

# THE Freethinker

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*And thus they cease not to demand of you the cause of the cause, until you take refuge in the will of God, that is to say, in the asylum of ignorance.—SPINOZA.*

## Mr. Birrell's Bill.

THE Liberal government, with its triumphant and almost unprecedented majority, has brought forward its first important measure in the new Education Bill. It is called "A Bill to make further provision with respect to Education in England and Wales," and it is backed by Mr. Birrell, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer and Mr. Lough. All these gentlemen, we believe, are Nonconformists; and the fact is extremely significant. The Bill was introduced by Mr. Birrell, the Minister of Education. This gentleman is a lawyer by profession, a popular writer by practice, and a politician by habit, who suddenly found himself at the head of a great public department. Both his Bill, and his speech in introducing it, illustrate the curious truth—which is not so curious to deeper thinkers—that no lawyer ever made a statesman.

Mr. Birrell's speech has been published in an "authorised edition" by the Liberal Publication Department, of which he was formerly Chairman. We have read it through carefully. It contains several Birrellisms. But we cannot find any statesmanship in it, or any declaration of first principles. Even its eloquence, which has been praised, is rather shoddy. This may be seen by a glance at his peroration:—

"I put together these ill-constructed sentences last Saturday in Battersea Park, a very beautiful place, rich with the promise, I hope not the delusive promise, of early summer—a place simply swarming with children, who all seemed animated by one desire—namely, to ascertain the time from me. Although at first I found their attentions somewhat disconcerting, in a very short time I came to perceive how congruous was their presence with the whole bent and cast of my thoughts. A hope, I trust not a delusive hope, stole into my breast, although I am not a sanguine man, that perhaps even this measure after it has received, as it will receive, the full consideration and deliberation of this House will be found to be a step forward in the right direction for securing to the children of this country an immunity from those quarrels which are not their quarrels but our quarrels, and to help in securing for them an education which will make them—the finest raw material in the world as I am satisfied they are—fit citizens of this country, and fit to play a great part after we have all gone, and so enable this beloved land of ours to be what it ought to be, the pulsing heart of a beneficent and freedom-loving Empire."

There is no reason why a tolerably clever man, who has circumnavigated the Blarney Stone, should not talk like that for hours together, with slight intervals for refreshment. When old Polonius (who would have made a first-rate member of parliament, and an exemplary cabinet minister)

asked Hamlet what he was reading, the answer was "Words, words, words." This is a fair description of Mr. Birrell's valedictory eloquence. It is the sort of thing that pleasantly tickles the average slow insensitive mind. In other words, it is bunkum. And it really has no relation to the body of the speech or the substance of the Bill.

As far as the children are concerned, it does not appear from anything that Mr. Birrell said, or from anything in his Bill, that they have any rights whatever. They are just pawns to be moved about in the game of politicians and priests of every denomination. That *they* are entitled to just and honest treatment does not seem to have occurred to the right honorable gentleman. They must wait until they are old enough to vote, and decide general elections, before *they* are to be considered. Yet they *have* rights. Their elders are entitled to teach them what they *know*; they are not entitled to teach them what they *believe*. The child should be left free to form his own judgment on matters of opinion. To anticipate that judgment is to rob him of his mental independence. And this is a worse crime than burglary. It is dastardly and sinister, it involves a flagrant breach of trust, and it entails lifelong pernicious consequences.

We hear a great deal about Churches, teachers, parents, and citizens in this controversy. It is time we heard something about the children. These helpless creatures are not automatons; they are alive, they think and feel—or rather they feel and think; what is more, the future belongs to them; and the great question of Thomas Paine's applies with special force to their case—What right have we to legislate for posterity?

This leads us to remark that Mr. Birrell's Bill is wrongly named. It should not be called an Education Bill. There is nothing in it about education. Not a word from beginning to end. The whole and sole object of the Bill is a rearrangement of educational machinery in the interest of the religious faction which boasts of having "got its own back" at the recent general election. Simply this, and nothing more.

The first business of a Government is to keep in office. Its second business is to redeem what it must of its pledges. These two guiding principles have animated Mr. Birrell. The leading idea of his Education Bill is to satisfy the Nonconformists. They have two hundred members on the Liberal side in the House of Commons. They can bring about the defeat of the Government whenever they please. Consequently the Bill must command their support. That is the primary consideration. But it is not the only consideration. Two hundred members are not everybody. There are others—even on the Liberal benches. Some are Churchmen, some are Catholics, some are Jews, some are even Secularists. They must be persuaded, if

possible, to let the Bill pass. Mr. Birrell therefore flings each section a bone, in the hope that it will keep them from disputing the Nonconformist banquet.

This may be statecraft. It is not statesmanship. It suggests the politics of Lilliput. Gulliver saw the principal men of state dancing before the king on a tightrope, and he who balanced himself longest, and with the greatest dexterity, became Prime Minister.

Were there no principle at stake, we might welcome the bone flung to the Secularists. Not directly, perhaps, but indirectly, it is so good that we are almost afraid of saying too much about it. There is meat upon it. As you gaze at it the meat grows into a joint, and the joint into the whole animal.

The one part of his speech in which Mr. Birrell spoke with real feeling related to the Conscience Clause. This clause in the first Education Act has always been denounced by Secularists as an imposture. Nonconformists told them it was the ideal of justice and liberality. But the same Nonconformists, when they had to send their children to Church schools, called it a delusion and a snare. The truth is that the burden of the Conscience Clause rested, not on the parents, but on the children. Being withdrawn from religious instruction, they were marked out for odium and insult, and often for outrage. They were martyrs at an age when they could feel the suffering without appreciating the principle at stake. That is why withdrawals were so few in number. Mr. Birrell recognises this. Although he was a Nonconformist, and the son of a Nonconformist, he himself went to a Church school and learnt the Catechism. "To expect any small and thin-skinned mortal between five and fourteen," he says, "to go into a school belonging to a dominant majority and demand separate treatment is to put upon him a burden he will never discharge." "No conscience clause," he continues, "is worth anything unless it carries with it the right of withdrawal during the time that the religious instruction is being given." Accordingly the Bill contains the following clause:—

"The parent of a child attending a public elementary school shall not be under any obligation to cause the child to attend at the schoolhouse, except during the times allotted in the time-table exclusively to secular instruction."

This means that, instead of being sent to school at 9, children may be sent at 9.45, when the religious lesson is over, and that this will be a full attendance.

What will be the result of this? Will not many children try to keep away from school until 9.45? Will not many poor mothers get help from their girls during that three quarters of an hour—help which, in a vast number of cases, they very much require; or will they not be glad of the extra time to get ready three or four boys, who should all be washed, dressed, and properly breakfasted? Mr. Birrell himself thinks that the children withdrawn from religious instruction, under his new conscience clause, may become objects of envy. Very likely. And this clause may in the long run wreck whatever system of religious instruction he succeeds in establishing. It may be—

"The little rift within the lute  
That by and by will make the music mute."

In one sense, therefore, the Secularist might rub his hands over the Education Bill. An effective Conscience Clause makes religious instruction really permissive instead of obligatory. The people who want it will have to take the trouble to obtain it. This is as it should be, but it is tremendously different from the present arrangement, and the difference is bound to work out in the Secularist's direction. And the best of it is that after what Mr. Birrell has said—and after what the most effusive Nonconformist leaders have said—it will be practically impossible for him to withdraw the clause in question.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

## Is Unbelief Easy?

ORDINARY experience shows that the most difficult thing in the world is to get people to embrace new ideas—particularly when these involve a new terminology. Like all forms of force thought follows the line of least resistance, and it is obviously easier to reason along accustomed lines and to repeat the old phrases, than it is to strike out in new directions and coin fresh phrases to express one's meaning. This is, indeed, one of the standing difficulties that fronts all workers in advanced movements, and particularly Freethought workers. Politics and science both carry with them certain obvious checks and recommendations, but Freethought moving on a more abstract plane, is faced with this difficulty in its severest form. And the Freethinkers difficulty is the religious teacher's advantage. He at most has to form old and familiar ideas and phrases in a new combination; if he erects a new building it is with the old materials. But the Freethinker has not only to build a new structure, he has to manufacture the materials as well. He has to convert the people to new ideas, and to familiarise both tongue and ear with a whole nomenclature to match.

All this would seem to be obvious enough to the point of being a truism. Yet, according to the Rev. C. F. Aked, of Liverpool, it is the very reverse of the truth. This gentleman declares that the explanation of much of the "cheap" Agnosticism of to-day is that "Intellectual thoroughness is difficult to us all." "Resolute thinking is an effort," and we therefore "accept the easy explanation because it is easy, the superficial because it is superficial," and we are solemnly advised to guard ourselves "against the tendency of human nature to accept the easy because it is easy and to reject the difficult because it is difficult."

In other directions the advice would be fairly sound; but the application Mr. Aked gives it is nothing short of ridiculous. It is doubtless very comforting to the people who "sit under" Mr. Aked to feel that their religious beliefs are the outcome of profound thought and long, patient investigation, and that if Freethinkers were only built of the same sturdy stuff their doubts would vanish; but what a travesty of the truth it is to be sure! For, man for man there is not a Freethinker in Great Britain whose doubts are not far more the outcome of mental exertion than are the beliefs of religionists. For whether the Freethinker be stupid or brilliant, his unbelief is at least due to some thinking on the points at issue. Had he never thought about them at all he would have gone with the crowd. That he does not go with the crowd proves that he has faced these questions with some degree of independence of mind. But no man or woman in Great Britain is, under prevailing conditions, religious because of their independence of mind. They may possess the quality of independence in spite of their religion, but their religious belief does not spring therefrom. For these beliefs are there waiting for them at birth, they are impressed upon their minds during childhood, promotion in life is made easier by their advocacy, a large portion of our history is written so as to support them, every possible inducement is held out to retain them, and it is therefore sheer childishness to say that under prevailing conditions there is the slightest guarantee of independent investigation or original thinking in the retention of religious beliefs.

Moreover, religious beliefs are only difficult because of their unreasonableness. In themselves they are simple enough and easy enough, as is shown both by the races and the people that hold them. Difficulties only commence when more accurate knowledge shows them to be either destitute of evidence or illogical in character. And the appeal to retain them either because or in spite of the difficulties in the way, is an appeal to simple unreasoning faith. With Freethought, on the contrary, there are difficulties of a real intellectual character. The more departure from old forms is in itself a difficulty of no mean

description; but there are others. The rejection of the God-idea implies a perception of the logical weakness of the arguments used to establish its validity. The rejection of the Christ-myth involves, negatively, a perception of its inherent unreasonableness, and positively, the necessity of searching through history and comparative mythology the conditions of its growth. Thus, whether the thinking be accurate or inaccurate, thorough or superficial, Freethought does involve intellectual work; and its difficulties are such as attend either prolonged intellectual effort or the careful search for facts and the equally careful verification of theories. The difficulties in the way of religious thinking are those presented by a scientific age to an unscientific hypothesis.

