I wish he would make up his mind to one charge or the other. In the meanwhile, I can assure Mr. Gould that I have no wish to warn him off the Freethought premises or to prevent him from propagating his views wherever he chooses. I am afraid that when Mr. Gould charged me with intolerance he wrote under the influence of irritation and was less than just. I claim for every man the same rights I exercise myself.

I am also accused of raking up morbid details from the life of St. Francis. I did nothing of the kind. If Mr. Gould has made the slightest acquaintance with the lives of the saints of the middle ages, he must know that these things constituted the *normal* actions of their lives. Most of them commenced business by renouncing their parents or their wives and children; their regular practice was to live in a state of semi-starvation on the coarsest food, and wear the coarsest clothing—believing that by so doing they would reap the reward of a hundredfold in the future life, as promised by Christ to those who "forsook all" to follow him. I say deliberately, that this Christianity which is held up to our admiration as the religion *par excellence* of altruism, is in reality the most utterly selfish of all the religions that ever existed.

Having cleared the way so far, we will come to the real bone of contention. Mr. Gould believes that "Christianity continued the evolution commenced by the more ancient cultures." On the contrary, I hold that Christianity, by concentrating the minds of men upon a future life, caused them to neglect and condemn the affairs of this life, and to hold that nothing was worth a thought except how to escape from eternal misery and win eternal bliss, and it was this despicability and detachment from the earthly life, which caused the dreadful night of the dark ages.

As a matter of demonstrable fact, the Church hated and despised the science and culture of ancient Greece and Rome. "What," asked Tertullian, "has Jerusalem to do with Athens? What connection is there between the Academy and the Church?" And he roundly declared that "We want no researches beyond Jesus Christ." This was the attitude of the whole Church. St. Jerome had a vision in which he was flogged by angels for reading the Greek classics. Far from continuing the evolution of the ancient culture, the Church looked upon it with aversion and contempt, and when Mr. Gould asks: "Whence did the beneficent science and liberalism and humanitarianism emerge," if not from the Church? I reply, not from the monkish cell but from the revival in Europe of the pagan science and culture preserved by the Mohammedans, who, says Dr. Tylor, the great anthropologist, not only preserved it but "even added to its store." In certain articles contributed to this journal, I have endeavored, in plain language and without literary adornment—to which I lay no claim whatever—to prove this view of the case, and when Mr. Gould came gracefully trailing his coat tails across these pages, I considered that to keep silence would imply assent to his views; hence my diatribe.

Then as to the Church being the protector of those oppressed by brutal princes. Mr. Gould has read history to different purpose than I have read

it. I find that the Church did not care a fig how much the people were oppressed so long as their rulers acknowledged the supremacy of, and bowed the knee to, her representative the Pope. The quarrel between King John and the Pope was not over his treatment of his subjects, but over the election of a new primate, and when at last John gave way, the Pope again supported him and left his subjects to put up with him as best they could. It is an illustration of what Mr. Herbert Spencer has pointed out in his work *Ecclesiastical Institutions*:—

"The chief concern of a sacerdotal system is to maintain formal subordination to a deity, as well as to itself as his agency, and that the ordering of life according to the precepts of the professed religion, is quite a secondary matter; but we have shown that such a right ordering of life is little insisted on even where insistence does not conflict with ecclesiastical supremacy."

No doubt it sometimes happened that while the two robbers, Church and State, were quarreling, honest men came by their rights, but that is no credit to the Church. I hope some day to illustrate this point more fully.

If I believed that Christianity had really benefited mankind, as Mr. Gould supposes, I would not spend my few leisure hours in attacking it. I believe with Professor Clifford that—

"When we love our brother for the sake of our brother we help all men to grow in the right; but when we love our brother for the sake of somebody else who is likely to damn our brother, it very soon comes to burning him alive for his soul's sake. When men respect human life for the sake of man, tranquility, order, and progress go hand in hand; but those who only respected human life because God had forbidden murder have set their mark upon Europe in fifteen centuries of blood and fire" (*Lectures and Essays*, page 384).

W. MANN.

### Who is the Father of Lies?

CHRISTIANS are always asserting that the Devil is the father of lies, and that "he was a liar in the beginning." If we consult the Bible, however, we shall find that "the inspired book," far from giving the palm for lying to His Satanic Majesty, actually gives it to the other party. Hear the words:—

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. ii. 16, 17).

In spite of this solemn declaration by the "Lord God," Adam had the hardihood and temerity to live to the ripe old age of 930 years, "and then he died." This was a lie to begin with, uttered to frighten Adam into obedience; just as if God, being omniscient, did not know beforehand whether Adam would obey or not. The oft-repeated quibble about the death mentioned signifying spiritual death is absolutely discountenanced by the context. The Devil, as we know, tempted the woman, saying: "Yea, hath God said ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" And Eve, having repeated the command God had given them, the serpent says, presumably in Hebrew:—

"Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

That this was the simple, sober truth, though uttered by His Satanic Majesty, and that this reason for God's command to the first couple, was the sole and only reason, is proved by God's remarkable soliloquy (Gen. iii. 22):—

"And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever—"

This is a verse of the inspired volume which is left for Freethinkers to quote. It is banished from church, chapel, and street-corner; from park, press, and pulpit. There is no need to delve into the bowels of the earth to consult the rocks; no need to peer into antiquity to study the tablets; no need to quote authorities in order to refute this "sacred volume." The worst enemy of the Bible is itself. Here is a plain record. God first of all forbids Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Every other fruit the man was allowed to eat—evidently the tree of life included; God seemingly not possessing the foreknowledge that the man would disobey the order. As a reason for this

prohibition God tells Adam that on the day he eats the fruit he will surely die. The Devil comes along and throws doubt upon God's statement, hinting that God's real reason is that they (the couple) will be as gods, and know good and evil. First of all this turns out to be absolutely true; for immediately they (Adam and Eve) had tasted the fruit "their eyes were opened, and they saw that they were naked."

The Lord God cursed the man, condemning him to "eat bread in the sweat of his face," thus throwing a text to employers not to spare the backs of their wage-slaves. It was a good, healthy, all-round religious curse; and after it was all over, and God had cooled himself down, he admits to his comrades—the plurals "us" and "gods" always being employed in the Old Testament, Jehovah only being the "Lord God"—the truth of the Devil's statement, in the words of the passage quoted above. But if the real reason for the prohibition of the eating of the fruit was that the partakers thereof would be as gods to know good from evil, then God told Adam a lie when he said "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," especially as he must have known that Adam would defy him and live nearly a thousand years. Therefore the only conclusion we can come to by reading the Bible itself is that the "Lord God," whoever he may be, and not the Devil, is the Father of Lies.

The most curious feature of the Bible is this, that it represents most of its heroes as notorious liars, and its God as the chief one. Search the book from cover to cover, and not once will the Devil be found to have lied. I could multiply these instances indefinitely, but shall only skim lightly over the surface; and as we go on it will be seen that not alone, according to the Bible, was God Almighty the Father of Lies, but he was the most persistent liar throughout his dealings with his people.

The next we come to is the lie, the inexcusable lie, the unnecessary lie that Jehovah not only told, but told one of his creatures to tell. Now I know many people who do not hesitate to tell a "harmless falsehood" in order to further their own ends, but I know but very few parents who would not hesitate to teach their children the art of lying. Thus man is better than his God.

"I Am," otherwise Jehovah, commissioned his servant Moses to tell the Jews:—

"And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction into the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, into a land flowing with milk and honey." (Ex. iii. 7).

