

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XXVI.—No 18

SUNDAY, MAY 6, 1906

PRICE TWOPENCE

Immortality! why the most of us don't know what to do with this one little personal life, and might well wonder how we came to be promoted to the dignity thereof: the claim to immortality is the claim to be trusted with millions of pounds because one has shown himself unfit to be trusted with sixpence. Leave me, O comical little men, with your talk about eternity; go and try to live a single happy and rational day.

—JAMES THOMSON ("B.V.")

Mr. Birrell's Bill.—II.

THE one straightforward and satisfactory feature of the Education Bill is the section rendering the Conscience Clause a reality, by relieving parents from the necessity of sending their children to school until the religious instruction is over. But as we dealt at length with this section in our first article we do not propose to do more than mention it now in introducing another point to which it is related; namely, the application of the same principle to the teachers.

It is contended by the orthodox Liberals in general, and by the Nonconformist division of them in particular, that the Education Bill carries out the two great objects which were sanctioned by the people's votes at the late elections. The first of these objects is universal public control; the second is the abolition of religious tests. Certainly public control is secured, but can we speak so decidedly about the tests? We think not.

As far as mere words go, in a special clause, the Bill is all right. This is what it says:—

"A teacher employed in a public elementary school shall not be required as part of his duties as teacher to give any religious instruction, and shall not be required as a condition of his appointment to subscribe to any religious creed, or to attend or abstain from attending any Sunday-school or place of religious worship."

This is plain enough, and Mr. Birrell's supporters ask us what more we want. But just as it is sometimes found in the law courts that one portion of an act of parliament contradicts another portion, so it may be that one portion of Mr. Birrell's Bill contradicts another portion. And this is really the case. There is no verbal contradiction. The contradiction is substantial. That is to say, the practical provisions of the Bill nullify this excellent and admirable declaration of the abstract right of the teachers to refuse to have anything to do with the religious instruction. They may so refuse, but as the refusal must obviously work out to their disadvantage—as, in short, it will penalise them, by causing friction and raising barriers to their progress in their profession—the boon which is so loudly praised turns out to be perfectly illusory.

The truth is that it is impossible to abolish religious tests while religious instruction remains

in the schools. Tests can be applied negatively as well as positively. Excommunicated persons were not punished positively; they were only punished negatively; but as no one could aid them, shelter them, traffic with them, give them food or drink, or so much as speak to them, the difference between positive and negative was rather formal than actual. If a man is to perish he may as well have his head cut off as be refused the means of life. And in the same way if a teacher is to be ruined he may as well be positively discharged from his post as negatively driven out of the service.

Let us look carefully at the actual circumstances of the case, and see how a man would be likely to fare who availed himself of Mr. Birrell's excellent and admirable Conscience Clause for teachers.

With regard to the schools for which Mr. Birrell provides "extended facilities" for religious instruction, we may say—as we shall presently show—that these are denominational schools in disguise. Dogmatic religious instruction—Catholic, Anglican, Jewish, or what not—will be given daily in these schools. The teachers "may" take part in this religious instruction. And will anyone deny that the "may" will be "must"? A teacher who holds back in a practically denominational school will be a marked man, and in such circumstances a marked man is a doomed man. He will soon find that he has the liberty to starve.

We will now go to the other extreme, and take the case of the "undenominational" schools where "simple Bible teaching" is the order of the day. It is hypocritical to talk, as Dr. Clifford does, about the Bible being read and explained in these schools as literature. What the law says is that the children are to receive instruction from the Bible in the principles of morality and the Christian religion. Mr. Birrell does not propose to interfere with this law; on the contrary, he proposes to extend it presumptively to all elementary schools. The Bible, therefore, is to be used not only ethically but religiously. And the consequences of this are easily deducible by the logic of experience.

Let it be remembered that it was under this very law, which Mr. Birrell extends instead of amending, that the famous agitation took place on the old London School Board. It was reported that a visitor was shocked by hearing a child answer "Joseph" when asked, "Who was the father of Jesus?" Thereupon a circular was drafted and sent out to all the teachers under the London School Board, reminding them that it was their duty to teach the doctrine of the Trinity, with special reference to the deity of Jesus Christ. What was done then could be done again now. The question of the Bible in the schools is really the question of Christianity in the schools. And whoever denies it is an ignoramus or an impostor.

There must have been several "unbelievers" amongst the teachers under the London School

Board. How many of them, even in face of that circular, applied to be exempted from the religious teaching? We recollect one, and one only. It was Mr. F. J. Gould. Those who know him will testify that Mr. Gould is a man of exceptional ability, attainments, and character. But he was an Agnostic. He did not mind giving lessons from the Bible if he were only allowed to do so honestly. He did not wish to tell lies about it, or about his own convictions. But as this did not satisfy the Board, he had the courage to say that he could not teach the Bible as the Board expected him to do. Accordingly he was relieved from that part of his duties, and everything seemed for the best in the best of all possible worlds. There was no bloodshed, no imprisonment, no persecution. The Board was tolerant and Mr. Gould enjoyed his freedom. That is how it appeared on the surface. But it was a very different thing when you looked deeper. From that moment Mr. Gould marked time. Smaller and slighter men were promoted, but there was no promotion for him; he was stranded for ever, even if he lived to the age of Methusaleh; and he had to put an end to his false position by going out into the world and beginning a fresh career.

Now if that was the experience of a man of exceptional ability, attainments, and character like Mr. Gould, what would be the experience of less distinguished teachers who tried to exercise their right to decline to take part in "undenominational" religious instruction and "simple Bible teaching"?

Religious majorities are never tolerant. Their rule is, Who is not for us is against us, and they treat him as an enemy. When they cannot kill they imprison, when they cannot imprison they ostracise. And no exception will be made for elementary school teachers. They will have to toe the line or clear out. And all the appeals they make to Mr. Birrell's conscience clause for teachers will only convince them of the truth of the old adage that fine words butter no parsnips.

Moreover it must be recollected that the training colleges for teachers, which the present Bill does not touch, are so many preparatory sieves for excluding "unbelievers." Nearly all these training colleges are denominational. Even the few that are not exact *some* Christian profession. The student has to inscribe himself as belonging to some Christian Church; he makes his choice, and he has to stick to it; and precautions are taken against his non-attendance at public worship. These training colleges sift out the open "unbelievers" to begin with; they secure a very general, if not a universal, orthodoxy amongst the teachers in the schools; and it is easy to see what chance a teacher of mental independence would have in stemming the strong current of conformity.