Mr. Aked is good enough to say that all Agnosticism is not of the "cheap" variety—whatever that may be. "There is earnest doubt, tragic doubt, loss of faith bringing grief and bitterness. Of that let no man speak disrespectfully." But unfortunately, Freethinkers, while their doubt may be earnest enough, have no tragic doubt, and their unbelief does not bring grief and bitterness. It brings, on the contrary, joy and sweetness to many who have not known them under the influence of religion. Of course, Mr. Aked can put up with anyone calling himself a Freethinker who laments that he is what he is and wishes he were otherwise, for the simple reason that such a person is not a Freethinker at all. He is a religionist who feels his beliefs going, expressing the cowardice developed by his Christian heredity, and destitute of the strength that would result from genuine Freethought. There really is no need for Mr. Aked, or any other gentleman in the same line of business to sympathise with Freethinkers on their lack of belief. Such sympathy is always uncalled for and is usually an impertinence. Imagine Mr. Aked sympathising with the forlorn condition of Spencer, Dr. Clifford condoling with Darwin, or the Bishop of London telling Huxley how deeply he felt for him in his religionless condition.

I have used "Freethought" where Mr. Aked uses only the term "Agnostic," because the latter has become so vague a descriptive term and because his strictures really do apply to Freethought as a whole. For obvious reasons, Mr. Aked prefers "Agnostic," and for equally obvious reasons it is as well to use a better word. Mr. Aked no doubt impressed his congregation with the feeling that he was doing some very "resolute thinking" when he treated them to the old mountebankism about "I don't know" as the full equivalent of "Agnostic." Anybody can say "I don't know," he says, "the characteristic of a fool is that he does not know." Is it? The real characteristic of a fool is that he does not know he does not know, and one might easily give a very pertinent proof of this if one were so inclined. People, he goes on to say, are not content with this attitude in other departments of life. If they do not know they struggle on until they do know. Certainly, but this is in directions where they may know, provided they bring enough knowledge, ability, and industry to the task. But how if there is nothing to know? How if there is intelligence enough to see this, to realise that we do not know because there is nothing to discover, and that the very terms of the problem defy solution, and one not only sees this but has honesty enough to say it? "I don't know" then becomes the expression of a conviction that human thought and energy are far too valuable to be eternally squandered on manufactured conundrums perpetuated for the interests of a class.

Perhaps, however, Mr. Aked is not altogether to blame here. In relation to the God-idea many Agnostics do use the word "Agnostic" as the equivalent of I do not know one way or the other, and assume that the question is undecided. Whereas the question is not undecided but decided. We really do know all that can be known about the validity and worth of the God-idea. I do not mean that there is nothing more to know concerning the

condition of its origin, or the order of its development, but substantially we know all there is to be known. We do know the general conditions amid which the God-idea began, we know even more of the course of its development, and we have a fairly accurate conception of how much or how little it is worth. To say, therefore, "I do not know whether there is a God or not," and to say it with the implication that we are ourselves undecided, that the Theist may, after all, be right, is a cowardly, a misleading, or an unintelligent Agnosticism. The honest sense of an Agnostic's profession should be "I do not know anything about God because there is really nothing to know." It is in the same sense that one would say I do not know anything about four-sided triangles or square circles. "Agnostic" should be the mark of a decided conviction, not an indication of suspension of judgment alone. But in that case a scientific Agnosticism would be indistinguishable from Atheism; and unfortunately, those who dislike clear cut unequivocal phrases are not who confided to the Christian Churches.

C. COHEN.

### "Illusion in Religion."

SUCH is the startling title of No. 8 in the interesting series of *Essays for the Times* now appearing. The writer of it is the Rev. Edwin A. Abbott, M.A., D.D., one of the ablest and boldest among the progressive divines of to-day. Anything that comes from his pen deserves serious consideration. He belongs to the same school as the Ven. Archdeacon Wilson and the Rev. R. J. Campbell. It is a characteristic of this school that its members are allowed to differ from one another on matters of detail, or of secondary importance. The Venerable Archdeacon and Mr. Campbell echo the teaching of Robertson of Brighton, while Dr. Abbott follows the same lines, substantially, as Arnold did in his *Literature and Dogma*. The point on which they all agree is the comparative non-importance of the letter, the practical worthlessness of mere dogma and ritual, when put side by side with the spirit, which is emotion.

Dr. Abbott's essay forcibly reminds us of a striking sermon by Robertson on the educational value of illusion, as illustrated in the life of Abraham. But what is really meant by *illusion*? Wherein does it differ from *delusion*? I may be told that *illusion* refers particularly to errors of the sense, while *delusion* has reference to deceptions of the mind. You may say that an optical deception is an *illusion*, while a false opinion on any subject is a *delusion*. But there is deception in both; and this is the all-important thing. Dr. Abbott says that God is "playing a game of hide-and-seek with us, in which He desires to be found out." He quotes from Paul to the effect that "it was ordained that men 'should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in him we live and move and have our being,'" and then adds: "In this game of hide-and-seek, when we falsely say, 'He is here,' or 'He is there,' the falsehood is not always wholly false; it is often not a *delusion* that lures us down to permanent error, but an *illusion* that lures us on through error into truth." But is that definition true to fact? Is it right to regard illusion "as a discipline for our truth-seeking faculties, and as a stepping-stone towards truth itself?" No one doubts the existence of illusions in the physical world; and to many all purely religious ideas are delusions. The question that needs a definite answer, however, is, do illusions, as such, ever "lure us on through error into truth?" Take the optical illusion that it is the sun, and not the earth that moves, and tell me in what sense it "lures us on through error into truth?" Astronomy may have discovered the truth about the movements of the heavenly bodies, but certainly the optical illusion rendered no assistance in the search for it. Is it different in the sphere of religion?

Dr. Abbott's candor is truly amazing. He is willing to judge every religion by the fruit it bears in

practice. Concerning Christianity, as well as concerning Buddhism or Mohammedanism, the question he asks is, does it "make better and purer, make nobler and more just," does it "inspire with good will to all men," those who profess it? If it does, then in his opinion, it should be accepted as in the main true. But no results in practice, however excellent, can make illusions true. Quite so; but may not illusions be the husks or integuments in which spiritual truths are preserved? Dr. Abbott maintains that they may be and often are; but in so doing he confuses *spiritual* truths with *moral* virtues. By no illusion of religion, but by actual experience and observation of life, have we learned that righteousness exalts those who practise it. It is historically true that righteousness is an essential condition of a prosperous and happy social life. This is a fundamental truth of evolution, which no religious illusions could ever serve.

Dr. Abbott is seemingly ignorant of the distinction between religion and morality, and of the fact that there was a time when the two existed apart. Morality, of the noblest type, has often been exhibited without belief in God and the spiritual world, and the most ardent belief in God and the spiritual world has frequently been held quite apart from morality. Nobody denies that there are moral elements of great value embodied in Christianity; but it is also equally undeniable that these elements are attached to distinctively spiritual, supernatural, or religious beliefs the truth of which is, to say the least, hypothetical. The union between religion and morality is therefore a union between the imaginary and the real; and on the whole it has proved detrimental to the best interests of the latter. Now, the moral elements found in Christianity, in so far as they are true, are no illusions, but precious realities. But if the moral elements in Christianity are not illusions but precious realities, which are the illusions in it? Are they not clearly the religious or supernatural elements? But once you admit that *some* of these latter elements are illusions, by what rule are you to determine that they are not *all* illusions? If the divinity of Christ is an illusion, what about the existence of God? Are we to believe in the reality of everything until it has been proved to be false? There may be innumerable illusions *about* morality; but experience has abundantly shown that morality itself is not an illusion. So, likewise, there may be endless illusions respecting God, but who can authoritatively assure us that God himself is not an illusion? A sunrise may be largely illusive; but the vision of beauty which a so-called sunrise presents is not an illusion. Be that as it may, the saying that a glorious sunshine is a revelation of the glory of God is nothing but an inference drawn by the imagination, and may be wholly illusive. To the question, "Is there a God, and if there is has He ever revealed himself?" no authoritative answer has ever been given. To say that "from the beginning of man every family was in reality a true house of God, a Bethel, with a ladder of angels ascending and descending, so as to connect earth and heaven," is merely to indulge in irresponsible rhetoric.

Dr. Abbott traces what he calls the gradual revelation of God in humanity; but what he really traces is the course of the gradual evolution of mankind. That there existed an infinitely wise and good Evolver is simply a hypothesis and may be an entire illusion or delusion of the mind. Even in the life of Jesus Dr. Abbott discerns many illusions, such as the virgin birth and the miracles. Jesus himself was under the dominion of not a few illusions, and so have been all his disciples in all generations. The four Gospels and the Epistles bristle with illusions. Only Dr. Abbott knows where the dividing line between illusions and realities is, and unfortunately he keeps the secret to himself.

It must be a startling item of news to many that Jesus suffered from illusions, or in other words, that in some aspects at least, He was a false teacher. According to Mr. Garrod, Jesus believed and taught that the end of the world was close at hand, and that the Son of Man would quickly appear to pro-

nounce final judgment. Consequently his moral teaching was adapted to the condition and requirements of a race about to be caught up into another sphere. Dr. Abbott seems to concur in this opinion. Well, let us take this one illusion cherished by the Nazarine Prophet, and see what effects flowed from it. Let us heed what Dr. Abbott says on this point:—

"It may seem a minor point that apparently the whole of the first generation of Christians, including the Apostles, were under the impression that the Lord would speedily come as a judge from heaven, and that the present 'age' would be brought to a sudden and manifest conclusion. Yet this illusion was fraught with serious consequences for us. It induced St. Paul, and probably the other Apostles, to lay somewhat less stress than perhaps he would otherwise have laid upon marriage and the home, and upon the recognition of this visible world as a beautiful and glorious training-school for the life to come. By this illusion the saints in Jerusalem were led to adopt a communistic life of devotion to prayer which forced them to depend upon the alms of the Western Churches, and might ultimately have resulted in a scandal and reproach. And even now we suffer perhaps even more than we are aware from the perpetual antithesis between 'the Church' and 'the World' (in some books of the New Testament), which somewhat too much checks our aspiration for the time when the Church shall have so leavened the world that the two shall be identical."

On Dr. Abbott's own showing, it is difficult to perceive how he can regard illusion "as a discipline for our truth-seeking faculties, and as a stepping-stone towards truth itself." He frankly admits that the illusion of the Second Advent has worked considerable harm in the world, and he fails to point to a single benefit that has resulted from it. He refers to other Christian illusions in the same way and to the same effect.