But to Pharaoh Moses was to speak as follows:—

"And they shall hearken to thy voice; and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the King of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, the Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God." (Ex. iii. 18).

This deception was practised upon Pharaoh throughout the period of the Ten Plagues. God had sent his people into slavery in order to punish them for their idolatry—he being "a jealous God"; and now he punishes the Egyptians for carrying out his own design, by luring them to their destruction in the Red Sea, whereas he could simply have softened Pharaoh's heart, instead of hardening it, as it is said that he did. And this is the God still worshiped by Christian Europe!

The last instance of divine lying I shall mention is the story of the Prophet of the Lord, Micaiah. This prophet is called before King Ahab, and the inference which the inspired writer wishes his readers to draw is that the seer was the only true one amongst the king's prophets. These are his fearless words:—

"And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now, therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee."

Here, again, as we have seen, the Lord, in order to lure poor King Ahab to his doom, goes a very roundabout way to do it. He has a consultation in heaven, and one spirit advises this, another that, until one offers to go forth and be a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, and is sent out that errand, succeeding in every case but one. And so henceforth, whenever a Christian is heard to lie, let him be excused, for he worships a lying God, and the poor creature thinks it his greatest duty to aspire to be godlike.

J. K. MAAGAARD.

## Acid Drops.

What a rare old joker Dr. Clifford is! The *Tribune* of Monday printed another "Dr. Clifford's explanation." Once more the Dan Leno of the Passive Resistance movement protested against "the State's intrusion into the realms of personal religious conviction." It is said that liars eventually believe their own lies, and perhaps Dr. Clifford has said this so often that he fancies he means it. What he does mean, of course, is that the State should "intrude" just as far as he approves. Church of England religion in a State school is an intrusion. Nonconformist religion is quite legitimate.

"Ye are the salt of the earth," said Jesus Christ—and the Leeds Passive Resisters know whom he meant. One of them told the Leeds magistrates recently: "We Passive Resisters, who are the salt of the earth, are nearing the land of Canaan, where the wicked will cease from troubling us." The usual order was made, and if this elect gentleman doesn't pay up he will find that his land of Canaan has stone walls—and no grapes. We may add that his Bible memory is a bit mixed. It was not in the land of Canaan that the wicked were to cease troubling—but in the grave. Our Leeds friend will doubtless find peace *there*.

The *Tribune* is to be congratulated on pointing out a grave difficulty in the way of Canon Henson's policy with regard to a "compromise" between the Church and Nonconformity. Canon Henson wants "definite Christian instruction" in the State schools; he also wants it to be "entrusted to religious teachers"; but he stipulates that every teacher shall have a statutory right to decline giving it. Whereupon the *Tribune* remarks: "It would be meaningless to secure every teacher from the necessity of teaching a given creed and yet leave to every body of managers or every educational authority the unfettered right to prefer teachers who would impart certain religious views." Quite so. As a matter of fact, you cannot have religious teaching without religious tests.

Dr. Macnamara, M.P., is on the warpath again in the *Daily Chronicle*. He begins his special article on "The Education Act" by stating that the mandate of the country to the new House of Commons is "conspicuously clear"—and that it is "Genuine Popular Control: No Religious Tests." And this is how Dr. Macnamara interprets the "conspicuously clear" mandate. He proposes that "every public elementary school be opened every morning with a simple family religious service and lesson based upon the elemental truths of Christianity as revealed in the Bible." Really now! For a clever man Dr. Macnamara is terribly foolish. He ought to know by this time—and he would know if he had any serious beliefs of his own—that the "elemental truths of Christianity" are disputed amongst the Churches. Some of them, even, are not taught in the Bible at all. Catholics and Churchmen regard the doctrine of the Trinity as "elemental," but it is not taught in the New Testament, except in the "three that bear witness" text, which is admitted to be a forgery, or at least an interpolation. The fact is that the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, is the religion of Nonconformists; and it is this religion that Dr. Macnamara proposes to establish by law in the schools of this country. And why? Simply because he owes his seat to the Nonconformists.

Dr. Macnamara mentions Churchmen, Nonconformists, Catholics, and Jews, and says he is anxious to satisfy them all—which is about the silliest saying that ever came from the lips of man. Non-Christians he does not mention at all. Perhaps he means that they have no rights in the matter, or that their rights may be disregarded. Which is only another piece of silliness—as he will find out in time.

Once more Dr. Macnamara tells the Christian Churches that if they cannot agree there is no other alternative but Secular Education. This he calls "a counsel of despair." It would keep the sweet and holy influence of religion away from "the hopeless scraps of humanity in our slums." They have nothing else worth living for; and for God's sake let them have religion. It will do instead of food, clothes, shelter, and decency.

After making all sorts of statements about the Education difficulty, some of them flatly at variance with others, Mr. Birrell now refuses to be drawn any further. During his quiet time for reflection we hope he will remember his principles. There is an old maxim that honesty is the best policy—which politicians are always forgetting.

A member of Kelvinside United Free Church, Glasgow, writes to the *Herald* complaining that Dr. Ross Taylor's sermon, the Sunday morning after the local parliamentary elections, was a partisan political diatribe, and more like a South Sea Islands war dance than an exhibition of Christian charity. The indignant bucket under the pump of the reverend gentleman's eloquence calls his discourse "a prostitution of the pulpit," and states that "several of the congregation walked out." This complainant has our sympathy. At the same time, he should remember that the Scottish pulpit was always apt to be political. When a man has an audience at his mercy he may be expected to consult his own feelings instead of theirs. The remedy is to leave the church and go to a more eligible place of amusement.

Anthony Comstock is at work again in America. We mean that he is at work again in front of the footlights, for he is always at work behind the scenes. He has secured the imprisonment of Moses Harman at Chicago for editing *Lucifer*—a paper devoted to the discussion of sex problems from the point of view of personal liberty. Many of the ideas of Mr. Harman and his contributors do not command our assent; sometimes we think these gentlemen are terribly mistaken; but we cheerfully recognise that they have the same right to their opinions that we have to differ from them. Anthony Comstock and the American Post Office, however, think otherwise. They regard all discussion of sex problems as "obscene," and they have got Mr. Harman sentenced to a year's imprisonment for "obscenity." This venerable old man, who has spent his life in advocating public reforms, as he understands them, is once more sent to herd with the lowest criminals because his ideas are not admired by Anthony Comstock and the American Post Office. There is not the slightest suggestion that he has used obscene language. It is his *ideas* that are objectionable. He is imprisoned, therefore, on account of his opinions—which is a flagrant outrage on the first principles of the American Constitution. But what does that matter, when a pious, tyrannical majority is determined to persecute those who do not share its prejudices?

In view of Mr. Harman's fresh imprisonment it is idle to call the United States a free country. The only real freedom there is freedom to agree with the majority. It is immoral and rebellious to have ideas of your own.

Really erotic, suggestive, and lascivious publications go through the United States mails unchecked. Such things may be dangerous to public virtue, but they are not dangerous to the settled order of things. A paper like *Lucifer* is supposed to be dangerous in that way, so its editor must go to prison, and various issues of it must be "held up" by the Post Office. That is to say, the Post Office, which is the great newspaper distributing agency in the United States, confiscates every mailed copy of any issue of the paper which contains anything they choose to say they will not carry. One of these confiscated numbers has reached us—probably because it was addressed to a person in a foreign country. Looking through it we find a paragraph, couched in perfectly respectable language, criticising President Roosevelt's recent utterances on the "crime" of women having fewer children than he believes they ought to have. The writer of this paragraph dared to criticise the President; and the Post Office protects the President's infallibility by refusing to carry the criticism. Yet the country in which this irresponsible and degrading censorship obtains is always boasting of its "freedom."