From a logical point of view it is absurd to boast of abolishing religious tests while retaining religious instruction. This is one of the monstrous follies of the Nonconformist position. Tests cannot be abolished practically—and why should they be abolished theoretically? There are tests in arithmetic, grammar, geography, and history. Why should there be no tests in religion? Is every teacher to be allowed to teach just what religion he pleases? This would be chaos. There must be *some* discrimination. And it must be exercised by *somebody*. It will be exercised tacitly by Churchmen in Anglican schools, by Catholics in Catholic schools, by Jews in Jewish schools, and by Nonconformists in the ordinary provided schools. But this is not a settlement, it is an evasion. Tests should be applied openly, under the eyes of qualified inspectors. Religious teaching should be religious teaching; the quality of it is more important than the quantity; and competent public officials should see that it is of the proper character. For reasons of their own Nonconformists object to open religious tests. Very well then, let them help to abolish tests altogether; and they will never do this without excluding religion itself from the school curriculum.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

A Religion of Calamity.

"THE Religion of Calamity" is the title given by a *Christian World* writer to an article discussing the San Francisco disaster. It is a title that might well have figured in a Freethought journal; but nowadays it is the custom for certain types of religionists to ape the Freethought attitude and misuse its nomenclature. It is in its way both a compliment and a confession. It is a confession that Freethought has to-day reached such proportions that it can no longer be ignored, and a compliment for the reason that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and its being true gives this old adage a signal distinction over many of its class. "The Religion of Calamity" is moreover a capitally accurate description of the Christian creed. For it has been this before all else. In its earliest years it played its calamitous part in helping to suck the vitality from the old Roman Empire. Much there was in old Rome that was bad, and needed either revision or destruction, but the empire was not beyond repair. The destruction of the old civilisation only became certain when interest in theology took the place of devotion to country, and the growth of the Christian Church made it an important factor in determining the destinies of the State.

From country to country, as Christianity spread, it brought calamity after calamity. Whatever good it brought in its train was chiefly adventitious. The evil was almost entirely its own. To the barriers of race it added those of creed. To the passion of civil strife it added theological hatred. If it, very occasionally, stood between the oppressed and the oppressor, the one was made more helpless by the terrors of Christian dominancy and the other even more tyrannical by a spiritual sanction having been given to his material lordship. It gave to the poor, but only a fraction of that of which they had been plundered. It visited a sick that was often enough suffering from its destruction of the old sanitary and medical science. It solaced a dying that had been driven nearly demented by its teaching of eternal damnation; and its attitude to-day on the question of education, where, in the name of religion, it claims to work for reform while all the time religion is the only serious obstacle to the reform being accomplished, is a summary of its whole career. Bred amid the decay of an empire, and rising to strength by the patronage of some of its worst rulers, it has left its calamitous trail in every country where it has effected a lodgment.

Needless to say I am using the word "calamity" with a far different application to that given to it by the *Christian World* writer. He is concerned with showing that we ought not to allow the San Francisco disaster to disturb our belief in Christian Theism. "What evidence," he asks, "do these disasters offer against the contrary Christian view of a benign Providence as directing our affairs?" Well, one would say they offer almost every possible evidence against such a view. It is, indeed, just another proof of the calamitous effect of Christianity on the human mind that people can be found who will say that such a disaster as that at San Francisco, or the Vesuvian outbreak, not only does not disprove the thesis that human affairs are controlled by an all-powerful benign Being, but that it even supports such a theory. It is admitted that the "immediate effect" of such outbreaks is to shock one's "religious convictions," and in this instance one's first impressions are the soundest. What takes place afterwards is the checking of one's healthy resentment for the sake of saving a theory. Our instincts tell us that such a disaster as that of San Francisco is a direct denial of the belief that a "benign Providence" overrules human affairs. But our religious beliefs say the contrary; and nothing is allowed to weigh against them.

"J. B.," the writer of the article referred to, follows the usual practice of playing fast and loose with the question of the validity of our human value

of the universe. It is perfectly true that we have, and can have, no scientific authority for measuring the universe by our moral standard. Freethinkers have always asserted this, and have only argued along other lines when criticising the hypothesis of Theism. In strict accuracy, to call the universe either moral or immoral is an abuse of language. It is simply non-moral. Natural phenomena, too, may be either agreeable or disagreeable to human beings, but they are neither malevolent nor beneficent. But this position, if logically held, would obviously destroy all forms of Theism; and so "J. B.," while protesting against our judging the universe from the standpoint of human morality, only means that our judgment must not be adverse. The method is a good one so long as it leads to a favorable judgment. For the statement that the universe is directed by a "benign Providence" is as much an act of criticism and a judgment as any other. We are told that we do not know what death is, and are asked: "What do we know ultimately about burning and slaying? Could we see the whole process as God sees it, the thousand sides of it at present to us invisible, our whole feeling concerning it would be entirely changed. Our feeling would then be like His." But this is sheer assumption. To argue that if we knew everything much that now seems evil would appear good, is to invite the retort that just as easily much that now seems good would then appear evil. Ordinary experience offers plenty of examples of both kinds. If we are to criticise the universe at all we must perforce do so in terms of the knowledge we possess; and if we are not justified in this, then the theory of a "benign Providence" is ruled out quite as much as a theory of omnipotent benevolence. The Theist is, in short, on the horns of a dilemma. If he estimates the universe according to a human or moral view, the facts are in glaring and irreconcilable discord with his theory. And if he declines to apply this measure the very groundwork of his Theism disappears.

"J. B." also urges that it is not the action of nature so much as the mode of action in such matters as the San Francisco earthquake that rouses resentment and disturbs our religious equanimity. After all, he says, nature in these operations is doing only what she is always doing in other ways. She kills a thousand in an earthquake; but then she will kill every one on the planet sooner or later. There is some truth in this, but there is also some error, and the error is fatal to "J. B.'s" argument. In the first place, all that a disaster on a colossal scale does is to call attention to facts that are ignored because of their familiarity. But it has always been one of the counts in the Freethought indictment of Christian theism that even the normal processes of nature are not what one would expect if the theistic hypothesis were valid. It is true that nature kills all of us sooner or later; true also that it matters not a jot whether one be a genius or a fool, good or bad, we share the same fate and are subject to the same dangers. Nature elaborates a genius, to assassinate him with cancer or blight him with insanity. A brutal and callous individual may pass unscathed through conditions that may have a fatal effect upon one of a more sensitive and more humane disposition. That nature treats all alike is often quoted by theists as proof of "divine" benevolence, but it may just as easily be evidence of divine carelessness or callousness. We should be in no doubt as to how to describe a human being who acted on the same principle towards those over whom he had control.

It is typical of the Christian mind to argue that one ought not to complain of a thousand people killed at San Francisco because a much larger number are killed year by year. Only a year or so ago a leading Nonconformist preacher said exactly the same of the earthquake at St. Pierre. The argument is, God is good here because he is worse somewhere else; he must not be charged with the deaths of a thousand at one place because he causes the deaths of many thousands elsewhere. Absurdity could hardly go further. "You are charged," a judge might

say to a prisoner, "with killing during a moment of passion two children who looked to you for protection." And the prisoner might as reasonably say in defence, "The charge is quite true, but if your lordship only knew all the particulars their death might be a good thing for all concerned, at any rate, I demand my discharge because what I did here in a moment of passion, I do in cold blood every year of my life." The application is obvious.