Dr. Abbott is specially severe in his condemnation of dogmatic theology. He warmly thanks modern criticism and heartily accepts its main conclusion, he cordially welcomes the grand discoveries of Science, but theology he pronounces undiscerning and blind. "Theology has been content to read nothing [in the way of revelation] in human hearts." It has brought into being contemptible fictions, in their revolt against which unbelievers "have completely discarded a theory of celestial mechanism which appeared to them to represent God as less merciful, less righteous, and less just than a decently respectable man." This sounds very fine and heroic; but is not Dr. Abbott himself a theologian, and in reality quite as dogmatic as the brethren he so unmercifully denounces? It is true that "believers have been only too ready to take priests and theologians at their word," and that in consequence they have become "a race of anxious seekers after truth, or mere idolaters of forms and ceremonies, or wrangling disputants about theological figments, or worldly, fleshy creatures who call themselves Christians, but differ from non-Christians simply in going to church on Sundays." All this is absolutely true; but would Dr. Abbott's dogmatism lead to better results? Here is a sample of it:—

"The summary of the truth, so far as we can at present express it, appears to be this, that God, being love, cannot be apprehended except by loving him; that in order to love God, one must begin by loving men, and that our bodily and mental faculties are intended mainly as a scaffolding to raise up in us a love responsive to God's love for us."

Logically, such dogmatism is the quintessence of absurdity. Its foundation is a metaphysical conjecture of the wildest nature. How does Dr. Abbott know that there is a God, and that He is love? How was he enabled to make so stupendous a discovery? How can anybody love God *before* apprehending him? Here is a man who has been an Atheist from his birth. What sense would there be in saying to him: "Love God and He will reveal himself to you." How *can* he love the unknown? "You must begin to love God by loving your fellow men," he is told. But he has loved and served his fellow-men from the beginning, and he has never yet felt the least sense of God. Love to men is a

beautiful and ennobling sentiment; but it can be demonstrated that love to God does not naturally grow out of it. That it does, is one of the illusions of Dr. Abbott. Unless a man is taught to believe in God as such and such a being, he has no sense of him; and until he does so believe, God's love never touches him at all, so that he has no chance of responding to it. Dr. Abbott has lived so long in a believing, religious atmosphere that he seems incapable of realising that a secular atmosphere exists, and is spreading, and that in it the higher human virtues flourish right well.

J. T. LLOYD.

## How the Gospel Christ was Manufactured. II.

(Concluded from p. 246.)

In the second chapter we find similar elements. The stage baby was to be born in Bethlehem according to another ancient stage direction (Matt. ii. 5, 6), or, rather, the perversion of an ancient Hebrew text. The gopeller could not have meant his story to be taken as history, for the stage baby here is "born king of the Jews," which is absolutely unhistorical. Regarded as a farce, it is all clear enough; call it history, and you start endless disputes, wrangles, confusion, strife, hatred, wars and bloodshed—the most essential elements of Church history. Nor can those horrid elements ever cease until the gospels cease to be regarded as history. Once possess the public mind with the potent truth that Jesus was never king of the Jews, any more than he was mikado of Japan, that he never was anybody at all but a fiction, and then the Churches will gradually sink into the slumber of death, and theological crimes come to an end.

Without enlarging upon other points in this gospel, I may note that the flight into Egypt, the murder of the innocents by Herod, the return from Egypt, etc., all yield similar results when analysed—they really do not pretend to be history, but some kind of dramatic performances—they were all done "that it might be fulfilled," etc. In chapter iii. John the Baptist is manufactured out of an ancient script about a voice crying in the wilderness. Of course, there may well enough have been a notorious dipper named John, but this particular dipper had a part to play as per an ancient stage direction, and he performs it.

In Matthew iv. we light upon the funny story of Christ's encounter with Satan or the Devil. No one needs to be told that this contest was no more historical than that between Punch and Judy. Even the clergy wish the Devil to Jericho by this time. They have renounced him in a sense never intended by the concoctors of the Catechism; but Nick sticks with perfect unconcern in the places assigned him by the ancients. And as he is so essentially part and parcel of the gospel, the clergy must endure him and his mocking grin until they renounce the Christ also. Satan says, "Where Christ or God goes I go; we have never been separated yet; and we won't be. We were all three born together, of the same parents; and our life is so bound up together that if one dies the others must die instanter." The three legs of the holy tripod are Satan, God and Christ. No one, no two of them can stand alone. Wheresoever the gospel of Christ is proclaimed there also and always at the same time is proclaimed the gospel of the Devil. "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be"—so long as Christianity or Satanism shall endure. Amen.

Take Christ and the Devil as dramatic characters or puppets, and all is clear. Make one of them historical, and you must take that yarn in Matthew iv. as a sober narrative of actual events. What clergyman can muster courage enough to do that at this time of day?

To spare time I must omit many notes of Christ-manufacture that the gospels contain; but I cannot

pass over that in Matt. xxvi., 6 to 13. The word *christ* means oiled, greased. In savage times common men greased themselves, chiefs and priests were greased by their slaves. In course of time public officials took office by being publicly rubbed over with fat—often human fat, no doubt. After that the king and the priest were called the Greased or the Smeared by way of honoring them. The old savage custom prevails in England to this day—when a man is selected for some public but utterly useless and senseless post with a huge salary attached he is publicly smeared, to the delight of gaping fools; and after that he is called the "anointed," or the "Lord's anointed!" In the old mystery play he who took the principal part had to be greased and so turned into a Christ or an Anointed. Jesus could not of course get himself anointed or rubbed with fat in a public and official manner, nor could the gopellers invent such an "honor" for him, considering that all the rulers were his enemies. Still, as Jesus must play the part of the Christ, they bring a woman with a box of grease, a hysterical weeper and every way adapted to the part she had assigned her; and she greases Jesus into the Christ as he was taking his dinner! This is holy history, be it remembered, written for the bewilderment and the salvation of a lost world!

The entire history of Judas owes its existence to certain Old Testament texts used as stage directions in the Christ farce. I cannot expand this, but it must be evident that a character so well known as Jesus, so universally notorious, could not have required any traitor to hand him over to his foes. This part of the drama must have been added late and was inserted for the express purpose of holding up the Jews, in the character Judas, to universal hate and malignity—a remarkable sample of the "good will" of the Christian scheme.

However, taken as a play, there is much in the Judas story that becomes perfectly clear and congruous. Christ selected Judas as a disciple though he knew him to be a Devil and was fully aware that he would betray him—in fact, it is plain that Judas was chosen especially to be the traitor. History knows of no such case; but in dramas it is always so. Christ, of course, knew from the beginning who would betray him, for he knew the entire play and the part assigned to each performer. Just as he who plays Othello knows from the beginning how Iago will behave, so did Jesus foresee the treachery of Judas. How clear it all becomes when we regard the Christ and his troupe in their true light!

The last supper, the eating of the Christ, the crucifixion, the piercing of the side and the effluent water and blood, the resurrection and ascension all become clear as day when the gospel is regarded as a Mystery Play. Taken as history, it is a puzzle which a thousand years of close study has rendered ever more perplexing. Those who care may see in Justin Martyr's *Apology* that the early Christians were fully aware that the Christ was not historic. Justin almost frankly puts him on a par with the sons of Jupiter, which he could not have done if he had held the Christ story to be strictly historical (see *Apol.* 21, 22, 66).

I have not attempted to exhaust this subject; there is much in the gospels I might refer to but for fear of making my paper too long. The brightness of the Christ's garment, the sunlike splendor of his face, are well and sufficiently explained on the Play theory, and so is the nimbus painters attach to the head of his "portraits"—although that was borrowed from Apollo. I cannot refrain from glancing at Isaiah liii., which is evidently a brief summary of the same drama, which is far older than what is generally called Christianity. In that chapter we have the essence of the drama of an innocent sufferer vicariously ill-used by "the Lord"; and, regarding it in this light, we can see how very appropriately the New Testament writers could apply Isaiah's words to the Christ—the plays are identical if the players are not.

It seems to me more than probable that there never has been any real break in the continuity of the Christ Play from ancient Pagan times till now. The farce called the Mass is no deliberate invention, but a real savage survival, much changed, perhaps, but in all essentials the same as ever. And is not the Mass a real Mystery Play? and is not the Christ as literally eaten and crucified in every performance of the Mass as he ever has been at all since the cannibal predecessors of the priests sacramentally murdered and ate a real man?

I will venture another item. "Paul" says, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. ii. 20). It may be read *in* Christ, not *with*—crucified as the Christ, that is, much as a modern actor dies in Hamlet. And Paul says again, "I bear in my body the stigmata of Christ," or I bear branded on my body the stigmata of the Christ (Gal. vi. 17). Francis of Assisi also had the stigmata, not to mention other cases. Both these parties had played the Christ in the play I am speaking of, just as a man does now periodically at Ober Ammergau; and these two may have been fanatical enough to get the stigmata really branded on their bodies, instead of being painted as usual. For, remember, the performance was always religious and well calculated to rouse fanaticism.

Many years ago I threw out a hint in my *Liberator* to the effect that the gospels were originally nothing but notes for popular perusal of an ancient Mystery Play, and suggesting that some of our British friends might take up the subject and work it out in detail. Thereupon our deeply lamented friend, J. M. Wheeler, wrote me privately to say that he and others had been cultivating that identical field for three or four years. Since then J. M. Robertson has done good work in the same field, which still requires more cultivation. It seems to me, however, that the subject is ripe enough for popularising; hence these notes.

JOS. SYMES.

Cheltenham, Victoria, Australia.

### Acid Drops.

During the earthquake at San Francisco the churches fared just as badly as the hotels, theatres, and music-halls—to say nothing of worse places. "Providence" made no distinction. But what a chance it had of converting an unbelieving world! If all the churches, and all other buildings in any way associated with religious worship, had been left standing and intact, the "infidels" all over Christendom would have been dumbfounded for ever.

The famous Lick Observatory, standing on Mount Hamilton, commands a fine view of San Francisco. It is within the earthquake area, but we do not learn whether it has suffered any damage. The great Observatory, with its magnificent telescope, was erected and endowed by James Lick, an American "Liberal," which is a name over there for "Freethinker." James Lick also found the money for building the Paino Memorial Hall at Boston.

New York cranks are declaring that Naples and San Francisco have been visited by volcanic eruption and earthquake as a punishment for their wickedness. But, considering the state of things in so many Christian cities, one wonders why these two were picked out for a "judgment." We can easily understand, however, that the earthquake disasters in California may help the cause of superstition. Men become more religious—and religion is only another name for superstition—as they are brought acquainted with Fear. Shelley was not yet a great poet when he wrote *Queen Mab*, but he was already a philosopher. He quite understood religion:—

"Prolific fiend  
Who peopled earth with demons, hell with men,  
And heaven with slaves!"