Much as we dissent from Moses Harman in many things, we agree with him that liberty of speech is more important than the accuracy of any man's opinions, and we admire the tenacity with which he cleaves to his indefeasible personal rights. We feel that his imprisonment is a disgrace to the country which acknowledges him as a citizen without affording him its protection. And we hope he will receive whatever financial support is necessary from Americans who understand that liberty is far from being the same thing as a wide extension of privilege. Liberty means the right of every man, bounded only by the equal right of others.

The San Francisco *Examiner* published the account given by an eye-witness, who was on board one of the rescue steamers, of the closing scene on board the wrecked *Valencia*. Twenty-five survivors, five of them women, were clinging to the fore topmast. They were singing "Nearer, my God, to Thee," when the mast collapsed, before the rescue party could reach them, and they all disappeared in the sea. It was "Nearer, my God, to Thee" with a vengeance. What a wonderful answer to prayer! With what divine love "Providence" looked down upon their affliction! How it

drowned them in the very nick of time, just as relief was within measurable distance!

Heaven is getting less attractive than ever. According to Evangelist Dunn, who has been soul-saving at Hawick,—“there will be one hundred ladies in heaven for one man.” What a prospect for the ladies! And perhaps it is too much of a good thing for the men.

An Indian Territory editor (we see by an American exchange) let out at a dead subscriber in the following fashion: “Deceased was a mild-mannered man with a mouth for whisky. He came here at night with another man's wife, and joined the church at the first opportunity. He owed us seven dollars on the paper. You could hear him pray six blocks. He died singing, ‘Jesus Paid It All.’ He never paid anything himself.”

Heirs are contesting the will of the late Francis A. Palmer, who for fifty years was president of the Broadway bank and bequeathed the bulk of a large estate to found the “Francis Asbury Palmer Fund,” to be spent in church work. The ground of the contest is that the old man was under the influence of the clergymen who were made the trustees of the fund, and that owing to his great age he was not of sound mind at the time of making the will. The testimony shows that at the time the will was made ministers were buzzing about Palmer like flies. They had a meeting at his residence every Monday night, and one of them slept in the house, so that if undue influence was not brought to bear on the testator it was no fault of the ministers. It is a question whether any man is in his right mind who wills money or property to the church to become a public burden through exemption from taxation.—*Truthseeker* (New York.)

St. Catherine's Mission, Birmingham, has been circulating some advertisement cards stating that: “Samuel Hunt was at St. Catherine's last Sunday at the 10.15 p.m. late service. He gave himself to Christ. On Wednesday last he died.” This is called “a solemn fact,” but the moral of it is not stated. We suppose it is “Don't give yourself to Christ unless you are in a hurry to die.”

Mr. T. H. Aston, the Christian Evidence agent at Birmingham, still comes up smiling at the old business. He writes to the local *Mail* protesting against the idea of abolishing the Blasphemy Laws, which he says are needed in order to punish those who “ridicule, degrade, and vilify the King of Kings.” We suppose he means Jehovah. Well now, Mr. Robert Blatchford has called Jehovah a blood-thirsty savage, and Count Tolstoy has called Jehovah a terrible monster of wickedness. Mr. Aston should start a prosecution of these vilifiers of his King of Kings—or their publishers. Why confine his Christian charity to the editor of the *Freethinker*? We assure him we don't want a monopoly of it. We could spare the lot.

“Religious Freedom” replied to “Honest Doubt” in the *Morning Leader*, pointing out that his letter “emphasises the urgent necessity for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, and demonstrates that the fires of persecution are not dead, but merely banked up.” By editorial fiat that closed the correspondence—and Freethought had the last word for once.

In the *Tribune* obituary notice of the late George Jacob Holyoake, reference was made to his friendship with the late Rev. Hugh Price Hughes. “At the time,” our new contemporary said, “when Mr. Hughes was being criticised by leading Secularists for his story of the converted Atheist, Mr. Holyoake rallied to his defence.” Exactly. It couldn't be better put. But did our contemporary feel the full force of its own words? If so, it was a very odd eulogy.

The old-fashioned prejudice against juvenile education no longer exists in the rustic mind. But a correspondent remembers hearing a Tory farmer forbidding the village schoolmaster to teach his son to write. “You may learn 'im to read,” he said, “but I won't 'ave 'im taught writing. When lads is learnt to write,” he explained, “there's no 'olding 'em. They gets to writing ‘Reform for ever!’ and suchlike blasphemous nonsense all over the walls.”—*The Tribune*.

While what Carlyle called “the condition of England question” is clamoring for solution the clergy are busily overhauling their stock of antiquities. A crowded meeting of the clergy in the Archdeaconry of London has just been considering the Athanasian Creed. One of them, the Rev.

R. S. C. Laffan, said that it could not be understood without a lot of thinking. We quite agree with him. But very little thinking is required to believe it. The less the better.

King Alphonso of Spain, the newspapers say, is going to marry an English princess, as soon as the courting is over. He is a Catholic, and she is a Protestant, but she is going to change her religion (according to report) before the marriage. Then they will both be Catholics—as the king and queen of a Catholic country should be. That is how the matter is managed in the “hupper suckles.” The religion of these exalted persons is a matter of policy. They change their religion as they change their clothes, for reasons of ceremony and state. It is only the common people who are expected to take religion seriously. And the worst of it is they do.

Beatrice Fone, a girl of eleven, was put into the witness-box at Stratford Police Court. She said she did not know what the New Testament was and had never read the Bible, and the magistrates decided that they could not put her on oath. Still, they might have got the truth out of her, if that was what they wanted. It is a funny idea (to those who really know the book) that reading the Bible is a guarantee of accuracy.

Messrs. Dobson and Mallet, the two members for Plymouth, being interrogated *re* the Blasphemy Laws, on the basis of our two questions, replied as follows. Mr. Mallet said: “I am prepared to give a favorable answer to both questions.” Mr. Dobson said that the Blasphemy Laws are “now only put in operation against persons who use indecent expressions against religious beliefs.” Mr. Dobson should have brains enough to see that his use of the word “indecent” in this connection is a shocking “indecentcy.”

Mr. W. R. Rutherford, M.P. (Conservative), in the West Derby division of Liverpool, replying to Mr. H. Percy Ward, expressed himself as follows in relation to the Blasphemy Laws: “If it should be found that there are any Statutes which are creating a hardship to-day I should be prepared to vote for their repeal. What, however, I would point out to you and your Society very strongly is this, that I should think it very wrong for anyone in the presence say of Mr. Quilliam, who is known to be a conscientious Mohammedan, to create animosity or show intolerance or otherwise behave badly by scoffing at and seeking to bring into contempt the Mohammedan religion. The same thing applies to Roman Catholics. I am opposed to processions down the streets where they largely dwell and observations being made in their presence calculated to cast ridicule upon objects and doctrines which they hold dear. The proper spirit to cultivate is that of toleration and regard for the opinions and views of other people. So long as Secularists confine their operations to advocating their own views in such a way as not to distress other people, raise religious animosity, and become a cause of offence to their neighbors, then I think they ought to be allowed to entertain those views in perfect freedom and peace; but it is only when one section of the people resort to conduct which interferes with the comfort and well-being of others that they ought to be brought under any legal restraints. I trust I have made my position quite clear.”