It is strange that the significance of the shock to religious feelings by nature's outbreaks seldom strikes believers. For it is plain, on reflection, that were religious beliefs grounded on the normal experience of life, earthquakes and the like would, while giving rise naturally to sorrowful feelings, be unable to seriously disturb one's convictions. But the truth is that while the fact of even ordinary experience being contrary to theistic beliefs is overlooked, it is these unusual experiences that break through all the subtleties and excuses of special pleaders, and brings people face to face with nature as it is. And then it is that many begin to *feel*, what the clearer thinkers already perceive, that man's relation to nature is not that of a weak intelligence in presence of, or dependent on, a stronger intelligence, but that of a sentient organism to a non-sentient universe. In his early and undeveloped condition man figured the universe as alive, read into it his own feelings and intellect, and treated it as he would one of his own kind, too powerful for him to subdue or outwit. It is the remnants of this primitive belief with which "J. B." and his kind are burdened, and in defence of which they essay the impossible task of reconciling a scientific age to an unscientific theory. Those who have shaken off this belief are put to no such desperate straits. They may sorrow at nature's stern and tempestuous moods, or feel joy at its calmer and pleasanter ones. But they are fooled by no primitive delusions, and their sorrow is not intensified by the feeling that human life is the sport of an omnipotent intelligence apparently careless of whatever suffering is caused by its operations. And to rid man of this unnecessary fear, to remove causeless terror, and to provide a sure ground for faith in the reality and efficacy of human effort, is not the least of the services Freethought confers upon humanity.

C. COHEN.

Do We Need a Religion?—I.

DR. ABBOTT tells us that in the Christian religion there are many illusions which have always served and still serve as "a discipline for our truth-seeking faculties, and as a stepping-stone towards truth itself;" but the examples cited by him fail to verify his contention. Indeed, according to his own frank admission, the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ worked incalculable harm in the early Church, and its evil influence has not ceased even to-day. As a matter of fact, Dr. Abbott has not succeeded in proving the truth of his thesis in a single given case. But while admitting the presence of illusions in Christianity, he maintains that at the core of it there is to be found truth itself. What "truth itself," or "fact indeed," as Browning calls it, is, Dr. Abbott does not know, nor is he confident that "we shall ever be able in this world to reach" it, "if it means 'absolute truth.'" All he expects is that "we may reach a closer approximation to fact," by means of illusions as "mid-way helps." But the truth exists, and Christianity shadows it forth.

Such is Dr. Abbott's position as outlined in his essay entitled "Illusion in Religion." In a non-religious sense, the central teaching of the tract is true enough, as also are the following lines from Browning:—

"God's gift was that man should conceive of truth,
And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake
As mid-way help, till he reach fact indeed."

In another essay, No. 14, in the same series, on "The Permanent Elements of Religion," the position

is somewhat different, though even more hostile to Orthodoxy. The author of this treatise is Professor D. S. Margoliouth, M.A., D. Litt., of Oxford, a well-known contributor to the *Expositor*. Professor Margoliouth agrees with Dr. Abbott's assertion that we possess no infallible guide to truth no absolute revelation of God, and no certainty of a future life. Such a concession, coming from high-placed Christian teachers, is of inestimable value to Freethought. Referring to such books as the Bible the Professor says:—

"Where the sacred books which form the ground-work of religion are unable to maintain their own claim to sanctity, where, if that be demonstrated, their content is in disagreement with the results which experience has made certain, it is not impossible to confer on them a factitious and conventional sanctity, which is all that is required for the function which is demanded of them. Such sanctity as is conferred on sacred places, sacred buildings, sacred persons, is similarly factitious and conventional: nature understands it not; only men who have been initiated understand it; and when the needs of the community require, it can be withdrawn."

What a violent shock such teaching must give to the orthodox Christian. The Bible is not *really*, but only "*factitiously and conventionally*," holy or sacred. The Church has *consecrated* it, it is true; but the act of consecration has not changed the quality of the volume. The same remark applies to places and buildings: "The properties which are to be found in wood and stone, bricks and mortar, do not leave them when they form part of a consecrated building; yet those who are fully aware of this may also hold that the community is better off for having consecrated buildings, invested with a dignity and with privileges which unconsecrated buildings do not share."

Now, is it not perfectly clear that such a position of necessity undermines all the doctrines of the orthodox Church? The starting-point of theology is that its dogmas are absolutely true, and that it is the bounden duty of all men to believe them. But to Professor Margoliouth the objective reality of the teachings of religion is a matter of practically no importance. He would still adhere to them even though their objective unreality were a fully established fact. Here are his own words:—

"The question of the objective reality of the teachings of religion in no way affects its value to the community. If men walk safely and courageously because the abyss is screened off, it matters not at all whether the screen be solid, or thin, unstable, and easily pulled away. The consolation which replaces the miserable all that the fortunate enjoy is a valuable asset to mankind; its value is not extinguished by the demonstration that it is illusory."

Such, in brief, is Professor Margoliouth's position. Religion may not be objectively true; but it is beneficial to mankind. There may not be a God, who is the maker and ruler of the universe; but the belief that there is has proved most helpful to humanity. Immortality may be nothing but a dream; but the hope of it is beautifully inspiring. Hence the value of the teachings of religion is dependent, not upon their objective reality, but upon their practical utility. In the opinion of the Professor, religion is necessary to man not because it is true, but because it is useful, whether true or false.

The question now is, Does man need a religion to make his life on earth worth living? The Professor's answer is in the affirmative. He says: "We are driven to seek the permanent elements of religion in the needs which it fulfils in human society: as learned not from any *a priori* assumptions, but from a study of its actual effects. And the main needs which it satisfies are three," namely, the ornamentation of life, education and reform, and the strengthening of human weakness.

1. According to Professor Margoliouth, human life needs *ornamentation*. It is not always expedient to leave the truth exposed. There are realities which it is best to ignore. Some facts are the opposite of beautiful, and highest wisdom dictates their concealment. So argues the Professor. "Science and taste," he says, "pursue their functions indepen-

dently, without rivalry, without mutual interference; at times, indeed, there is even co-operation between the two." Then he adds:—

"Penetration into nature's workshop is not forbidden: but the sense of what is comely and decent makes us keep the door ordinarily shut. For the unæsthetic realities connected with the origin and termination of human existence, and the mode whereby it is sustained, religion substitutes an account that suits the aspiration after what is comely and beautiful. 'When a man is dead he shall inherit creeping things, beasts, and worms'—that is the natural account. 'Father, in thy gracious keeping leave we thy servant sleeping,' 'Christ the Lord shall guard them well, He who died for their release'—is what religion substitutes for the painful and unæsthetic reality."