He also understood the part played by Fear in the manufacture of gods. Apostrophising religion, he said:—

"Thine eager gaze scanned the stupendous scene,  
Whose wonders mocked the knowledge of thy pride.  
Their everlasting and unchanging laws  
Reproached thine ignorance. Awhile thou stoodst

Baffled and gloomy; then thou didst sum up  
The elements of all that thou didst know;  
The changing seasons, winter's leafless reign,  
The budding of the heaven-breathing trees,  
The eternal orbs that beautify the night,  
The sun-rise, and the setting of the moon,  
Earthquakes and wars, and poisons and disease,  
And all their causes, to an abstract point  
Converging, thou didst bend, and call'd it God."

Fifty years afterwards Buckle, the historian of civilisation, elaborately showed how the terrible aspects of nature had ministered to the disease of superstition.

The earthquake in California has not killed as many people as the famous earthquake at Lisbon. Nor has it killed as many as were wiped out in a few minutes by the eruption of Mont Pelée. But in some respects it more powerfully appeals to the imagination. The earthquake devastated a wide district. San Francisco was but the largest of many places that suffered. But being the largest it naturally attracts the greatest attention. First came the earthquake, rending and overthrowing thousands of buildings, and burying a multitude of people in their ruins. Then came, not "the still small voice" of Scripture, but a raging fire that burnt to death hundreds of people imprisoned in the fallen buildings, and destroyed a vast part of the city that was left standing. The scene must have been awful. There is too much talk about the cost of some of the buildings destroyed. What is all that to the terror and misery that must have prevailed?

Many years ago we wrote what some persons probably thought a "strong" article on the frightful earthquake in Japan, which, with the tidal wave that followed, destroyed so many thousands of people. One passage in that article is perhaps worth reproducing now. We wrote it under the influence of strong feeling, and we don't suppose we could better the expression now. The whole passage is contained in the following paragraph.

"Lay your hand upon your heart, Christian, and honestly answer this question. Would you have done this deed? Of course not. Your cheek flames at the thought. You would rush to save the victims. You would soothe the dying and reverently bury the dead. Why then do you worship a Moloch who laughs at the writhings of his victims and drinks their tears like wine? See, they are working and playing; they are at business and pleasure; one is toiling to support the loved ones at home; another is sitting with them in peace and joy; another is wooing the maiden who is dearer to him than life itself; another is pondering some benevolent project; another is planning a law or a poem that shall be a blessing or a delight to posterity. And lo the mandate of Moloch goes forth, and 'his word shall not return unto him void.' Swifter than thought calamity falls upon the gay and busy scene. Hearts that throbbled with joy now quiver with agony. The husband folds his wife in a last embrace. The mother gathers her children like Niobe. The lover clasps in the midst of horror the maiden no longer coy. Homes are shaken to dust, halls fall in ruins, the very temples of the gods are shattered. Brains are dashed out, blood flows in streams, limbs are twisted, bodies are pinned by falling masonry, cries of anguish pierce the air, groans follow, and lastly silence. Moloch then retires to his inmost sanctuary, filled and sated with death and pain.—Is it not better, Christian friend, to defy Moloch instead of worshipping him? Is it not still better to regard this deity as the creation of fanciful ignorance? Is not existence a terror if Providence may swoop upon us with inevitable talons and irresistible beak? And does not life become sweeter when we see no cruel intelligence behind the catastrophes of nature?"

"Providence" could hardly have been apparent to the most pious Christian in the death of Professor Pierre Curie, the discoverer of radium. Walking along in Paris, and probably thinking out some fresh problem, this very able and very modest scientist slipped his foot, fell to the ground, and was run over by a wagon, the wheel crushing his head and killing him instantly. His mangled corpse was all that was left to Madame Curie, herself a scientific investigator, of the husband she adored.

"Providence" doesn't care a straw how a great scientist dies, or whether he dies in the very height of his usefulness or afterwards. In Paris a wheel of a wagon may go over his head and destroy his "soul." At sea he might fall overboard and be snapt up by a shark. In India he might have furnished a meal to a tiger. It matters nothing to "Providence" either way.

"Where is God?" was a headline in last week's *Christian World*. The question was not answered.

Holy Russia, under the monstrous Autocracy of which the pious Czar is at least the conscious figure-head, contains more scoundrelism to the square yard than any other part of the globe. The pious Czar himself is safe in one of his palaces, guarded by Cossacks, but he cannot venture to go outside it, and is practically a prisoner. The subordinate scoundrels, who move about and run risks, get a bullet in them every now and then, and it would be idle to pretend sorrow when one of them meets his fate. We were far from shedding tears when we read the report of the shooting of Abramoff, the Cossack officer who outraged Marie Spirodonova, the girl who shot the infamous Governor of Tamboff. The hideous treatment to which the girl was subjected almost passes belief. Every kind of torture was inflicted upon her for many hours; and at last, wounded all over, with one eye blind and the other gouged out, helpless, and stark naked, the unspeakable beast Abramoff came in and violated her. Well, the hand of vengeance has sent him to his doom. And although bloodshed is in itself a nasty business, we say deliberately that it would be better for men to die by the thousand fighting for freedom and justice than to tolerate a state of things such as this case reveals in Russia. After all death is but death, and every man must die some time; and there are circumstances in which the old proverb may be true that it is sweet to die for one's country. Sweet, that is, to die for the country's welfare and dignity—for the freedom of its men and the honor of its women.

According to a *Tribune* telegram from New York, a most profound and remarkable sensation was caused by a speech in Congress by Mr. McDermott, who called upon the Russian Church to teach the people that Christ was a Hebrew, as a means of stopping the Jewish persecutions. This is a point that has often been pressed in the *Freethinker*—which is naturally a lot in advance of the Christians in such matters. Jesus was a Jew, his mother was a Jewess, his apostles were all Jews, and when an extra one had to be converted (by miracle or sunstroke) outside Damascus, it meant the addition of another Jew to the Hebrew company. Had there been no Jews there would have been no Christians. This is obvious, but we don't think it will stop the murder of Jews in Russia.

Christianity, we are told, is to be judged by its fruits. Well, let us look at its fruits in the colony of Natal, which has lately been attracting so much attention. It appears that a law has been passed forbidding the existence of any native churches which are not directly controlled by a white minister; and that, in pursuance of this law, the native churches have been deliberately and systematically burnt down. First they were pulled down, the furniture and benches were piled up amid the ruins, and the whole set on fire. Facts like these throw a strong light on the sweet speeches about the "dear heathen" delivered at missionary meetings.

A father applied to the Maldon bench for a vaccination exemption certificate. Being suddenly asked the name of his child, he replied: "There, it's clean gone; blowed if I can think of it." Whereupon the mayor said that a man who could not think of the name of his own child was not fit to apply for a certificate, and that the application would be refused. This is the sort of thing that destroys people's respect for the magistracy. That mayor was a very foolish person. A shocking bad memory for names, especially on a sudden, is quite compatible with more than average reasoning powers.

Absent-mindedness in general has often characterised great thinkers. It is said that Sir Isaac Newton once caught hold of a young lady's hand, and, instead of making the declaration she expected, used one of her fingers as a stopper for the pipe he was smoking. Had he appeared before the mayor of Maldon he would have been treated as an obvious lunatic.

Motor-car road-hogs knocked down Ernest Cottorill at Norwood Hill, Charlwood, breaking his leg in two places, and rendering him unconscious. They did not stop to render assistance. If he was dead, it didn't matter; if he was still living, the next motor-car might finish him. They were probably Christians, and perhaps had been to church the day before.

Mrs. George Gould, of U.S.A., being a very wealthy woman, and not being quite satisfied with the comforts of religion, has had her pedigree traced by the College of Heralds over here. They have fixed her up with what she wants. Of course! They are also preparing her an elaborate coat-of-arms, and it is to be printed with her pedigree

in costly style, for private distribution. Such are the products of Christian civilisation.

We saw a bill the other day announcing a religious meeting to be addressed by "Gipsy Smith's Father." No doubt, if it pays, his grandfather and mother-in-law will come along.

Human beings take to superstition as kindly as a duck takes to water. The explanation of it is that they have so many thousands of years of superstitious heredity behind them. And in view of this tremendous fact one need not be surprised at anything. Not even at the newspapers reporting, as though it were a matter of considerable importance, an address by Mr. Robert King, who is described as an "authority" amongst "occultists," at the Westminster Palace Hotel. This gentleman's subject was "Magic, Black and White"—which was not a reference to a certain brand of Buchanan's whisky. Mr. King told his hearers that holy water, for instance, had certain qualities that ordinary water had not. Those qualities passed into it from the priest. How they passed into it does not appear to have been stated. We believe common water is made holy water by the priests' dipping his finger into it after first putting that finger into his mouth. His saliva mixes with the water, and the saliva is a part of himself, and we suppose it partakes in some way of the Holy Ghost with which the priest is endowed. And if the priest is suffering from any disorder which leaves traces in his mouth, we dare say there would be some change in the common water after he had blessed it; but whether the change would be "holy" or not we leave to every one's own judgment.

The Protestant Reformation Society held a meeting at Exeter Hall lately, and listened to a denunciation by the Rev. Dr. Wright (chairman) of the approaching marriage between King Alphonso and Princess Ena. It appears that the P. R. Society intends to go on holding meetings in denunciation of "this unhappy and unholy project." This is turning a farce into a tragedy—although there will be a marriage instead of a death in the fifth act. These Protestant fanatics evidently don't know that religion is only a means to an end with the "classes." It is only the "masses" who are soft enough to take it seriously.

Mr. Limbrick, whoever he is, one of the speakers at that Exeter Hall meeting, declared that "the King had no right to outrage the deepest feelings of his people." But why gird at poor Edward VII. in this fashion? How on earth can he be responsible for the religion of all the members of the royal family, right and left, and up and down? How the deuce could he prevent a young woman from changing her religion in order to marry the King of Spain? Heaps of females would have changed their religion, and their skin too, for such a prize. It is really too bad to saddle King Edward with the duty of keeping every royal female in the way that pleases the Protestant Reformation Society.

This same Mr. Limbrick said that the English people could not forget the bitter agonies their country had suffered from her alliances with Spain in the past. But what on earth was the man referring to? Surely he was not referring to the days of the Peninsular War under Wellington. Perhaps he was referring to the days of "bloody Queen Mary" and her Spanish husband. But the "bitter agonies" of that age were not confined to the brief reign of Queen Mary. We only hear more about them then because the victims were Protestants. There were plenty of Catholic victims in Elizabeth's reign. And Catholics were all penalised in England from that time until the Act of Catholic Emancipation was passed in the nineteenth century. We dare say the worthy Mr. Limbrick imagines that Catholics did all the persecuting, and that all the victims were Protestants. That is how Protestant history has been written—by Protestants. But it is all a pack of lies. Protestants have been beastly persecutors to the full measure of their opportunities.