Yes, Mr. Rutherford *has* made his position quite clear. His position is that he does not want to say Ay or No to that plain question about the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws. We must be pardoned for saying that his reply is a windy rigmarole. What he has to consider is not the ethics of controversy, but the practical question whether Freethinkers, and Freethinkers only, should be subject to restraints, and liable to penalties, in respect to the dissemination of their views on religion. This is the only real question at issue.

It is all very well for Mr. Rutherford to talk in this amiable way about interfering with the “comfort” of people—meaning, of course, *religious* people. What on earth has “comfort” to do with the matter? Is the “comfort” of Liberals respected by Conservatives, or the “comfort” of Conservatives by Liberals? Why should all the burden of respect for “comfort” fall upon the Freethinkers? Controversialists and propagandists are bound to interfere with the “comfort” of orthodox people. This is true in every direction. Of course it is wrong to force yourself into people's houses, or cause disorder in other people's meeting-places; but Freethinkers do not want to do anything of the sort; all they claim is the right enjoyed by others—namely, to state their own case in their own way in their own meeting-places and in their own publications. That is all they desire. And they would be cowards to be satisfied with less.



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, February 4, Milton Hall, Daulby-street, Liverpool: 3,  
"What has Christianity Done for Russia?" 7, "The Morality  
of Nature and the Nature of Morality."

### To Correspondents.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—February 11, Liverpool.  
March 4, Glasgow.

RIDGWAY FUND.—Frank Smith £1, H. Arnold 1s., Manchester  
2s. 6d., G. F. H. McCluskey 5s., M. W. R. 5s. Mr. Partridge  
(183 Vauxhall-road, Birmingham) also acknowledges: E.  
Stephens 2s. 6d., C. J. Whitwell 2s. 6d., A. Deane 5s.

F. RICH.—Thanks for the cutting, although we had already seen  
it. It was not in the *National Reformer*, but in the *Freethinker*,  
that you read the exposure of the late Hugh Price Hughes's  
"Atheist Shoemaker" story. We are now forced to take the  
matter up again—and it will be an eye-opener to the new  
generation of readers that has arisen since that old battle was  
fought.

J. GREEVES FISHER.—The matter was dealt with in the *Freethinker*  
some weeks ago. Thanks all the same.

W. C. SPEDDING.—"Rich" indeed! Mischief was intended, but  
a fresh opportunity was afforded us of doing a good (though  
painful) stroke of work.

A. FREEMAN.—If the late Mr. G. J. Holyoake did end a letter of  
congratulation to Mr. John Burns with the text: "Lord, now  
lettest thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for  
mine eyes have seen thy salvation"—he was, of course, only  
speaking facetiously. Some people need a surgical operation  
before they can see a joke. They take everything as if it were  
an affidavit.

GEORGE WEIR.—An excellent and opportune letter of yours in the  
*Yorkshire Evening Post*.

C. F. S. BARKER.—Thanks for the cutting from the *Liverpool  
Echo* containing your letter correcting the editorial statement  
that Mr. Holyoake was "the last person imprisoned in England  
for alleged Atheism." Freethinkers all over the country should  
correct this statement, if possible, wherever they see it. Pleased  
to hear that you liked our article *re* Maeterlinck and Mr. Stead  
so much, and that you "have never seen the relation of Reli-  
gion to Morals so clearly and powerfully expressed before."  
We value the "clearly" most in your praise; for words are so  
often used to darken thought on such subjects.

W. H. SPIVEY.—Mr. Weir's letter was a good one. Perhaps, as  
you suggest, the last sentence was not strictly correct, but it  
seems near enough for the purpose in view. Really the failure  
of the Leeds prosecution was due to the attitude of the Stipen-  
diary Magistrate, who has since published a *Life of Jeremy  
Bentham*, which shows the real direction of his intellectual  
sympathies. Before any ordinary Magistrate, all three defen-  
dants would probably have been committed for trial at the  
Assizes.

HARRY ARNOLD.—Delighted to learn that your wife, who was  
rather prominent in chapel work when she married you, now  
enjoys leaving the *Freethinker* in the tram, or having a dis-  
cussion with a Christian, as much as you do yourself. Securing  
the adherence of women to our cause in this way is real progress  
—far more so than anything that can be done by political  
machinery, and noisy meetings, and partisan voting. The only  
revolution worth troubling about is the *internal* one. The  
*external* one is as sure to follow that as the day follows the  
night. With regard to the late Mr. Holyoake's scriptural  
quotation, we have already told another correspondent that it  
was obviously a pleasantry.

G. CROOKSON.—It was impossible to change either of the subjects  
of our Manchester lectures, which had been billed for a week  
when we received your letter. Pleased to hear that it was the  
late Mr. Holyoake who first turned your thoughts from the  
strict path of orthodoxy, and that now you are three score years  
and ten you don't feel like going near the old path again. Don't  
imagine, by the way, that you intrude in writing to us. We  
are always glad to hear from the real "saints."

GEORGE JACOB.—Charles Bradlaugh did not expect to overcome the  
police at the House of Commons. He never expected that  
physical violence would be used against him. When it was used,  
and so brutally, he exerted his herculean strength against it.  
To answer your other question would need a lot of space. But  
we are not committed to the theory that Charles Bradlaugh was  
infallible.

L. DESTEFANIS.—Thanks for your kind intention, but we are not  
going to trouble ourselves about the fellow.

A. BROOKS.—See paragraph. Thanks.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

H. Y. E.—We do not know of any Freethought lectures in the  
Watford district. There are some occasionally on Sundays in  
North London at the Stanley Hall, Junction-road. See special  
announcements from time to time in our columns. Pleased to  
hear that you find the *Freethinker* "quite refreshing" and look  
forward to it every week.

J. PARTRIDGE (Birmingham) writes: "Our treasurer, Mr. Pitt,  
through the generosity of Miss Baker, represented our Branch  
at the late Mr. Holyoake's funeral."

NEW READER.—You will find the new one-volume edition of  
Byron's poetry, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, and pub-  
lished by John Murray, the best for your purpose. It contains  
everything yet printed, in verse, from the poet's pen, with  
adequate footnotes; and the Editorial Memoir is excellent. The  
best Shelley is the "Oxford," edited very thoroughly by  
Thomas Hutchinson. Byron's prose (chiefly letters) is not yet  
gathered into a single volume; neither is Shelley's; but such  
editions are really wanted, and would command a sale, if the  
publishers only woke up to present-day necessities.

THERE was a mistake in last week's *Freethinker*. Our paragraph  
conveyed the idea that Mr. Astbury, K.C., the Liberal candi-  
date, who was so unsound *re* the Blasphemy Laws, was not  
successful at Southport. We regret to say he *was*.

F. C. B.—Thanks for your public correction of the *Birmingham  
Daily Mail's* remarkable statement that the late Mr. Holyoake's  
"imprisonment on the charge of atheism" led to the destruc-  
tion of the "last of the constitutional religious disabilities." If  
newspapers are as ill-informed on other matters as they are in  
this, the readers who trust in them are to be pitied.

H. SPENCE.—We note the West Ham Branch's vote of congratu-  
lation to Mr. J. M. Robertson on his "glorious victory on the  
Tyneside," and Mrs. Bonner's statement at your meeting that  
"Atheism would be represented in the House of Commons  
again for the first time since the death of her father, the late  
Charles Bradlaugh." We were not aware that Mr. Robertson  
was going to Westminster to represent Atheism. Charles  
Bradlaugh was always careful to explain that he did not re-  
present Atheism there.