Now comes the refrain met with everywhere in this wonderful essay:—

"The value of religion, therefore, as beautifying human life, is entirely independent of the objective value of what it teaches."

The Professor proceeds to observe that "to the ornamentation of life belong those feasts and fasts which it would appear that physiological reasons require that vent should at certain seasons of the year be given to certain human emotions." His contention, on this point, is that for the expression of such emotions "some ostensible cause is required," and that "religious occasions are more suitable than any others, because they can be universal, and permanent, and personal." The Christian system provides fasts and feast in which all mankind may participate, because the causes of the mourning and the rejoicing are of a universal, permanent, and personal character. Jesus may never have died on the cross and never have risen again from the tomb; but the belief that He did gives vent to "certain emotions" which otherwise would not find suitable expression.

Such is the service which religion renders as a beautifier of human life. But is it a genuine and wholesome service? It seems to me that everything turns on the question whether religion is or is not true. Professor Margoliouth admits that the objective reality of religion cannot be proved. At best all that can be said is that the supernatural may be real, or may not. *All we know is that between man and the higher animals there is apparently no fundamental difference.* Why then should he be differentiated from them? Science assures us that he and they have had the same beginning, that they are closely related while they live, and that there is nothing to indicate that they have a different destination. Why then should man be put in a category by himself? Why should he be made to believe that "he has a different beginning and a different destination from" the beasts of the field? Indeed, is it not one of the main drawbacks of Christianity that it ignores the whole animal kingdom, puts man on a pinnacle of hurtful isolation, and reserves its immortal blessedness for him alone? Yes, religion does differentiate man from the beasts, and, as Professor Margoliouth admits, it differentiates him still more, if possible, "from his like, perpetuating castes and peculiar peoples, and those other divisions which have so much arrested human progress."

Bearing in mind that the religious adornment of life has taken the form of thus differentiating man both from the beasts and from his fellows, on what ground of utility can it be justified? It would be far better to leave human life unadorned, to allow the ugliness of reality to remain fully exposed, than to have resource to a method of ornamentation that only results in mischief and injury all round. The truth, however, is that the realities of Nature, now under consideration, lack beauty only when unæsthetically described. The origin of no living thing requires to be concealed, as if it were unbecoming and indecent to contemplate it undraped by fancy. It was not the sense of what is becoming and beautiful that first led people "to conceal all the body except the face and hands," but rather the sense of grim necessity. But no sense of necessity dictates the concealment of man's real beginning

and destination as Nature gives them. You can decorate them without resorting to concealment. Indeed, to hide a thing is not to adorn it. "The naked facts of human existence, as Nature gives them," are both comely and decent, and no one needs to be ashamed of them.

But Professor Margoliouth advocates, not only the concealment of what he calls the ugliness of Nature, but the substitution for it of the creations of faith. "When a man is dead he shall inherit creeping things, beasts, and worms"—that is the Professor's unæsthetic and ugly description of death. It is his version of the fact that is unbeautiful, not the fact itself. Instead of ornamenting the reality he substitutes a mere dream for it. The poet makes the naked fact unspeakably lovely. Death is not repulsive when viewed in the right spirit; but, in any case, to substitute something else for it is not to beautify it. I much prefer to look death full in the face, and then, in open sight of it, to cry out with George Meredith:—

"And oh, green bounteous earth!
Death shall I shrink from, loving thee?
Into the breast that gives the rose
Shall I with shuddering fall?"

J. T. LLOYD.

(To be continued.)

A Misty Religion.

A NOTE from Leicester may edify readers who are interested in the Religious Difficulty in the Schools.

On Monday, April 23, at the Leicester Education Committee, I observed that people were now discussing the subject of religious instruction, and it might be of interest to the local public to know the general character of the Bible teaching given in the Council Schools. I therefore asked this question:—

"May the responsible teachers in this Committee's Provided Schools give instruction, under the present regulations as to Bible teaching, in any or all of the following doctrines, namely:—

- The existence of God as Creator and Providence;
- The Trinity;
- That the Bible is the Word of God;
- That the human race fell through Adam and is redeemed through Christ;
- That Christ is our Lord and the Son of God;
- That God works miracles;
- That God hears and answers prayer;
- That the soul is immortal;
- That Heaven and Hell are our future reward and punishment;
- That the Devil is a personal evil spirit."

To this question there were three methods of reply. One reply would be Yes; in which case I should have had (so far as Leicester was concerned) a clear program of the theological teaching imparted as "simple Bible instruction." Another reply would be No; in which case I could have asked what, in the name of common-sense, was taught. The third reply would be an evasive one.

It was the business of Mr. Alexander Baines, J.P., Chairman of the Elementary Schools Sub-committee, to reply. He did not answer in the first manner, or the second. This was what he did:—

- (1) Mr. Baines reminded the Committee of the regulations in force in this town. They direct the Head Teachers to choose suitable passages of the Bible, and, in a reverent and sympathetic spirit, give "such explanations as may be necessary."
- (2) He said also that the Bible-reading might be preceded by a hymn and the Lord's Prayer.
- (3) Neither the late School Board (said Mr. Baines) nor the present Education Committee had ever scheduled a list of doctrines to be taught; and he hoped they never would. (Several members ejaculated "Hear, hear!")
- (4) For twenty-one years, no parent or teacher had ever raised any question as to what should be taught.

That was the substance of Mr. Baines's reply. I rose again merely to observe that Mr. Baines had not answered my question. Any person of discernment will surely see, on examination of my question

and of Mr. Baines's rejoinder, that that allegation is absolutely true. The subject then dropped, but I had gained a point of some significance. I had stimulated the orthodox members of the Committee into virtually affirming that they were not prepared to say what was the definite aim and content of the "simple Bible teaching" so loudly advocated by Nonconformists.

The shuffling timidity and meanness of such a position are astonishing.

F. J. GOULD.

The Freedom of the Press.

SOME day the conductors of this country will doubtless recognise that from a philosophic point of view it is not worth very much. The *Times* was one of the first journals to publish a review of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, the review being written by Professor Huxley. To-day one might pick up a copy of the *Times* and imagine that the *Origin of Species* had never been written. We are having, and will doubtless continue to have, a prolonged discussion concerning the religious difficulty in the schools as to the precise amount of theological dogma to be taught to children. The Bishops and the clergy generally are secure of a hearing in the *Times*, but no evolutionist need apply, with possibly Professor Ray Lankester as an exception. Scientific men might leave their investigations for a time and assist us to settle the "religious" controversy in the only possible and permanent just way—complete secularisation of all schools. They would undoubtedly benefit, for the deposition of the clergy would open up the way for the appointment of a scientific priesthood, so to speak. Ethics and modern philosophy would then receive greater attention. Children would learn a little more about the why and wherefore of things. Exploded notions would be cast into the limbo of forgotten things.