"Shakespeare on Baptist Pioneers." It nearly took our breath away. But it was only Mr. Shakespeare of the Free Church Council. So it didn't matter.

According to the *Christian World*, Mr. R. L. Knowles, the designer of the covers and title-pages of Dent's "Everyman's Library," is "a young Methodist artist." What is a Methodist artist?

Old Dowie, it is said, will resign his ecclesiastical offices in Zion City for £200,000. Divine commission and all, we presume, is included in the bargain. It is a sad come down

for Elijah II., but, after all, he has made a good thing out of the business. We understand that he will settle down with the £200,000 in Mexico, leaving Mrs. Dowie and the "un-kissed" son and heir behind. The Prophet may have a fine old time yet.

Rev. R. J. Campbell, preaching in the City Temple on Easter Sunday morning, declared that "The Resurrection is as certain as any fact attested by history." Such a declaration, if sincere, betrays a hopeless ignorance of the nature of the problem. There is absolutely no historical proof of the Resurrection, and we should be extremely glad of an opportunity of showing this to Mr. Campbell's congregation. But debate is not to the reverend gentleman's taste, and certainly it is not his forte.

A Leeds policeman found a man standing in the middle of a shallow pool at Killingbeck on Easter morning. The man was haranguing an imaginary audience. He declared himself to be a "prophet" and it took a lot of trouble to get him out of the water; in fact, he had to be dragged out with a rope. The next day he was charged with attempting to commit suicide, but it does not appear whether the water or the preaching was expected to kill him. The magistrates ordered him to be detained at the workhouse infirmary, with a view to testing his intellectuals. Apparently there was an overplus of religion in his constitution.

After all the bragging about the Welsh revival it is amusing to read of the decrease of Christian membership in the Principality. The *Methodist Recorder* reports that, notwithstanding the 3,000 on trial, there was an actual reduction of the full membership by 430 during the past year. And if this is true of Methodism, what must be the case in other bodies?

An "infidel" has not committed suicide. Oh dear no! The performer was the Welsh girl revivalist, Eunice Thomas, of Bargoed. On Good Friday—perhaps on the principle of the better the day the better the deed—she went down on the Rhymney Railway, took off her hat, replaced the hatpins, put her gloves under it, pulled her hair back to leave her neck free, and then placed it on the rail, so that the next train decapitated her. It was all done, as the coroner said, in "the most deliberate manner he had ever heard of." The jury brought in the usual verdict of "temporary insanity." The adjective may not be as correct as the noun.

A man of God at Moriston, near Swansea, has been denouncing chapel teas and singing festivals. He knew several young women in the district who had gone astray through these meetings. Very likely. Religious excitement and sexual excitement are first cousins.

Three hundred clericals brought an action for defamation of character against Professor Masaryk, who said something uncomplimentary to their profession. The Vienna court gave a verdict for the defendant. This was loudly applauded by the public. But the three hundred clericals are dissatisfied, and have lodged an appeal. They mean to have the blood of the man who doubts the beauty of their holiness. If they can get it.

The Lady Mayoress of Liverpool was allowed to present the Japanese sailors on board the *Katori* with copies of the New Testament. This sort of patronising impertinence is doubtless taken at its true value by the polite Japanese. Every copy of these presentation volumes bore the following inscription in Japanese characters: "This book is the word of God, revealing the birth, life, and death of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ." We dare say some of the bright little Japs wondered why the Mother had no place in the family group.

The *Nottingham Guardian* of Saturday, April 22, contained an advertisement of two addresses to be delivered the next morning and evening by the Rev. J. E. Rattenbury in the Albert Hall, as part of what is called the Nottingham Mission. Mr. Rattenbury delivered the morning address on "Easter and After," but Providence would not let him deliver the evening address on "Providence and the Earthquake." It burnt the place down in the afternoon. This is how we are obliged to read the occurrence. Certainly it is how the Christians would read it if the speaker had been a Freethinker. And we don't see why the interpretation should be changed for Mr. Rattenbury. It seems a plain warning to him to let Providence speak for itself. "I the Lord do all these things," the Bible says; after that, Mr. Rattenbury's views are unimportant, and even impertinent. He had better not tempt Providence again.

The *Washington Evening Star* of March 18 contains a dispatch from Norfolk, Va., dealing with the heresy of the Rev. Dr. W. M. Vines, pastor of the Freemason Street Baptist church, who, it is alleged, has declared that the Bible contains mistakes and has been reconstructed by modern science, and that the books of Genesis, Job, and Jonah are largely composed of fiction. One Arnold Eberhard, a leading Baptist churchman, who says he loves the Bible as he loves his wife and children, has come out in the newspapers declaring that the heretical preacher should be tarred and feathered and that he would be the one to put on both the feathers and the tar. The outbreak of Mr. Eberhard shows the need of heretical preaching in Norfolk, especially preaching of the kind that inculcates toleration and the liberty of thought.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Soul is but a name for the activities of the brain. This is proved by all sorts of positive evidence. One of the latest proofs comes from America. Some surgeons have operated on an incorrigibly vicious boy of twelve at Cleveland, Ohio. Five years ago he suffered a fracture of the skull, and a piece of bone, pressed against his brain, made him a degenerate. This being remedied by the operation, he immediately became tractable and affectionate.

Dr. Macnamara is incorrigible. At the Teachers' Conference at Scarborough he referred again—for the thousandth time—to the 20,000 teachers under a creed test, which he said would disappear under Mr. Birrell's Bill. Dr. Macnamara may be this, that, or the other, but no one suggests that he is a fool. He knows perfectly well that there was a creed test in the Board Schools as well as in the Church and Catholic Schools, and he knows very well that there will be a creed test in every school under Mr. Birrell's Bill as long as religion is taught there. Religion cannot be taught without a creed test being imposed upon the teachers. It may not be imposed openly, but it will be imposed all the same. To deny this is mere humbug and hypocrisy.

"J. B." of the *Christian World* had an article last week on "Undenominationalism." It was very clever, but it was all sophistry. He wound up with an appeal to the Secularist—"for he, too, believes in goodness, love, self-sacrifice, and service as the basis of character and the vital core of training." Perhaps so, dear "J. B." But the Secularist doesn't follow you in finding all that in its "highest form in the life, the teaching and the death of Jesus Christ." The notion that you have got what exactly suits the Secularist is just a trifle too thin. You can't expect to catch such birds with a net like that.

"We are able to say," the *British Weekly* states, "that the Government are quite confident that they will carry the Education Bill in its essential principles, not only through the House of Commons, but through the House of Lords." Well, time will show. But even if our Dissenting contemporary is right, and the Liberal Government carries out the Nonconformist mandate, we defy it to produce a condition of stable equilibrium. There will be no peace. The Bill, if carried, will only be the beginning of a fresh war. And the upshot is bound to be one of two things—either universal Sectarianism or universal Secular Education.

A few lines further on the *British Weekly* is positively funny. It says that Dr. Clifford's moderation has greatly gratified the Government. This is really delicious. Dr. Clifford refrains from attacking the Nonconformist Education Bill. What astonishing moderation!

The *Western Morning News* prints a vile, filthy, scoundrelly article on "Secularism and Morals" by an anonymous "Australian Agent-General." No wonder the writer was ashamed to put his name to such a libel on his own countrymen and country women. But the Plymouth paper in printing it takes the responsibility. And we have no hesitation in calling its conduct infamous. More than this we need not say, for the article itself is unworthy of criticism.

The Pope is said to be suffering from heart trouble. Judging from some of his utterances he seems to be suffering from head trouble too. He does not appear to be either a thinker or a statesman, but just a good sort of priest accidentally elevated to the first clerical position in the world.

Heaven ever renders her dews to the earth; but earth seldom, or never, renders her dues to heaven.



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, April 22, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, London, W.: 7.30, "God at San Francisco."

May 6, Liverpool.

### To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—April 29, Liverpool.
- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—April 29, Manchester.
- RIDGWAY FUND.—T. Hopkins £1, R. E. 5s. J. Partridge (Birmingham) also acknowledges: Friend 1s. 6d., J. B. 6d.
- J. ROBERTS.—We have given Mrs. Sarah Jones some attention. See the thirteenth page of this week's *Freethinker*.
- G. M. DAVIES.—Glad you liked our Shakespeare article. The passage you want is probably one of the speeches of Edmund in *King Lear*, Act I., scene ii. See also what Iago says to Cassio after the drunken scene in *Othello*.
- G. ROLEFFS.—Thanks for cuttings.
- J. E. GARRETT.—Mauve, green, and white.
- A. H. PAUL.—Gutter literature of that kind is beneath contempt. To mention the name of its author in America, even in Christian circles, was to excite disgust. That the dirty thing should be published in England by the late John Kensit was only natural. It is not generally known, but the "martyred" Kensit started by opposing "infidelity." He was not successful; in fact, he was a nobody. But he found a more profitable game in attacking "Romanism" in the Church of England. His son carries on the business.
- W. P. MURRAY.—Useful, yes; thanks.
- H. W. CALLINGTON.—Some of the cuttings were ancient; for the others, thanks.
- C. W. STYRING.—Thanks for cuttings. See paragraphs. You will see that we are now dealing with the Education Bill.
- J. L. EVANS.—The Anglo-Israelite craze is astonishingly foolish, but it is harmless.
- T. FISHER.—It is no use expecting fair-play from such journals. We have repeatedly said, and we are more convinced of it than ever, that while a Christian may often be trusted as a man he is never to be trusted as a Christian. Lying for the glory of God, and the profit of the Church, has always been a well-practised Christian virtue. Mr. Stead made an appeal to his Christian brethren in regard to Dr. Torrey's slanders against Paine and Ingersoll, but they are kept mum. Mr. Stead acted nobly, but he demonstrated the truth of our old charge against his co-religionists. They still approve lies that hurt the "infidel" and help "edification." Don't lose heart, however; the world improves, though slowly; that is to say, the number of Christians diminishes.
- W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for your very useful cuttings.
- H. THOMAS.—Thanks. See elsewhere.
- W. P. PEARSON.—Contents of letter noted; also see "Sugar Plums."
- J. A. REID.—You may rely upon our "pegging away." Your advice is on the lines of Jeremy Bentham's motto: "Maximise morals—minimise religion."
- E. S.—Thanks for the Byron picture-postcards.
- W. G. WARNER.—We should certainly like to see more Freethought propaganda done in the Newcastle district.
- G. C. WALKER.—You suggest that the Chatham Branch should be restarted, and believe that many of the old members would be glad to co-operate if the work were carried on in a central position. Perhaps something might be done, and greater success achieved without the entanglement of an out of the way meeting-place. What do other Chatham friends say?
- J. G. STUART.—Pleased to see your excellent letter in the *Northern Echo*.
- T. HOPKINS.—See acknowledgment. Thanks for subscription, also for your humorous letter. Mr. Ridgway has neither prayed nor preyed; he has been a plain honest working man, and men of that kind are never rich at eighty.
- FOUR MONTHS READER.—No doubt the books you refer to are well worth the money, but we believe it is best for every man to follow his own lines of reading. Besides, a few of the greatest writers are better than a lot of selections from all sorts of authors.
- W. KENNETT.—Surely a "religious atmosphere" is not essential to the instruction of children in secular subjects. Your sympathy with the religionists seems overstrained.
- THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

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

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

### Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote has decided to postpone the subject already advertised for his Queen's Hall lecture this evening (April 29). That subject is one that will keep for another occasion. Instead of it he will take a subject of more immediate interest—one on which some leading preachers have been enlightening their congregations. "God at San Francisco" is a topic that will give room for a rousing discourse. Freethinkers should give as much publicity as possible to this lecture amongst their friends and acquaintances. It is impossible to bill London all over for a Sunday evening lecture. Any advertisement over such a vast area must be a colossal expense. This we cannot incur; so we beg the "saints" to act as advertising agents themselves. They can easily do it—and fill the hall with a little trouble. Let them try to get Christians to come. Those are the people we want to reach.