J. BROUGH.—Thanks for cuttings. Glad you were so delighted  
with Mr. Foote's evening lecture at Manchester.

B. FORD.—If Mr. Simon, the successful Liberal candidate at  
Walthamstow, answered both the Blasphemy Law questions  
satisfactorily—that is something, isn't it? He could hardly be  
quite so straight on Secular Education with all those political  
Nonconformists around him.

D. MALINGER.—"Honest Doubt," the author of the infamous  
letter you cut out and send us from the *Morning Leader*, did  
well in concealing his name. He is probably a disguised Chris-  
tian. Swinburne's works, which are expensive, are published by  
Chatto and Windus. Of course Milton and Longfellow were  
both religious. But what of that? What is your friend's  
point?

E. NEVILLE.—It appears, after all, that what Mr. Holyoake wrote  
was a parody of the original; not "mine eyes have seen  
thy salvation" but "mine eyes have seen *social* salvation."  
Mr. Holyoake had no "profound belief in immortality." He  
had none at all. The real truth is that Christians have good  
(or bad) inventions. For the rest, thanks.

T. R. ALMOND, eighty-five years of age, says he has read the  
*Freethinker* from the first copy, and hopes to read it for some  
time yet.

W. MARKHAM.—You are quite right. The Freethought party, as  
such, stands for certain definite principles. It is not an adjunct  
to the Liberal or any other political party.

G. SCOTT AND E. ENSLEY.—Received.

C. D. S.—Accept our best thanks for both letters.

M. W. R.—Yes, there is "a Freethinkers' Benevolent Fund at  
present." The N. S. S. secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, will send  
you particulars on application.

J. ROBERTS.—Exactly so. Mr. Speaker Peel ended the Bradlaugh  
struggle in the House of Commons by letting Charles Bradlaugh  
take the oath and his seat, and refusing to allow any opposition.  
And the worst irony of it was that Bradlaugh's bitterest enemies,  
including Lord Randolph Churchill, were then sitting upon the  
Government benches. Pleased that Mr. W. P. Byles, at  
Manchester, answered both Blasphemy Law questions satis-  
factorily.

T. E. ELWYN.—Thanks for your encouraging letter. Paper shall  
be sent as desired.

N. C. HIMMEL.—A reply at a public meeting or by letter would be  
preferable.

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 Pub-  
lishing Company, Limited, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-  
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4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms  
for repetitions.

## Sugar Plums.

Liverpool "saints" will note that Mr. Foote delivers two lectures in their city to-day (Feb. 4). Not in the Alexandra Hall this time, but in the Milton Hall, Daulby-street, not far distant from the Branch's old quarters. We hope all who stand by the N. S. S. Branch, and have any good will towards the N. S. S. President, will rally round the old flag on this occasion, and see that the hall is packed at both meetings.

In spite of so many counter attractions in the city, Mr. Foote had fine audiences on Sunday at Manchester—the finest he has had there for many years. There was a quite exceptionally large afternoon meeting, and in the evening the hall was crowded in every part, even the standing room being occupied right to the outer doors. Mr. Foote was in capital form, and his audiences were extremely enthusiastic.

The newspapers reported that Mr. G. W. Foote represented the National Secular Society at the late Mr. Holyoake's funeral. This is incorrect. Mr. Foote was not present. He found it impossible to attend, and the Society was therefore represented by the Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance. Mr. Holyoake's daughter, Mrs. Emilie Holyoake Marsh, wrote Mr. Foote late in the week, hoping that he would be able to be present at the Crematorium, and saying that she would have written earlier if it had not been for her illness. Mr. Foote wrote thanking her for her kind attention, but fearing that he would be unable to join the funeral party. Mr. Greening, an old friend of Mr. Holyoake's, had charge of the funeral arrangements; but in sending out the press announcements he overlooked the *Freethinker*, as in sending out the cards for the funeral he overlooked Mr. Foote.

Mr. J. W. de Caux got a letter into the *Eastern Daily Press* correcting the statement that the late Mr. Holyoake was "the last person in this country to be tried by a jury" for Blasphemy. Mr. de Caux refers to the prosecution and imprisonment of Messrs. Foote, Ramsey, and Kemp in 1883. The case of old Mr. Ferguson at Glasgow was two years later.

Mr. W. J. Ramsey managed to get a letter into the *Morning Leader*, correcting that journal's statement—which appeared in the newspapers generally—that the late Mr. G. J. Holyoake was the last man prosecuted for Atheism. Mr. Ramsey pointed out that, as a matter of fact, no one has been prosecuted for "Atheism," that Mr. Holyoake was prosecuted under the common law of Blasphemy, and that he was neither the last nor the greatest sufferer, since Messrs. G. W. Foote, W. J. Ramsey, and H. A. Kemp were sentenced to twelve, nine, and three months' imprisonment respectively in 1883. Mr. Ramsey might have added that Mr. Holyoake's imprisonment (six months) was not so rigorous as theirs. He had many privileges; he did not wear prison clothes, he could see his friends frequently, and could carry on his literary work in prison. The 1883 prisoners for Blasphemy were treated in every respect like common criminals.

We like to see Freethinkers making headway. On personal grounds we are glad to see that Mr. J. M. Robertson has won the seat he fought for in the Tyneside division of Northumberland, and by a big majority. Of course he was not elected as a Freethinker, but he was elected *in spite* of his being a Freethinker—and that is something. It would be a good thing if Mr. Robertson could take up Charles Bradlaugh's old Bill for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. Only forty-five members of the House of Commons voted for it eighteen years ago. More would vote for it now. And in time it might be carried.

Mr. Robertson ought to feel flattered by the *Daily Telegraph* notice of his election, in which he is described as "A pronounced Radical and Home ruler" and "the last survivor of any consequence of the Secularist movement headed by the late Mr. Bradlaugh." But is it quite polite to Mrs. Bonner and Mrs. Besant?

St. John Adcock, in *London Opinion*, says that "one of the kindest, most upright, genial, wholly lovable" men he ever knew was "a frank and confirmed sceptic." When he had to die, from the effect of an accident, his only thought was how to spare the feelings of his wife. "I am a sort of a Christian myself," the writer says, "but I'm bound to admit that his life and death have taught me more than I have learned from the examples of my co-religionists, so many of whom are too self-righteous and intolerably good, condemning all mankind outside their own narrow sect, and

seeming to give so much love to God that they have little or none left to share among their fellow men."

Captain Campbell, Conservative, Mid Lanark, after some correspondence, replied that he was in favor of abolishing the Blasphemy Laws. Mr. Jas. Caldwell, Liberal, was prepared to consider any amendment that might be brought forward, but was not in favor of abolishing the Blasphemy Laws altogether. He was informed by Mr. J. Reid, at a public meeting, that Freethinkers wanted total abolition or nothing.

We have already mentioned that Mr. Will Thorne, the successful Labor candidate in South West Ham, was "straight" on the question of the Blasphemy Laws. We have since seen a letter of his, in reply to Mr. A. Brooks, a constituent, in which he says: "I am in favor of liberty for people of all shades of religious belief, and would vote for the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws." This is perfectly satisfactory.

Captain Verney, the unsuccessful Liberal candidate in North Hants, replying to Mr. F. S. Edwards *re* the Blasphemy Laws, wrote: "All men should be liable to the same conditions as regards their religious opinions." When will candidates learn that electors smarting under a practical grievance are not to be put off with cheap generalities?