When the Dean of Westminster publicly admitted his adherence to the doctrine of evolution, the *Spectator* remarked that the Dean's admission was a manly statement. How an evolutionist can consistently advocate sectarianism it is impossible to say. The *Spectator* continues to chatter about "fundamental Christianity" without attempting to define the expression, and appears to stand by the Bible in its entirety, with all its lies and legends. All communications from the "wicked" Agnostic, Rationalist, and Evolutionist are discarded. Is this what is known as the "freedom of the press"? How long can the existing "conspiracy of silence" last? How long will the press continue to trade upon the ignorance, the indifference, and credulity of the people? There will be a rude awakening shortly. Those newspaper proprietors who make their fortunes out of halfpenny papers and so-called religious journals—worthless rubbish—have much to answer for. There was a doubt about the tenability of the Christian doctrines long before they were born, and those who deny that there is a doubt, to put it mildly, must be either fools or fanatics. They may prate about truth and justice, but let us have a little intellectual honesty. People do not exist in order that millionaire newspaper proprietors may delude them. Some day some of these titled newspaper proprietors may develop a conscience. The world managed to progress without their assistance, and it would not come to an end if some of their ephemeral productions ceased to exist. It is not a glorious thing to make fortunes by trading on people's ignorance. There can be no compromise on fundamental issues. Let public men, worthy of the name, show that they at least will not shirk the real issue. The press would then have to follow their example.

FREETHINKER.

The veneration we have for many things entirely proceeds from their being carefully concealed.—*Goldsmith*.

Acid Drops.

Nobody who knows the *Daily Mail* attaches any importance to anything it says. But there are people who don't know, and some of them, at least, have been disturbed by an anonymous article on "Crime and Secularism" which appeared in its issue of April 26. This article pretended to set forth statistically the awful consequences of secular education in Australia. A very curious thing about these figures was that they were all twenty years old, and many of them a good deal older. Another curious thing was this. The writer said that the Australian people were aghast at the results of secular education and were calling for a return to religious instruction. "When a referendum has been carried out," he said, "the majority in favor of a change has been three to one." This, of course, was a silly lie upon the face of it; for how could a change be prevented when the people were three to one in its favor? The truth is that the Churches have always been trying to upset secular education, but every time the matter has been submitted to the people they have upheld it in spite of all the terrors of the pulpits and all the intrigues of ecclesiasticism.

The lies about secular education in Victoria were started a good many years ago by Bishop Moorhouse, of Manchester; they were exposed again and again by colonial representatives, but the Bishop and his "pals" took no notice of the exposure, they simply went on repeating the lies. And that is what the *Daily Mail* writer did last week. Fortunately a Reuter telegram from Sydney, dated April 28, once more correcting these falsehoods, was printed in the *Morning Leader* of Monday, April 30. It is so important that we venture to reproduce it completely:—

"In connection with the statements published in London alleging an increase in crime in Australia owing to secular education, Capt. Nietenstein, Comptroller-General of Prisons, characterises the story as 'arrant humbug.'

His report for 1905 shows a remarkable diminution of crime in New South Wales. During the 13 years just ended the number of prison inmates in relation to population has decreased almost 50 per cent.

At the end of 1905, the number of prisoners of all kinds was 1,685 as compared with 1,880 in 1904, and 2,604 in 1894, in spite of the growth of the population from 1,200,000 to 1,500,000. The actual decreases in the number of prisoners in the ten years just ended are in New South Wales 775, and in Victoria 319.

The total entries to gaol also showed a large decrease, and not half the total entry were born in New South Wales, and of the remainder 3,637 came from the United Kingdom.

The gaol figures borne out by police reports show that the country is remarkably free from serious crime, and expert officials, intimately acquainted with both cities, declare that there is much more larrikinism in London than there is in Sydney."

This is a triumphant answer to the *Daily Mail* liar. And we beg our readers to note how much of the crime in Australia is to be laid to the credit of people who were born and brought up in Great Britain and Ireland, where religious education is practically universal.

The *Daily Mail* gave great prominence to that lying article because it was meant to tell on the Church and Catholic side in the Education controversy. When a reply was sent in by Mr. T. A. Coghlan, Agent-General for New South Wales, it could not be ignored, but it was printed in an obscure part of the paper (April 28). We have not room to reproduce it in our own columns, but we shall keep it by us for future use, if necessary. Meanwhile we may observe that it bears out the whole case set forth in the Reuter telegram. It also points out the vastly important fact that in Victoria, as well as in New South Wales, most of the criminals are *aliens*. "Out of the 20,189 so-called criminals in Victoria in the year 1890," when crime was apparently at its height, "there were 13,361 who were not natives of Victoria at all—indeed, there were far more of Victoria's criminal population born in these islands than in the State itself."

Mr. John Morley's speech at the Eighty Club dinner reminds us of what a Newcastle acquaintance of his once said when he was member for that city. "Mr. Morley," he said, "has the theory of courage." That sarcasm too faithfully hit off Mr. Morley, the politician. He has been a party man ever since he entered parliament as an orthodox Liberal; and, although he has brains, and knowledge, and principles, he has never in practice been six inches in advance of the average Liberal member. In his speech to the Eighty Club he made a parenthetical reference to the principle of Secular Education, but he also made it clear that he was not going to lift a finger in support of that principle in the House of Commons. Considering how much Mr. Morley has written

on French topics, it may be as well to remind him that the triumph of his principles in French public life are due to a very different policy from his own.

Mr. Morley was indignant at those who charged Mr. Birrell with establishing "a new religion." He was easily able to show that "simple Bible teaching" was established in 1870. Yes, but it was not established in the way in which Mr. Birrell seeks to establish it. The new Education Bill abolishes the old "voluntary" schools by bringing all schools under the one class of "provided." Having done this it sets up "simple Bible teaching" as the only religious instruction which the State will recognise, and pay for, and give on its own account. And if this is not establishing "simple Bible teaching" as a new religion, perhaps Mr. Morley will tell us what would merit that designation.

It was odd to see Mr. Morley, the Agnostic, admitting that there was more than one Agnostic in the Cabinet, and then defending "simple Bible teaching." He should leave that to Mr. Birrell—or Dr. Clifford, who are both Nonconformists. They can do it so much better than he can, with sincerity and conviction.

"My own impression is," Mr. Morley said, "that in these islands they are sick and weary of this feud between church and chapel." We agree with him. But why does he help to prolong the feud by railing at the church and taking the side of the chapel? For that is what he is doing.