There was a good meeting at Queen's Hall on Sunday evening. It might have been better, but no doubt the holiday season was responsible for that. Mr. Foote's lecture was enthusiastically applauded, and much laughter was provoked by his criticism of the syllabus of Bible teaching which has the warm approval of Mr. Birrell and Dr. Clifford. Mr. Victor Roger, who occupied the chair, made an appeal for discussion of the lecture, but none was forthcoming. Some questions, however, were asked and answered. Prior to the lecture some first-class instrumental music was given by excellent artists who do not wish to be identified, and was highly relished by the meeting.

One of Mr. Foote's most interested and appreciative auditors on Sunday night was Mr. John T. Lloyd, who seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself. Mr. Lloyd went off in his modest fashion before Mr. Foote could get round from the anteroom to shake hands with him.

Manchester "saints" will please note that Mr. John Lloyd lectures in the Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints, this afternoon and evening (April 29). They will miss a treat if they fail to hear him.

Mr. Cohen had good meetings at Liverpool on Sunday, and will doubtless have better to-day (April 29) when the holiday season is over. Several heathen—we beg pardon, Christians—were present at the evening lecture, and the secretary expects to hear from some of them by-and-by. A number of questions were asked and very ably answered.

Mr. Cohen lectures at Nelson on Monday and Tuesday evenings, under the auspices of the new local Branch of the N. S. S. Details, which have not reached us, will be found in the local advertisements.

Liverpool "saints" should note that Mr. Foote visits Liverpool the first Sunday in May and lectures in the evening at the great Picton Hall. As the evenings are lengthening, and the weather is improving, it may be necessary to work a little harder to get the Picton Hall crowded. We hope it will be done.

The new North London Branch, formed in connection with the last course of Stanley Hall lectures, is carrying on very successful outdoor meetings at Parliament Hill. The meeting last Sunday afternoon was a very fine one. We wish this new enterprise a brilliant future.

The Camberwell Branch begins its new season's open-air work on Sunday, May 6. A new station will be started at Rushcroft-road—corner of Brixton-road, outside the Tate Library. There will be no more lectures at Station-road. Morning, afternoon, and evening lectures will be continued in Brockwell Park. Mr. F. A. Davies opens the ball, and is pretty sure to have good meetings.

We are glad to see that our friend, Mr. J. W. de Caux, of Great Yarmouth, has got some of the local Christians entangled in another controversy in the *Yarmouth Mercury*—this time on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mr. de Caux is a most generous-minded gentleman, speaking personally, but in controversy he is a sort of intellectual spider, and the poor Christian who gets into his web is pretty sure to meet the usual fate of such adventurers.

The Annual Conference of the Independent Labor Party carried a resolution in favor of Secular Education.

The *Morning Leader* recollects some of its old principles occasionally. In a recent article on "The Public Point of View," it wrote as follows: "We believe that Mr. Birrell's Bill represents with considerable preciseness the public point of view. If that prove true, the struggles of the sects over a compromise which they are not powerful enough to alter will gradually become meaningless even to the combatants, and cease. If it does not, the result must be a fight to a finish between sectarianism and pure secularism. In such a battle the public sympathy will, without question, be with the secularist, and the people's sympathy means, in this case, certain victory. It is a consummation with which we should be content." The last sentence just saved our contemporary's face.

April 19 was the death-day of Byron. His release from suffering took place, as all the world remembers, at Missolonghi, in 1824. This year the poet's statue behind Apsley House, was decorated with lilies and roses, and during the morning an audience, mainly of Greeks in London, assembled at the railings dividing Hamilton Gardens from Hyde Park, and listened to a brief address in front of the statue. One magnificent wreath bore the following inscription from Shelley's *Adonais*:—

"He has outsoared the shadow of our night;  
Envy and calumny and hate and pain,  
And that unrest which men miscall delight,  
Can touch him not and torture not again;  
From the contagion of the world's slow strain  
He is secure, and now can never mourn  
A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;  
Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,  
With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn."

Beautiful lines! But they were written by Shelley in memory of Keats, and should not be applied to Byron. Shelley did write several things about Byron, and all finely laudatory, at least in his verso. Above all there is the noble sonnet to Byron, ending with the daring hyperbole:—

"The worm beneath the sod  
May lift itself in homage of the God."

It is good to know that Greece still honors Byron. If she forgot him she would herself deserve to be forgotten. "One loves to think of him at last," we once wrote, "laying down his life, as he gave his substance for the freedom of Greece. With all his faults, no pious or cowardly fear of death ever haunted his mighty spirit. How gloriously he would have died on the battlefield, fighting desperately for the cause of the people. The last verses he ever wrote showed the troubled stream of his life running pure at its close. Noble and sincere in its language, it was a fitting farewell to the world; and although the poet did not find his 'soldier's grave,' he died none the less for the cause to which he had pledged his fortune and the remnant of his strength."

#### EDUCATION AND RELIGION.

Upon the remote and abstract questions of religious faith, the influence of education is very predominant. The theological doctrines which have received our passive assent in early infancy, are not encountered on our entering the world by experimental proofs of their fallacy, such as correct the fanciful and enthusiastic notions of every-day life obtained in the school, the college, or the ideal world of books. The proofs (such as they are) which decide on the fate of religious theories, are difficult to obtain, and hard to comprehend; and argument is so opposed to argument, that discussion ordinarily tends only to increase doubt. But catechisms and early drillings confirm the child in the belief of dogmas which afterwards never enter his mind, except when it becomes necessary to transmit them, by a repetition of the process, to his own progeny. By these means, nations go on from generation to generation, entertaining the same faith respecting religions, while they vary incessantly in all that concerns practical morality.—*Sir T. C. Morgan, M.D., "Philosophy of Morals,"* p. 289.

#### The Decay of Church-going.

THESE are degenerate days in erstwhile kirk-going Scotland. For the people of North Britain, on the testimony of our clerical guardians and leaders, have, for one reason or another, fallen off sadly in the matter of church attendance, and there is much lamentation and shaking of heads thereat on the part of the clergy. The disfavor into which public attendance at divine worship has sunk in Scotland is not confined to the large urban centres, though, of course, it is in such quarters we find it most marked. The percentage of church-goers in the small towns and villages is still a fairly respectable one, though by no means commensurate with the total population. The higher proportion of church-going in the outlying districts is partly accounted for by the fact that in such localities there is little competition with, or opposition to, religious worship. Making due allowance for the duller intelligence and narrower outlook of the bucolic mind, which render it an easier prey to the clerical influence, people in the country districts go to church or chapel largely because there is really nothing else to do on Sunday and a visit even to a church is a welcome break in the hideous and appalling monotony of a Scotch Sabbath. The kirk is a common rendezvous; friends and neighbors meet on the way to, or coming from, worship; the choir and the music are always an attraction; the sermon even—if there be a capable speaker—may be something to look forward to. In fact in a number of ways the church in sparsely populated districts appeals to those social instincts that are but inadequately catered for—if at all—by other agencies.

Nor must we overlook the force of public opinion and conventionality—always strongly operative in small communities in connection with outward religious conformity. It is still the hall-mark of reputation to go to church. Anyone in a small village who habitually absents himself from church attracts an undesirable attention which may manifest itself inimically in more ways than one. It is hardly possible to lead a life of independence and privacy in a small community. Everybody knows what everybody else is—and does; and as a consequence many individuals who have little faith in religion find it politic and convenient to placate local opinion by maintaining the external semblance of religion—namely, church connection. These and other considerations sufficiently account for a proportionately larger church attendance in suburban districts than obtains in the great industrial centres.

In the cities the conditions of life are entirely different, and the resultant effect upon the dimensions of church congregations naturally educes the tears and jeremiads of the clergy. It is true that even in the big towns we have not yet secured a free and rational use of the Sunday, but there is usually an alternative to church-going, and the average man seizes it. Museums and Art Galleries are open; secular and political lectures are delivered; concerts, euphemistically called sacred, are becoming frequent; cycling is an immensely popular Sunday recreation for the townsman, and tramway cars furnish facilities for jaunting and for visiting friends. All these militate against the old-fashioned observance of the Lord's Day. Above all, the decay of church-going in the cities has been assisted by the fact that the town-dweller—to an extent unknown to his country cousin—is able to live his own life in his own way and to spend Sunday as he chooses. He is out of reach of the frowns of his employer and the admonitions of the minister, and if the air be not so pure as in the country the mental atmosphere is freer. Finally, as a result of this concatenation of circumstances, together with vastly extended opportunities for reading, the typical modern citizen is highly critical and sceptical regarding the claims of the Churches in relation to Sunday observance and in other directions.

Many of the Protestant clergy still obstinately uphold the old-fashioned view of the whole duty of man in relation to the Sabbath, and set their faces sternly against the secular encroachments that are being made on their monopoly of one-seventh of our week and of our lives. It is surely one of the most significant of circumstances that the Churches must have a monopoly of the situation if they are to retain their hold upon the people. Yet the clergy entirely miss the real significance of the matter. They indeed recognise keenly enough the necessity for maintaining exclusive rights as regards the Sunday, but they are blind—one might almost say wilfully blind—to the moral that can be drawn from the fact that such exclusive privileges are deemed essential to the prosperity of the Churches. Why is it that when any alternative is provided to church-going the people select the former and eschew the latter? It will not do merely to ascribe their choice to the perverseness or depravity of human nature. It may suit the clergy to pretend that non-church-going is symptomatic of lax morality, but no one whose interest is not purely a Church interest is misled by any such contention. The curious problem confronting the Churches is this: that while the proportion of our population which is entirely outside the influence of the Churches increases year by year, there is a growth and not a declination of public morality. This condition of things is no cause of wonderment to any student of sociology, fully aware as he must be that there is no necessary or inseparable connection between church-going and moral conduct. But it is a startling fact for the clergy that in an age when unbelief is more assertive and widespread than it ever was before we have a vastly quickened public conscience and a much more universally displayed anxiety to grapple effectively with the multitudinous evils the Churches have left uncured. Non-church-going does not mean moral indifference—let alone moral turpitude—but a juster perception of what morality is and what the real essentials and conditions of moral conduct are.