Sir Robert Filmer, Unionist candidate in North West Durham, replying to Dr. J. G. Stuart, wrote: "I am in favor of all laws applying equally to all classes. I understand the Blasphemy Laws are obsolete. I am in favor of removing all obsolete laws from the Statute Book." This is as good an answer as could be expected. But there is really no such thing as an obsolete law. No law is certainly dead until it is buried.

Replying to Mr. H. Percy Ward, the Rt. Hon. R. R. Cherry, K.C., M.P., Attorney General for Ireland, who won in the Exchange division of Liverpool, wrote that "everybody should be allowed to express openly the views which he holds whether for or against the Christian or any other religion." This is good as far as it goes. But a definite attitude towards the Blasphemy Laws as they exist is what is really required.

Major Seeley, M.P., in the Abercromby division of Liverpool, also replying to Mr. Ward, stated that he did not understand the question relating to the Blasphemy Laws, as "some law of the kind would appear to me to be necessary"—although he did not state why. He also was unable to agree to the policy of banishing religion from the public schools. But perhaps he will find in a few months that he has got to agree with it.

We were glad to receive a brief letter from the veteran Freethinker, Dr. E. B. Foote, the burning down of whose house at Larchmont Manor was reported in our last week's issue. Dr. Foote assures us that his "physical condition has not been seriously affected by the excitement attending the fire." He is staying for the present with his son and daughter-in-law at New York, where he is sure to receive every attention. He sends us the heartiest new year's good wishes, which we warmly reciprocate.

Some resolutions passed by the N. S. S. Executive, at its last meeting, will be found in the Secretary's report on another page of this week's *Freethinker*. Our readers will understand what the press boycott against fighting Freethought is like when we state that none of the papers to which those resolutions were sent—not even *Reynolds*—inserted one of them.

Ingersoll's first lecture will be continued in our next. It was impossible to include the third instalment in making up this week's *Freethinker*. This lecture, by the way, has never been printed in England before.

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,  
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,  
There is society, where none intrudes,  
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:  
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,  
From these our interviews, in which I steal  
From all I may be, or have been before,  
To mingle with the Universe, and feel  
What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

—Byron.

## In Praise of Ridicule.

BY THE LATE GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE.

[After Mr. Holyoake's imprisonment in 1842 he took to the war-path again, and one of his earliest efforts was a pamphlet entitled *A Short and Easy Method with the Saints*, which was published by Henry Hetherington, one of the heroes of the struggle for a free press in England. The pamphlet is dedicated to the Right Hon. Mr. Justice Erskine, the judge who presided at Mr. Holyoake's trial. "I find," he says to the man who gave him six months, "that from the pulpits of the clergy I heard only the fictions, but at your lordship's bar I received the facts, of Christianity." Instead of being repentant, Mr. Holyoake was defiant, and justified his conduct as a "blasphemer." Unlike the Mr. Holyoake of later years, he boldly championed the employment of ridicule as a weapon against religious absurdity. The following extract will interest our readers to-day.]

THERE was a time, when Christianity wore its holiday clothes of meekness and humility, that no court would allow it to be debated whether to write or speak against Christianity was not an offence at Common Law. But on my trial, Mr. Justice Erskine laid it down that the credit of Christianity might be assailed by "*Sober discussion and legitimate reasoning.*" The defence he set up of my imprisonment was that "sober argument could be answered," but I had used "Indecent reviling, improper levity, and ridicule, which could not—and therefore the law stepped in and punished them." Some people have a happy knack of calling everything "indecent" which disturbs conventional propriety, and convenient pecculation—and everything "improper" which they cannot refute. This was Mr. Justice Erskine's case. And the jury coincided in his lordship's opinion, because they were so ignorant, weak, and bigoted, as to deem anything "indecent" which those great men with the wigs on thought proper to direct. But if all "sober argument" can be answered, our good clergy are either very lazy or very supine fellows, for I know of much sober argument against Christianity, which not only has never been, but does not seem likely to be, answered. Mr. Justice Erskine applied the remark to Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. Why there is a work that, through five or six editions, in each of the principal European languages, has been crying in vain for a refutation. Why is not that answered?

Now let us see what degree of credibility is to be attached to the declaration that indecent reviling and improper levity cannot be answered. When Arkwright invented his ingenious and intricate spinning-machines, he was subjected to much indecent reviling. Could he not answer it? He coolly perfected his contrivances, gave to this nation its great cotton trade, and all reviling ended in the ridiculed barber being made a baronet, and amassing a princely fortune. Who has not heard of the invention of gas?—that was treated with very improper levity, even by the great Sir Walter Scott. Could not the inventor answer it? He quickly lighted up his house, from top to bottom, and subsequently whole towns were served in the same way. Need I add that all reviling of the invention has since fallen dead-born? And I will undertake to say that if those sagacious and learned gentlemen who descant to us professionally on the astonishing benefits of Christianity, could only prove that it is but half as useful to us as is the cotton manufacture to this kingdom, or that it enlightens our darkness as gas does, they never need employ the arm of the law to protect their cause from revilings.

In another, and perhaps better, sense, reviling and levity require no refutation—for they refute themselves. You cannot injure a good system by such weapons, and the man who employs them will only injure himself, for he will bring upon himself the disgust and contempt of all sensible men. The practice would succeed with none but men in the lowest stage of depravity, and, let me add, that Christianity pays itself a poor compliment if it leaves us to suppose that, after a thousand years' residence among us, the mass of our countrymen are in this condition—and if they are not in this condition no harm could accrue, even were the means employed which we deprecate.

What a hubbub has been made in the world about ridiculing religion! I will venture to assert that the system which cannot bear ridicule stands on a bad foundation. Ridicule is the infallible and searching test of truth. Moore tell us, that—

"The powers of the pulpit, the bar and the throne,  
Are equal'd by ridicule's power alone."

But ridicule has the valuable quality of being discriminate as well as potent—of being fatal only to falsehood, which is the true reason why it is so dreaded. Like the rays of heat which fly off polished surfaces, but penetrate dark grounds, so ridicule reflects from the burnished surface of truth, but scorches the black front of error. And thus, by discovering weaknesses, serves to set men upon their guard. Hence it may be further said, that as the sunbeams open the buds of the living flower, but dry the leaves of the dead plant, so ridicule invigorates the flowers of utility, while it withers the rotten plants of folly.

## The Book of the Acts.—IX.

ITS UNAUTHENTIC AND UNHISTORICAL CHARACTER.

(Continued from page 60.)

5. CONTINUING our examination of the narratives in the Acts, we find in chapter vii. an account of the martyrdom of a Christian deacon named Stephen. According to this story, the Jewish Sanhedrim in Jerusalem, having taken no action with regard to the two murders committed by Peter in that city, caused one of the members of the apostolic party to be stoned for uttering what they considered blasphemous language in a speech delivered before them.

In the case of Jesus Christ, in the Gospels, we are told that the Jews, being a conquered nation, had no power of themselves to put anyone to death, and so the prisoner had to be arraigned before the Roman procurator, Pilate (John xviii. 31). This Gospel statement is flatly contradicted by the Acts account of the summary execution of Stephen. In the latter case no permission was asked of the Roman governor, who at the time referred to was the same Pilate who is said to have condemned Jesus.