A final word on Mr. Morley's speech. It is really unworthy of him to pretend not to understand why Churchmen and Catholics object to "simple Bible teaching." Their objection is perfectly clear and perfectly well-founded. And it will have our sympathy as long as religious teaching is allowed in the nation's schools. Mr. Morley should be Freethinker enough to see that if the State legalises religious teaching in its universal and compulsory schools, parents have a right to demand that such religious teaching shall not be opposed to their convictions. To deny their right to make this demand, and yet to go on legalising religious teaching, is to make the State the organ of religious propaganda—which is in flat hostility to the very essence of philosophical Liberalism. It is all very well for Mr. Morley to talk about the "quagmire" of this squabble, but he is in a quagmire himself, and the only way out of it is to return loyally to his first principles.

And now a final word on Mr. Morley himself. How many years ago is it since George Meredith wrote his fine sonnet "To J. M."? Something between thirty and forty. Mr. Morley was so much younger then, and the friendly poet prophesied of his splendid future:—

"Thou fighting for poor humankind wilt feel
The strength of Roland in thy wrist to hew
A chasm sheer into the barrier rock
And bring the army of the faithful through."

Splendid verse and noble imagery. But it adds another to the world's stock of unfulfilled prophecy. Mr. Morley has been no Roland, he has hewed no chasm into the barrier rock, he has not led the army of the faithful through. He has sunk into officialdom and respectability. And there is a terrible sarcasm in the fact that the most important piece of literary work he has ever done is the *Life of another man*—a great politician who was probably less of a thinker than any other distinguished man of his time.

The London correspondent of the *Liverpool Daily Post* wants to know the names of the "Agnostics—more than one" that Mr. Morley says are in the Cabinet. Well, there is John Burns for a start.

Dr. Clifford is a Baptist. So was the famous Pastor C. H. Spurgeon. The latter understood the true principle of Nonconformity better than the former. In his monthly publication, the *Sword and Trowel*, for March, 1868, Spurgeon wrote: "We should like to see a system of universal application which would give a sound secular education to children, and leave the religious training to the home and the agencies of the Church of Christ." Dr. Clifford may put that in his pipe and smoke it.

Dr. Clifford had a letter in the *Daily News* of April 28 headed "Towards a 'Secular Solution.'" It was characteristic of him. It was full of that unwinking hypocrisy which is so much more detestable than the straightforward bigotry of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal Bourne. Dr. Clifford declared that he avoided such terms as "secular education" because they "rarely mean the same

thing to different individuals." But is not this a ridiculous assertion? Everybody knows what "secular education" means, except those who don't want to know. It means the inclusion of secular subjects and the exclusion of religious subjects. The real truth, we take it, is that Dr. Clifford does not talk of "secular education" because it is not what he wishes to see realised in the nation's schools. Some time ago he ventured to describe his policy as "Secular Education plus the Bible," but as it did not catch on he said no more about it. Now he drops the "secular education" and sticks to "the Bible." His one anxiety—a professional anxiety—is to have it kept in the schools. But he is sagacious enough to see that if it is to be kept there as a book of religion people will be quite aware that his object is to get the religious teaching which he favors established at the expense of all his fellow citizens. To disarm this criticism he pretends that he only wants the Bible to be used in an exclusively "ethical, literary, and historical way." But this is all humbug. It is merely throwing dust in people's eyes. In the first place, the Bible is a book of religion—and it is *nothing else*. In the second place, it cannot be used otherwise than as a book of religion by the great mass of the elementary school teachers. In the third place, it is used for the purpose of "religious" as well as "moral" teaching, under the Act of 1870, and the word "Christian," which is still more definite, was introduced subsequently. And, as a matter of fact, Mr. Birrell's Bill provides for the continuance of this very "religious" and "Christian" teaching at present obtaining. Yet in the face of these facts Dr. Clifford asks people to believe that the Bible is only to be used in an "ethical, literary, and historical way." Is it possible for effrontery to go further?

We may tell Dr. Clifford, moreover, that the teachers of ethics, apart from religion, would never select the Bible as a handbook. And the idea of taking the Bible as an historical handbook is positively ludicrous.

Dr. Clifford told the Baptist Union that "priests should be kept out of the State schools as completely as they were kept out of the Post Office." Quite so. The priests of all denominations—including the Nonconformists. Dr. Clifford must not be allowed to bring in his Bible any more than the Archbishop of Canterbury is allowed to bring in his Catechism. "Hands off!" all round.

The Catholic Truth Society, at its annual meeting, with the Archbishop of Westminster in the chair, pronounced against the new Education Bill in terms of resolute hostility. The following reasons, which we reproduce for the information of our readers, were given for considering the Bill as "fundamentally unjust":—

1. Because the Bill gives to local authorities the right of control of religious teaching in public elementary schools, and the power of placing children under the continuous educational influence of those who may be indifferent, or even hostile, to the conscientious religious convictions of the parents of those children.

2. Because, while generous provision is made for the children of those parents who are able conscientiously to accept for their children what is styled 'simple Bible teaching,' the provision made for the children of those who conscientiously regard such teaching as not only inadequate, but absolutely unacceptable, is quite insufficient, and inflicts upon such parents a very grievous civil disability solely upon the ground of their conscientious religious convictions.

3. Because the clauses relating to endowments are such as to render it possible to confiscate and divert to uses for which they were never intended, buildings and funds which owe their origin mainly to the desire of Catholics to provide for the teaching and maintenance of the Catholic Faith."

The second reason is a direct challenge to the Nonconformists who are trying to get their own religion established and endowed in the nation's schools.

The Bishop of Lichfield has an odd proposal for defeating the Education Bill. He recommends the clergy of his diocese to observe May 22 (Rogation Day) "with special prayers and intercessions that the wrong with which all members of the Church are threatened may be averted." Praying against Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's majority is about as hopeful as praying for a warm fruitful rain with a steady north-easter blowing. If the clergy were wise they would never pray for anything unless it is likely to happen.

The Bishop of Salisbury has made a remarkable discovery. He declares that if the Education Bill passes it will be "due to a combination of so-called Free Churchmen with Secularists." The Bishop may ease his mind on that point. There is no love lost between the Secularists and the Free Churchmen—not in this gallery.

Mr. Birrell, replying to Dr. Macnamara, gave the following statistics of schools in England and Wales:—

| | |
|---|--------|
| Council | 12,157 |
| Church of England | 16,320 |
| Roman Catholic | 1,834 |
| Wesleyan | 639 |
| Jewish | 24 |
| British and other undenominational | 949 |

Mr. Birrell also gave the following figures of the number of children enrolled in the statistical year ending July 31, 1905:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Council | 3,083,990 |
| Church of England | 2,305,947 |
| Roman Catholic | 339,544 |
| Wesleyan | 135,868 |
| Jewish | 8,149 |
| British and other undenominational | 171,471 |

These figures give some idea of the strength of the various parties, and of the extent to which "simple Bible teaching" is at present carried. Of course it is impossible to say how much farther it would be carried under Mr. Birrell's Bill. Time alone can determine that.