Complaints regarding the scant attendance at diets of worship have been an annual occurrence at the meetings of the Scotch Church Presbyteries for many years past, but the animadversions of the Fathers and Elders are becoming more Cassandra-like and lachrymal each year. Dr. Dykes Shaw, speaking to the Edinburgh Presbytery recently, laid stress on "the wave of materialism" that has carried the people away from the Church. But, as a fairly competent journalistic critic pointed out, there are phases in materialism, and not all of these phases merit reprobation. Indeed, it has been repeatedly emphasised in these columns that the word "materialism" will bear more than one construction. The clearer secular outlook of the majority of the people, which is at least one characteristic of the twentieth century, is not matter for regret, but for satisfaction. It is really the development in the public mind of a healthy spirit of questioning—call it scepticism if you will—that has reduced the Church from its former high estate in the public eye and minimised its importance as a moralising agency. That and a growing appreciation on the part of the slow-witted multitude of the iniquitous and glaring nature of those social evils which the Churches are not only powerless but largely unwilling to do more than palliate. It is because the masses of the common people are realising more distinctly day by day that the Church has always been—and still is—leagued with their oppressors that the churches are standing empty.

It seems rather odd that Edinburgh—the ecclesiastical centre of Scotland—should have shown the way on some points in breaking down the sanctity of the Sabbath. Perhaps the reason is to be found in the very fact that Edinburgh is the centre of Church activities in Scotland. The history of the Papacy shows that nowhere was the Pope held in less awe and reverence than in Rome itself. The Popes were too well known in Rome. It is not without cause that a prophet has no honor in his

own country. And it is just possible that prolonged clerical dominance in Edinburgh is bringing about its own undoing. After a long struggle the citizens have obtained the use of the cars on Sunday, the Art Galleries were thrown open a considerable time ago by the authority of the former Secretary for Scotland, and open-air band performances have been given before great crowds of people, to the scandal of the self-righteous. These band performances were first given on the Edinburgh Castle parade-ground, on the initiative of the commanding officer of the garrison, who, of course, in a matter of this kind is outwith the jurisdiction of the city authorities. They were afterwards extended to the King's Park, where last summer a crowd of thirty thousand people might be seen listening to the music. The clergy waxed wroth at this abuse of the Lord's Day, though in what manner the morals of the public could be adversely affected by outdoor musical performances might well puzzle any unbiassed observer. However, the crowd had the temerity to enjoy itself without going to church, which is a grievous cause of offence to the godly.

At a meeting lately of the United Free Church Presbytery of Glasgow there have been more tears shed over the backsliding of the people in the matter of church-going. Dr. Corbett, in presenting the report of the Home Missions Committee, stated that "the appalling fact seemed to be that, on a moderate calculation, somewhere about fifty per cent. of the population of Glasgow were non-church-goers." We are not "appalled" by the fact; indeed, we think the calculation is a very "moderate" one, and that Dr. Corbett leans unduly to the side of clerical optimism in his estimate. If the Roman Catholics be left out of the account (as church attenders Roman Catholics can put their Protestant brethren to shame) we venture to assert that nothing like fifty per cent. of the remaining population of Glasgow are church-goers. Protestants are perpetually puzzled at the much better results shown by the Roman Catholic Church in this matter of church attendance. Apart from the superior warmth and attractiveness of the Romish service, there is a good solid reason to account for the disparity in numbers between a Protestant and a Catholic congregation. If Protestantism had the courage to teach that anyone absenting himself from divine worship thereby incurred the guilt of mortal sin, and ran the risk of hell-fire, there might be considerably more crowding at Protestant diets of worship. That is if Protestantism could have induced its adherents to believe such doctrine. It is only Roman Catholicism that can get people to believe things like that.

Dr. Corbett further remarked that what this defection from the Churches implied of social, moral, and spiritual danger was hardly possible of exaggeration. But, viewing the subject with a non-professional eye, we are quite convinced that the clergy do exaggerate the dangers of the situation. Where are the proofs that the morals of the nation are worse to-day than they were when outward compliance with the forms of religion was more general? Our clerical friends may point to the outrages and atrocities of various kinds that fill the newspapers from week to week. But these things—and worse—happened in the days of faith. Only there was no halfpenny sensational press to dish them up to the public, morning, noon, and night. There always have been croakers—generally religious croakers—who can see nothing but evil in the age in which they live, and to whom the past appears veiled in a false glamor of romance that obscures the real facts. Individuals who feel called by God to work for the regeneration of the race are too apt to overvalue their own importance in the scheme of things, and too prone to think and speak in superlatives. One thing is certain. The people are drifting away from the Churches and the clergy. And the clergy may wring their hands and moan over their vanishing occupation, but can they do anything to arrest the growth of the secular spirit?

G. SCOTT.

## Ingersoll's Lecture on Superstition.—II.

(Continued from p. 252.)

THIS belief in the efficacy of bones or rags and holy hair was born of another belief—the belief that all diseases were produced by evil spirits. The insane were supposed to be possessed by devils. Epilepsy and hysteria were produced by the imps of Satan. In short, every human affliction was the work of the malicious emissaries of the god of hell. This belief was almost universal, and even in our time the sacred bones are believed in by millions of people.

But to-day no intelligent man believes in the existence of devils—no intelligent man believes that evil spirits cause disease—consequently, no intelligent person believes that holy bones or rags, sacred hairs or pieces of wood, can drive disease out, or in any way bring back to the pallid cheek the rose of health.

Intelligent people now know that the bone of a saint has in it no greater virtue than the bone of any animal. That a rag from a wandering beggar is just as good as one from a saint, and that the hair of a horse will cure disease just as quickly and surely as the hair of a martyr. We now know that all the sacred relics are religious rubbish; that those who use them are for the most part dishonest, and that those who rely on them are almost idiotic.

This belief in amulets and charms, in ghosts and devils, is superstition, pure and simple.

Our ancestors did not regard these relics as medicine, having a curative power, but the idea was that evil spirits stood in dread of holy things—that they fled from the bone of a saint, that they feared a piece of the true cross, and that when holy water was sprinkled on a man they immediately left the premises. So, these devils hated and dreaded the sound of holy bells, the light of sacred tapers, and, above all, the ever-blessed cross.

In those days the priests were fishers for money, and they used these relics for bait.

### II.

Let us take another step:

This belief in the Devil and evil spirits laid the foundation for another belief: Witchcraft.

It was believed that the Devil had certain things to give in exchange for a soul. The old man, bowed and broken, could get back his youth—the rounded form, the brown hair, the leaping heart of life's morning—if he would sign and seal away his soul. So, it was thought that the malicious could by charm and spell obtain revenge, that the poor could be enriched, and that the ambitious could rise to place and power. All the good things of this life were at the disposal of the Devil. For those who resisted the temptations of the Evil One, rewards were waiting in another world, but the Devil rewarded here in this life. No one has imagination enough to paint the agonies that were endured by reason of this belief in witchcraft. Think of the families destroyed, of the fathers and mothers cast in prison, tortured and burned, of the firesides darkened, of the children murdered, of the old, the poor and helpless that were stretched on racks, mangled and flayed!

Think of the days when superstition and fear were in every house, in every mind, when accusation was conviction, when assertion of innocence was regarded as a confession of guilt, and when Christendom was insane!

Now we know that all of these horrors were the result of superstition. Now we know that ignorance was the mother of all the agonies endured. Now we know that witches never lived, that human beings never bargained with any Devil, and that our pious savage ancestors were mistaken.

Let us take another step:

Our fathers believed in miracles, in signs and wonders, eclipses and comets, in the virtues of bones, and in the powers attributed to evil spirits. All these belonged to the miraculous. The world was supposed to be full of magic; the spirits were sleight-of-hand performers—necromancers. There were no natural causes behind events. A Devil wished, and it happened. One who had sold his soul to Satan made a few motions, uttered some strange words, and the event was present. Natural causes were not believed in. Delusion and illusion, the monstrous and miraculous, ruled the world. The foundation was gone—reason had abdicated. Credulity gave tongues and wings to lies, while the dumb and limping facts were left behind—were disregarded and remained untold.

### WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

An act performed by a master of nature without reference to the facts in nature. This is the only honest definition of a miracle.

If a man could make a perfect circle, the diameter of which was exactly one-half the circumference, that would be a miracle in geometry. If a man could make twice four, nine, that would be a miracle in mathematics. If a man could make a stone, falling in the air, pass through a space of ten feet the first second, twenty-five feet the second second, and five feet the third second, that would be a miracle in physics. If a man could put together hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen and produce pure gold, that would be a miracle in chemistry. If a minister were to prove his creed, that would be a theological miracle. If Congress by law would make fifty cents worth of silver worth a dollar, that would be a financial miracle. To make a square triangle would be a most wonderful miracle. To cause a mirror to reflect the faces of persons who stand behind it, instead of those who stand in front, would be a miracle. To make echo answer a question would be a miracle. In other words, to do anything contrary to or without regard to the facts in nature is to perform a miracle.

Now we are convinced of what is called the "uniformity of nature." We believe that all things act and are acted upon in accordance with their nature; that under like conditions the results will always be substantially the same; that like ever has and ever will produce like. We now believe that events have natural parents and that none die childless.

Miracles are not simply impossible, but they are unthinkable by any man capable of thinking.

Now an intelligent man cannot believe that a miracle ever was, or ever will be performed.

Ignorance is the soil in which belief in miracles grows.

### III.

Let us take another step:

While our ancestors filled the darkness with evil spirits, enemies of mankind, they also believed in the existence of good spirits. These good spirits sustained the same relation to God that the evil ones did to the Devil. These good spirits protected the faithful from the temptations and snares of the Evil One. They took care of those who carried amulets and charms, of those who repeated prayers and counted beads, of those who fasted and performed ceremonies. These good spirits would turn aside the sword and arrow from the breast of the faithful. They made poison harmless, they protected the credulous, and in a thousand ways defended and rescued the true believer. They drove doubts from the minds of the pious, sowed the seeds of credulity and faith, saved saints from the wiles of women, painted the glories of heaven for those who fasted and prayed, made it possible for the really good to dispense with the pleasures of sense and to hate the Devil.