With regard, however, to the alleged martyrdom of this deacon, we can say with perfect assurance that the story is a Christian fabrication. Assuming Stephen to have been a historical character, he did not utter the words ascribed to him. The speech placed in his mouth was composed by Luke himself; there was consequently no reason for putting him to death, as described in Luke's veracious chronicle.

6. Shortly after the alleged martyrdom of Stephen it is recorded (Acts viii. 1-3) that there arose "a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, *except the apostles.*" The latter, it is clearly implied, were not "scattered abroad" like the other members of the Christian church. We are further told that "Saul," who is represented as assisting in the stoning of Stephen, "laid waste the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison." This was in Jerusalem, where the twelve apostles had their headquarters. The Sanhedrim, of course, knew the exact locality in which they could be found, but allowed them to remain unmolested. Though every house in Jerusalem was searched for members of the new sect, the twelve leaders of that sect lived in that city in perfect security. While this alleged persecution was at its height "the apostles which were in Jerusalem" sent two of their number down to Samaria to lay their hands on new converts, which mission having been successfully accomplished the two delegates "returned to Jerusalem" (viii. 14-25). All through the Acts—with the exception of one paragraph, which bears the stamp of fiction (xii. 1-19)—"the church and the apostles and the elders" dwelt in perfect

safety at Jerusalem (see ix. 27-28; xi. 2; xi. 30; xii. 25; xv. 4; xxi. 17-18). As, however, we cannot trust the account in this book, we turn to Paul's Epistles and find that such was actually the case (Gal. i. 17, 18; ii. 1, 9; 1 Cor. xvi. 3). The primitive Christian church had from the first always remained in Jerusalem, and lived there in security under the presidency of James, "the Lord's brother." And the reason why they were not molested was due to the fact that in adopting the religion supposed to have been founded by Jesus, they did not cease to be Jews, but still conformed to the law of Moses. They were, in fact, Essenes; Jesus was not the founder of the sect; they suffered no persecution whatever. The account which Josephus gives of the Essenes proves those peculiar people to have been no other than the primitive Jewish Christians, and the Essenes were not persecuted. All the members of the apostolic party in Jerusalem were Jews, who still held to the law of Moses; there was therefore no persecution of Jewish Christians at all, as described in the Acts.

7. In Acts ix. 1-2 we are informed that the mythical persecutor, Saul, having consigned to prison all the Christians he found in Jerusalem (except the apostles) "went unto the high priest, and asked of him letters to Damascus unto the synagogues" to arrest any members of the sect he might find there, and to "bring them bound to Jerusalem." This request being readily granted, he set out on his journey to that city. Then we have an account of Saul's conversion on the way, he being struck blind, and of Jesus calling to him from heaven. If we are a trifle sceptical, and ask what evidence can be adduced for the truth of this extraordinary story, the answer is, Luke, who was not present, and who was probably not born at the time, has recorded it. Whether that editor invented it himself, or found it in one of the apocryphal histories which he has revised and welded together, is immaterial; there cannot be the smallest doubt as to the fictitious character of the narrative.

In the first place, as we have seen, there was no persecution of the Christians, and consequently no persecutor named Saul. In the next place, the high priest in Jerusalem had no authority to arrest anyone in Damascus, nor had the Jews in that city power to send any of its inhabitants "bound to Jerusalem." It was not until several years later (A.D. 42) that Claudius, moved by the entreaties of king Agrippa I., granted to the Jews in all the chief cities of the Empire the same rights and privileges as the Greeks and other citizens, with full permission to observe their own religious laws and customs. But this concession was accompanied by the caution that they were to "use this kindness with moderation, and not to show a contempt of the superstitious observances of other nations, but to keep their own laws only." Prior to this decree—and at the time referred to in the Acts—the Jews in foreign cities, when not persecuted, were barely tolerated; they never, at any time, had a voice in the civil administration. The idea, then, of the Jewish aliens in Damascus arresting people in that city who differed from them in religion, and sending those persons "bound to Jerusalem" is simply ridiculous. The Acts story of the journey of Saul to Damascus is nothing more nor less than a pious Christian fiction. And here I may remark, in passing, that a method of criticism, like that of Renan, which first accepts the narratives in the Acts as to a certain extent historical, and then endeavors to explain away the miraculous element, is worse than useless. To admit, for instance, that there really was a persecution of Jewish Christians and a persecutor named Saul, and that the latter did go to Damascus as narrated; and then to contend that on the way this persecutor fell to the earth from sunstroke, and imagined he heard a voice calling to him from heaven, and so on, this, I say, is not criticism at all, and is irrational as well as unnecessary. For in the absence of a single scrap of corroborative evidence of any kind, it is simply absurd to tacitly assume

that any part of the narrative is historical—more especially when several other portions can be proved to be purely fictitious.

It should also here be stated that the two verses in 2 Corinthians (xi. 32-33) which appear to corroborate the narrative in the Acts are an interpolation, and give a date more than a century anterior to the time of Paul. This can easily be seen by reading xi. 30-31 and xii. 1 as one paragraph, when it will be perceived that the interpolator was unfortunate in his choice of a place for inserting his spurious passage. Furthermore, there is no evidence to show that the Saul mentioned in the first part of the Acts is the same individual as the Paul whose doings are narrated in the later part of the book, or that the Paul of the Epistles was ever named Saul. The probability is (as I have already suggested) that Luke has combined three independent histories—the acts of Peter and the apostolic party, the missionary journeys of Paul, and the travels of Peter and Paul written in the first person. When about to follow the second legendary history the compiler says (xiii. 9): "But Saul, *who is also Paul*, being filled with the Holy Ghost," etc., after which only the name Paul is employed to the end of the book. The explanation usually offered by Christian commentators and others is that Saul assumed the name of Paul because he had converted a proconsul named Sergius Paulus—which on the face of it is very unlikely, as well as absurd. According to the story, the conversion of the governor named was effected by smiting a certain magician with blindness—a miracle unsupported by any kind of evidence, and one which the Paul of the Epistles had no power to perform. It is, of course, clearly evident that if this miracle story be fictitious—as undoubtedly it is—there was no change of name. The account of the conversion of the great Sergius Paulus is thus seen to be another Christian fable, committed to writing for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian religion. In short, the only rational explanation of the two names is that which I have suggested. The "Saul" and "Paul" of the Acts are both mythical persons; only the Paul of the Epistles is historical.

ABRACADABRA.

(To be concluded.)

### National Secular Society.

REPORT of Executive Meeting held on January 25, 1906. The President, Mr. G. W. Foote, in the chair. There were also present, Messrs. J. Barry, C. Cohen, F. A. Davies, T. Gorniot, W. Leat, J. Neate, V. Roger, S. Samuels, H. Silverstein, F. Schindel, and F. Wood.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed. Cash statement adopted. Permission was given for the formation of a new Branch at Falkirk. The President reported upon correspondence received from Birmingham, and the following resolution was carried unanimously:—

"That if the Birmingham Town Hall can be secured by the local Branch for the evening of Whit-Sunday, the N. S. S. Conference shall take place in that city; and that an explanation of this resolution of urgency be made to the Branches and members through the *Freethinker*."

The President also reported the death of Mr. George Jacob Holyoake; and it was moved by the President and seconded by Mr. Roger—

"That the Executive of the National Secular Society recognises in the death of Mr. George Jacob Holyoake the disappearance of a striking historical figure in modern English Freethought, and especially recognises the importance and value of his earlier services to Freethought in a time of difficulty and danger."

Miss Vance was deputed to represent the Society at Mr. Holyoake's cremation.