A fire occurred recently at the Roman Catholic Church of St. Mary Star of the Sea, Hastings. It is believed that a candle was left alight behind the high altar, and that the flames came in contact with some curtains and a large globe of olive oil used for the sacred lamps. Anyhow, great damage was done, and the altar—a magnificent piece of workmanship, which is valued at £10,000—suffered greatly. As the altar is the holiest part of a church, our readers will see how much this sacred building was under the care of divine providence.

Rev. Frederick Jesson, of St. Peter's Hill, Grantham, kept out of heaven an unconscionable time. He died at the age of ninety-two. He also left behind him, not being able to carry it, estate which has been sworn of the value of £23,097 9s. 2d. Another rich apostle of "Blessed be ye poor." We shudder to think of his fate in Kingdom-Come. That is, if the New Testament be true. But perhaps it isn't.

The organist in a parish church near Liverpool, being deaf and uninspired, didn't know when to bring in the "Amen," so they stationed a member of the choir to give him the signal to pipe up, but this person forgot or went to sleep, and as the Lord wouldn't work a miracle, as he used to do in Palestine, the poor organist had to find another job.

Miss E. M. Vance, the N. S. S. secretary, got a very brief letter (half of what she wrote) in the *Morning Leader* with respect to Messrs. Smith & Son's virtuous complaint against Messrs. Wymans' abortive boycott. Miss Vance pointed out that Smith & Son always boycotted Bradlaugh's *National Reformer* and have continued the boycott with regard to the *Freethinker*. Miss Vance wrote sensibly on a matter of importance, and letters of that kind are generally curtailed. Two of the ladies who made that ridiculous row in the House of Commons wrote a silly letter to the press justifying their conduct. It was a long letter, but it all went in. Moral: don't be sensible, but theatrical, if you want publicity.

Talking about that female row in the House of Commons, is not the following of considerable interest? It is the report of a dialogue that took place in Brentford Police Court, where a husband was summoned for assaulting his wife:—

Husband: Have you smashed a teapot over my head?—
Wife: I have.
Did you threaten to stab me with a knife?—Yes.
Did you break a decanter over my head?—I did.
Have you punctured all my bicycle tyres?—I have.
Have you smashed two bottles over my head?—I have."

That energetic lady would be invaluable in the next attack on the House of Commons. We wonder if she is a Primitive Methodist, a Salvationist, or an Irish Catholic.

A bookmaker named Pelder was watched by the Barnsley police for several days during the dinner hour. His clients handed him money or slips of paper in the street, and the majority of them were women. The following list is full of edification:—

"March 31, from twelve to one o'clock, fifty-seven men, seventy women, four boys, and two girls.
April 3, from half-past twelve to half-past one p.m., twenty-seven men, thirty-seven women, five girls, and five boys.
April 4, in the dinner hour, forty-seven men, sixty-eight women, three boys, and one girl.

April 5, sixty-five men, ninety-two women, and five boys.
 April 6, twenty-seven men, forty-one women, and one boy.
 April 7, sixty-eight men, sixty-seven women, and two boys.
 April 9, thirty-four men, thirty-six women.
 April 10, sixty-six men, eighty-eight women, and one girl.
 April 11, six men and seven women."

There were 377 women to 304 men. This proportion may be exceptional, but there is no room to doubt that the betting mania has largely infected the female part of the population in England, and it is one of the worst signs of national decadence. This decadence is not prevented by religion; it is, indeed, rather hastened; for religion stands in the way of fresh ideas of personal and social discipline.

The Army Scripture Readers' and Soldiers' Friend Society held its annual meeting at Exeter Hall. Colonel G. Phillips, who presented the annual report, stated that there existed a greater need than ever for fresh exertions to spread true and practical religion in the Army. This may be true, but it is a poor compliment to the Society.

There is a Zenana Bible and Medical Mission which operates, of course, in India. Its income last year was £21,638, and it spent £295 more. Its object is to push Christianity in India by getting at women in their homes and girls in the schools. And the fashion amongst its supporters has been to represent the women of India as poor down-trodden creatures, subjected to every indignity. But the cat of truth was let out of the bag of falsehood at the Mission's annual meeting at Exeter Hall. This was done, of course inadvertently, by the chairman, Sir Frederick Lely, who was reported in the *Daily News* as saying that: "Although totally secluded from society, and though disappointment was expressed when a girl was born and joy when a boy came into the world, yet underneath the surface the wife, the mother, and still more the grandmother, had as much power in India as in any country in the world." This is perfectly true, but what a bombshell it must have been in Exeter Hall! The life of a people goes on *beneath* its manners and customs. And those who penetrate to it know very well that woman is really more honored in India than she is in the Bible.

Rev. F. B. Meyer, in his presidential address to the Baptist Union, had one significant utterance. He referred to the opium traffic which Christian England forced upon China, and pointed out that the Japanese may insist upon this wrong to China being redressed. Great Britain will then do for political reasons what she has refused to do on any other ground. "But surely," Mr. Meyer said, "it would be a stain on the Church of Christ if our heathen allies were more insistent on the righting of this grave wrong than she was." Later on he spoke of the Chinese as "a great and wisdom-loving people, though unable to cope with us in the art of war." What a sentence for a Christian preacher to utter nearly two thousand years after Christ! The Chinese are decidedly inferior to Englishmen in one thing—and that one thing is the art of war. This is the Christian's unquestioned superiority over the Heathen. He is a more scientific and efficient butcher.

Rev. F. C. Spurr, whose rather ill-conditioned reply to Mr. Robert Blatchford we dealt with last year, is a contributor to the *Christian World* and has been writing a good deal about Paris. In last week's article he wrote, probably in a moment of absent-mindedness, the following admission on a point as to which the "infidels" of France have been so systematically misrepresented in England:—

"A visit to the Bois de Boulogne or the Bois de Vincennes on Sunday afternoon, or on a *fête* day, is a perfect revelation to the ignorant of the beauty of French family life. Innumerable groups of people, composed of father, mother, and children, occupy the whole wood. It is positively delightful to watch these men, many of them artisans, romping with their children and generally enjoying themselves. Many English visitors whom I have taken to see this spectacle have expressed their delight at it, and have freely admitted that the sight has effectively disposed of the absurd superstition, current in England, that the French know next to nothing of family life. I wish some of our English artisans, belonging to the same social order as their brethren in France, knew as much of family life."

It is good to have the truth told—even accidentally.