These angels watched over infants who had been baptised, over persons who had made holy vows, over priests and nuns and wandering beggars who believed.

These spirits were of various kinds: Some had once been men or women, some had never lived in this world, and some had been angels from the commencement. Nobody pretended to know exactly what they were, or exactly how they looked, or in what way they went from place to place, or how they affected or controlled the minds of men.

It was believed that the king of all these evil spirits was the Devil, and that the king of all the good spirits was God. It was also believed that God was in fact the king of all, and that the Devil himself was one of the children of this God. This God and this Devil were at war, each trying to secure the souls of men. God offered the rewards of eternal joy and threatened eternal pain. The Devil baited his traps with present pleasure, with the gratification of the senses, with the ecstasies of love, and laughed at the joys of heaven and the pangs of hell. With malicious hand he sowed the seeds of doubt—induced men to investigate, to reason, to call for evidence, to rely upon themselves; planted in their hearts the love of liberty, assisted them to break their chains, to escape from their prisons and besought them to think. In this way he corrupted the children of men.

Our fathers believed that they could by prayer, by sacrifice, by fasting, by performing certain ceremonies, gain the assistance of this God and of these good spirits. They were not quite logical. They did not believe that the Devil was the author of all evil. They thought that flood and famine, plague and cyclone, earthquake and war, were sometimes sent by God as punishment for unbelief. They fell upon their knees and with white lips prayed the good God to stay his hand. They humbled themselves, confessed their sins, and filled the heavens with their vows and cries. With priests and prayers they tried to stay the plague. They kissed the relics, fell at shrines, besought the Virgin and the saints, but the prayers all died in the heartless air, and the plague swept on to its natural end. Our poor fathers knew nothing of any science. Back of all events they put spirits, good or bad, angels or demons, gods or devils. To them nothing had what we call a natural cause. Everything was

the work of spirits. All was done by the supernatural, and everything was done by evil spirits that they could do to ruin, punish, and mislead and damn the children of men. This world was a field of battle, and here the hosts of heaven and hell waged war.

(To be continued.)

## Revival Pandemonium.

### WILD SCENES AT CWMTWRCH.

#### EXTRAVAGANT ASSERTIONS; HYSTERICAL OUTBURSTS.

Mrs. JONES, of Carmel, held meetings at Cwmtwrch on Tuesday in farmhouses. The first was at Tyr-Gos. At this a miner declared that he saw the prayer and praise of the meeting embodied in the form of a radiant cloud ascending towards heaven. The second meeting was held at Maespica Farm. Here in the evening Mrs. Jones took her seat at a round table in the centre of the kitchen. Standing around were men and women packed closely and filling the room to its utmost. Among those present were persons from Swansea, Morriston, Gorseinon, Bridgend, and Abertillery, and three ladies from Liverpool.

It was soon manifest that all present were overflowing with religious enthusiasm. Nothing like order prevailed, and at times all the assembly seemed to be either speaking, praying, crying, or fainting at the same time. A voice above all this unusual din was heard declaring a "readiness to fight for the Lord."

Then Mrs. Jones threw herself on the table, and appearing in great agony screamed out, "I love Thee." Then she went on to say that what she was suffering was as nothing, but the people should see their iniquities. Did they not see Christ now? Did they not observe His shining face? Let them love Jesus with all their hearts. Then a voice sounded above the clamor,

"I SEE THOUSANDS OF ANGELS."

Mrs. Jones, continuing, said, if they would only ask God He would hear all people. (Loud shouts of "Diolch.") By this time men and women were to be seen in almost all attitudes, gesticulating, shouting, praying, and laughing. Someone started a hymn, which was taken up by a part of the company, but mingled with the "harmony" were shouts, wild and

#### EAR-PIERCING SHRIEKS,

and the thumping of tables and chairs, "Thank God," burst in a stentorian voice, "if the first revival has cooled down there is a new one rising. The last revival was amongst the Methodists, but the present one is amongst the Congregationalists and Baptists." Rapturous outbursts of "Diolch" followed this declamation. Another man said he did not believe that he was himself—he could speak in many tongues. "Thank the Lord," rejoined another, "for this Pentecost six weeks before Whitsuntide." Roars of laughter greeted this remark. They wanted Christ to bend them, continued the speaker, undismayed by the ridicule of which he seemed to be the object. "Christ," he said, "does not want men with starch." Mrs. Jones again became the centre of attention. She was wildly waving her arms and appeared to be in great distress. It was proclaimed that she was in agony because of unbelievers, but that they must not expect smooth times in a revival. They must be prepared for storms. Mrs. Jones murmured, "Lord, I do not understand Thee," and raising her voice to a higher pitch she exclaimed, "Oh, Lord, let me feel Thee," and pointing upwards she literally screamed the prayer, "O Iesu, Iesu." "Rescued by God," shouted those about her, and Mrs. Jones broke down in a fit of weeping. "Diolch, Diolch," resounded through the building. The whole assembly seemed beside itself. One young man fell into the arms of others in an unconscious state; and in the midst of the general "hub-bub" a loud voice was heard calling, "Think of Christ on Calvary. Pray for light." The tension was relieved by someone starting to sing "Diolch." Mrs. Jones, after another paroxysm, declared that that night she had had given to her on her hands the names of three men whom the world thought were followers of Christ; "but," she solemnly declared, "He knew them not." The three men were against her. Then with a strong voice she appealed to the Almighty to bend them. A man at this point fell into the arms of a woman loudly shouting "O Iesu, O Iesu; without Jesus, without light," strongly wrestling with those holding him. Ejaculations more or less coherent continued to be made, and then the assembly was swayed by an uncontrollable burst of hysterical laughter, in the midst of which one of the visitors from Liverpool gravely declared that she

#### HAD SEEN CHRIST IN A VISION.

Then another man suddenly took to wrestling with those about him, and being apparently in a fit, had to be forcefully

restrained from doing harm. The excitement became indescribable, and in the midst of the din a man stood over the prostrate form and shouted at the top of his voice, "Oh, Jesus, I command thee to release this man from the bonds of the Devil." The suffering one eventually seemed to regain consciousness, and his first words were "Diolch Iddo!" Periods of laughing, crying, praying, shouting, and gesticulating continued in rapid succession, the scene going beyond anything yet witnessed even in connection with this so-called mission of the "Wonderful Woman of Carmel."

—South Wales Echo, Wednesday, April 18.

[We reproduce the above in order to let our readers see what the Welsh Revival really is. It must be remembered that this lunacy has been blessed by the men of God.]

## Correspondence.

### MR. HOLYOAKE'S ATHEISM.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Whilst thanking you for having so kindly afforded Mr. Mackenzie an ample opportunity in this week's *Freethinker* of extricating himself from a difficult position, I am wondering whether it would be of any avail my asking Mr. Mackenzie to disclose the name and address of some of his friends to whom he reported Mr. Holyoake's declaration within ten minutes of the event. Mr. Mackenzie says "many can testify." Will they do so? Surely Mr. Mackenzie would like to obtain corroboration. He would be compelled to do so in a law court. Why expect immunity in this case? Will Mr. Mackenzie allow me to inspect his pocket note-book? Mr. Mackenzie says, "the greater number of whom were familiar with his writings." What does he wish to imply by this? In all Mr. Holyoake's writings—since 1891—can Mr. Mackenzie or his friends bring to mind one sentence in which Mr. Holyoake calls himself an *Atheist*? If Mr. Mackenzie produces such evidence, I will, Sir, by your permission, send you (Mr. Foote) a sovereign to use as you please. Unfortunately, instead of confirming his original assertions, Mr. Mackenzie merely introduces additional ones.

Has Mr. Mackenzie asked the late Mr. Holyoake's relations and friends to verify what he says?

GEORGE JACOB.

[We insert this letter as written, "sovereign" and all, although we don't know why we should be mixed up financially in the dispute.—EDITOR.]

## Little Things that Tell.

It was wretched weather, and as I hurried through Saint Paul's Churchyard the door of the Chapter House opened, and out came a Church dignitary.

I stopped, because a woman of miserable appearance approached as he was about to enter his carriage and asked him for something; but he only glanced at her, pitilessly.

The footman in waiting covered his master's knees with a fur rug, and then got up beside the coachman, who immediately drove off.

This poor woman looked so dejected, and, walking away, drew a cover of some sort more tightly round her baby.

Now, he must have seen that woman's condition, and he must have heard her request; likewise, he must know these words, by Christ: "Give to every one that asketh."

Such is the piety that proceeds from religion.

Ring down the safety curtain.

A. DRAMA.

### When reason's voice

Loud as the voice of nature, shall have waked  
The nations; and mankind perceive that vice  
Is discord, war, and misery; that virtue  
Is peace, and happiness, and harmony;  
When man's maturer nature shall disdain  
The playthings of its childhood;—kingly glare  
Will lose its power to dazzle; its authority  
Will silently pass by; the gorgeous throne  
Shall stand unnoticed in the regal hall,  
Fast falling to decay; whilst falsehood's trade  
Shall be as hateful and unprofitable  
As that of truth is now.

—Shelley.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

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

### LONDON.

QUEEN'S (MINOR) HALL (Langham-place, London, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "God at San Francisco."

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 3.15, Freethought Parliament; 7.30, Business Meeting.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Liberal Hall, Broadway, Forest Gate, E.): 7.30, H. Spence, "Evolution."

### OUTDOOR.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill, Hampstead): 3.30, F. Fletcher, "Signs of the Times."

WOOLWICH BRANCH N. S. S. (Beresford-square): 11.30, H. S. Wishart, "Christianity v. Atheism."

### COUNTRY.

FAILSWORTH SECULAR SUNDAY SCHOOL (Pole-lane): Mrs. H. B. Bradlaugh Bonner, 2.45, "Morality Without Religion"; 6.30, "Arbitration or Armaments?" Hymns, etc., by the Choir, assisted by the Failsworth String Band.

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (110 Brunswick-street): 12 (noon), Discussion Class, Business Meeting; 6.30, J. F. Turnbull, "Ingersoll or Jesus: Which?"

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Milton Hall, Daulby-street): C. Cohen, 3, "Some Lessons of Evolution"; 7, "The Necessity of Atheism."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints): J. T. Lloyd, 3, "Secularism in the Clouds"; 6.30, "Secularism on Solid Earth." Tea at 5.

NEWCASTLE RATIONALIST LITERARY AND DEBATING SOCIETY (Lockhart's Cathedral Cafe): Thursday, May 3, at 8, R. Mitchell, "Rationalism."

PORTH BRANCH N. S. S. (Room, Town Hall, Porth): 6.30, a Lecture; Important Business Meeting.

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