Attention was then called to the recent erroneous statements in the *Daily News*, and the following resolution was carried and ordered to be sent to the press:—

"That the Executive of the National Secular Society protests against the *Daily News* reference to the part played by the late Mr. Holyoake and by Freethinkers generally in the controversy over the late Rev. Hugh Price Hughes's 'Atheist Shoemaker' story, and begs to observe that the

upshot of that controversy was the exact reverse of what is stated in the *Daily News*—the reverend gentleman's story having been proved false in every important feature of it, and the apology being really due from Mr. Hughes and Mr. Holyoake to the Freethought party."

Other equally misleading statements having appeared in almost every daily paper which had referred to Mr. Holyoake's imprisonment, the Secretary was instructed to send the following correction to the press:—

"The Executive of the National Secular Society desires to record its protest against the press notices of the death of the late Mr. G. J. Holyoake which represent him as being the last prisoner for Atheism in England. Considering that Mr. Holyoake's imprisonment took place so far back as 1842, this representation is calculated to induce the public to believe that no danger to religious freedom has existed during the past sixty-four years; whereas several Freethinkers have been imprisoned under the Blasphemy Laws since Mr. Holyoake's sentence, notably Mr. G. W. Foote, editor of the *Freethinker*, Mr. W. J. Ramsey, and Mr. H. Kemp, in 1883; and only two years ago the police made an attempt—which was abortive on technical grounds—to enforce the Blasphemy Laws at Leeds. This Executive does not desire to detract from the merit of Mr. Holyoake's bold fidelity to Freethought in 1842; it merely wishes to point out that others have been martyred since, that the danger still exists, and that it cannot be removed except by the total repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, under which Freethinkers, and Freethinkers only, are liable to prosecution, fine, and imprisonment in the dissemination of their opinions."

A highly successful Annual Dinner was reported, and the meeting closed.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary*.

### Obituary.

THE cause of progress has lost an ardent and devoted adherent through the death of Mrs. Henry McGuinness of Derby, who passed away on January 22nd, last; and progress is not the only cause that has suffered, for Mr. McGuinness, her husband, who is so well known in Freethought circles, survives to mourn her loss.

When first married Mrs. McGuinness was a Christian but soon became a convert to Freethought, and to the end remained firm in its principles.

An ardent liberal, a hard worker, a convinced Freethinker, and a devoted wife; the world is indeed the poorer by her loss.

THOMAS O. NEWSON.

### The Use of Prayer.

A MOTHER kissed her little maid  
And said, "God bless you dear;  
Now go to school, don't be afraid,  
You have no cause for fear.

Although the friend has gone away  
Who went to school with you,  
There is a friend who will not stray,  
But always will be true.

He'll give to you his kindly care,  
For I have asked his grace;  
So think of him, till you get there,  
And keep a smiling face.

Your auntie will be sure to wait  
To give you her good day;  
She'll stand beside her garden gate  
To see you on your way."

So on her way the maiden went,  
And, as she danced along,  
She sang for her encouragement  
A merry little song.

She passed the mill wheel by the stream;  
The miller kissed his hand;  
She saw her father with his team  
Across some meadow land.

And then she reached a lonely way;  
The path went through a wood;  
The shade obscured the light of day  
Where massive elm trees stood.

The morning passed; 'twas afternoon;  
Then evening shadows fell;  
Then o'er the hills appeared the moon,  
Then rang the vesper bell.

And as the night came on apace,  
The sorrowing forms were seen,  
Of those who fain would find a trace  
Of where that child had been.

All night they searched the countryside.  
Alas! they searched in vain;  
All through next day, till eventide,  
No tidings could they gain.

The kindly vicar came to see  
That broken-hearted pair;  
"Oh Lord!" he cried, "do let there be  
An answer now to prayer.

Let this lost maiden be restored,  
So stay thy servant's tears,  
And may thy sympathy afford  
A cordial for their fears."

He breathed "Amen" with hands outspread,  
When at the open door,  
"Excuse me, sir," a young man said,  
And then could say no more.

Emotion had prevented speech,  
But actions speak as well;  
More pointed truths they often teach  
Than words can ever tell.

The papers told a ghastly tale  
Of outrage in a wood.  
(These prurient details always fail  
To do the slightest good).

Again the vicar came to see  
That broken-hearted pair.  
"Oh God!" he cried, "if God there be,  
What is the use of prayer?"

My heart went out to that good man,  
Whose anguish found relief  
In questioning the doubtful plan,  
Which justifies belief.

God may possess the power to smite,  
May take our feeble breath,  
But surely he has not the right  
To torture us to death.

But some have tried from time to time  
This fact to misconstrue:  
If God does not prevent a crime,  
Then He is guilty too.

W. J.

### "OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN."

(THERE'S NOTHING LIKE LEATHER!)

Papa has told me there's a God,  
A God the Father up above;  
Who fashioned all from broeze to clod  
As Dad created us—by love!  
Much like himself, a heavenly pater;  
Yes, just like Dad, but vastly greater.  
So great, so good, so wise, so solemn,  
And larger than the Nelson column.  
And you must pray to him for bread,  
And that it may not be too hard;  
For if you don't you won't be fed,  
As he's a crusty kind of card.  
And if by chance he cuts up rough,  
Oh! don't he make the pie crust tough,  
And wollop you and punch and cuff,  
As Dad does too when in a huff.  
They've leprosy, cane, brick, and spatter,  
A thousand blades to flay live matter;  
They say they do it all for love,  
But how they lay it on by Jove!

W. W. S.

### FAIRLY ANTIQUE.

An Englishman, in the presence of an American, was boasting about the antiquities that the British Museum possessed. For instance, there is a book that was once owned by Cicero, to say nothing of Egyptian remains dating back as far as 5,000 B.C. "Well, they ain't new, certainly," replied his friend from the U.S.A. "But in the museum in Washington they've got the very same lead-pencil that Noah used to check off the animals with as they went into the ark."

"My boy," exclaimed a deacon, "you do very wrong to fish on Sunday." "It can't be no harm, deacon; I ain't catching nothing."

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

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

### LONDON.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 3.15, Freethought Parliament.

FINSBURY PARK DEBATING SOCIETY (79 Grove-road, Holloway N.): 6.30, Debate, "George Jacob Holyoake." Open discussion.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Liberal Hall, Broadway, Forest Gate, E.): 7.30, R. Rosetti, "The Bible and Modern Science."

### COUNTRY.

FAIRSWORTH SECULAR SUNDAY SCHOOL (Pole-lane): 6.30, Half-yearly Meeting.

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (110 Brunswick-street): 12 (noon), Discussion Class: Miss A. Pettigrew, "Women and Progress"; 6.30, Robert Park, M.D., "The Emotions of God."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Milton Hall, Daulby-street): G. W. Foote, 3, "What has Christianity done for Russia?" 7, "The Morality of Nature and the Nature of Morality."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints): 6.30, J. B. Hudson, "Christianity and its Relation to Social Democracy."

NEWCASTLE RATIONALIST LITERARY AND DEBATING SOCIETY (Lockhart's Cathedral Cafe): Thursday, Feb. 8, at 8, A. L. Coates, "Alien Immigration."

PORTH BRANCH N. S. S. (Room, Town Hall, Porth): 6.30, G. Dolling, a Lecture.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7.30, "The Education Question."

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Secretary—E. M. VANCE (Miss).

This Society was formed in 1898 to afford legal security to the acquisition and application of funds for Secular purposes.

The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of inquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularisation of the State, etc., etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

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