We don't want to say anything against (or about) Jabez Balfour—the distinguished ex-criminal with the Biblical name. He has done his "bit" and should be allowed to pass into private life. But the enterprising press insists on inflicting him upon us. He was very pious before his imprisonment, and they tell us that he is even more so after it. According to one report, he has sent the Governor of Parkhurst Prison a handsome brass-bound prayer-book to be

placed on the altar of the prison chapel, as a slight recognition of the many benefits he derived from worshipping there. It seems another case of the deathless ruling passion.

The Churches are talking about using Whit-Sunday as a special day of prayer for the reunion of Christendom, at least in the bonds of peace and good-will. Humanly speaking, they admit that the thing is impossible; nothing but a miracle can bring it to pass. Such is the result of nearly two thousand years of the "religion of love."

That little effort towards Christian unity, by wrestling with the Lord on Whit-Sunday (why not Bank Holiday?), has the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Presidents, Chairmen, and Moderators of all the great Churches in Great Britain. The head of the Roman Catholics holds aloof. Archbishop Bourne wishes the enterprise success, but "fancies he can help most by working on the traditional lines." Quite so. We all know what that means. When the Catholic Church lies down with the other Churches they will be inside.

Rev. Dr. Agar Beet, the well-known Wesleyan professor, lecturing to the Willshaw Theological Class in the Central Hall, Manchester, told his hearers that the Bible never claimed to be the word of God. Perhaps he will tell us, then, how the Christian clergy had the impudence to declare that it is so, and to persecute men and women to the death for denying it.

Dr. Beet maintained that after criticism had done its worst upon the Bible "there remained certain unshaken articles of belief." Does he include amongst them the belief in everlasting punishment in hell, for doubting which the Wesleyan Conference told him to "shut up" and ordered the withdrawal from publication of the book he had written upon it? How can doctrines be called "unshaken" when they have to be propped up in that way?

Texas has been visited by a destructive tornado, many towns being seriously damaged, with considerable loss of life. Clearly the "philanthropy of God"—to borrow Hugh Price Hughes's phrase—was not exhausted by the California earthquakes.

Now that Vesuvius is quiet the charlatan Cardinal Prisco, Archbishop of Naples, has ordered a solemn festival of thanksgiving to St. Januarius, on May 6, for his great services to the city in stopping the eruption. If the Neapolitans had less piety, and more sense, they would see that St. Januarius would have been better employed in preventing the eruption.

Evan Roberts is a master of silence. Some speakers make a reputation by their eloquence. He makes most of his reputation by saying nothing at all. Often he has gone to a revival meeting and wrestled with the Lord for two hours without uttering a word. While he is in that state the Welsh madmen believe he is most inspired. They positively hang upon his lips when they are closed. When he opens them it is no great matter. Evan has been pressed to conduct revival meetings at Bognor. He replies that God does not tell him to go there yet. When the Lord gives him the tip to go he will let them know. This little game is in keeping with the peculiar smile on Evan's face in the photographs—a mixture of silliness and cunning; two things, by the way, that very often go together.

Mrs. Jones, of Carmel, the Welsh prophetess, a silly hysterical woman who has personal interviews with God Almighty and Jesus Christ, is still "carrying on." But one regular man of God, at least, is denouncing her antics. The Rev. Evan R. Hughes, of Taffs Well, calls upon the ministers of religion to protest. "Are we to believe," he asks, "that the Omnipotent Deity condescends to play the tricks of a painted clown in a sawdust circus ring?" But this question goes farther than the reverend gentleman imagines. A hundred years ago Thomas Paine, in the *Age of Reason*, said that the Bible miracles degraded the Deity to the level of a travelling showman. Pastor Hughes only sees this when the "medium" is Mrs. Jones.

The Baptists boast of an increase of 31,752 in their membership through the Welsh revival. They do not say how many of them are warmed-up Christians.

Man can paint, or make, or think nothing but man.—
 Emerson.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, May 6, Picton Hall, William Brown-street, Liverpool:
7, "Simple Bible Teaching: Mr. Birrell's Recipe for Children."

To Correspondents.

- R. CHAPMAN.—We are writing you on the matter.
- H. JONES.—You do not intrude; far from it. We are very glad to hear from you. We can quite understand how you thought the *Freethinker* was a low, trashy publication, and how you were astonished when you got hold of a copy, after much difficulty with Welsh newsagents. Go on with your propaganda amongst your fellow workmen, and may you find more and more success in the effort. You could get many of the back numbers of the *Freethinker* by ordering from the shop manager (W. A. Vaughan) at our publishing office.
- B. H. TUBBS.—We quite agree with you that "Freethought sadly needs reviving" in Sheffield. It will never be done in connection with the hall you mention. Are there no "saints" in the town who would form a working N. S. S. Branch and arrange for meetings to be addressed by leading Secular lecturers in a good central hall? See "Acid Drops" for our comment on the cutting.
- UNKNOWN.—Your suggestion that "Mr. Foote should offer the editor of the *Daily Mail* a short article in reply" is founded upon the innocent assumption that the *D. M.* loves the truth and desires fair play. Mr. Foote knows better, and has no time to waste on such a journal.
- A. L. TAVERNER.—There are some good books in "Everyman's Library," but the worst of the various series of cheap reprints is that they all go over very much the same ground. We believe that some of the publishers would find purchasers for a good many out of the way books, if they only had the courage to be a little more original.
- W. P. BALL.—Thanks for your much-valued cuttings.
- ROADWAY FUND.—H. Voigt 2s. 6d. J. Partridge also acknowledges: C. J. Whitwell 2s. 6d.
- W. EMSLEY.—Of course it is more pleasant to praise what one loves than to attack what one hates, but duty has always to come first in life. Still, we hope to be able to find time for many such articles as the one you mention—on Shakespeare, and the other poets in your list. We wrote some articles on Shelley, in connection with a visit to his grave, and that of Keats, at Rome, some eighteen months ago.
- R. CLARKE.—Cuttings may not all be useful, but some are sure to be. Mr. Foote is keeping fairly well, although his old enemy, insomnia, has been troubling him lately.
- J. BROUGH.—Thanks. No doubt you found Mr. Lloyd's lecture the treat you expected.
- TRUTHSEEKER.—The *Sunday Companion's* religious statistics are not correct. Naturally. To represent the Buddhists as only 121,000,000 is absurd. They number over 500,000,000. "Confucians, 300,000,000" is also an absurdity. Confucianism is not a religion. It is the moral philosophy of the intellectual classes in China.
- JAMES NEATE.—See paragraph. We hope your Branch will have a very successful summer season in Victoria Park.
- J. NUGENT.—Your suggestion is not one that we could deal with personally. Our time is already too fully occupied.
- G. ROLEFFS.—Thanks for cuttings.
- F. MARTIN.—The matter is dealt with in this week's "Acid Drops." We may deal with it further before long. Evidently you, like so many others, saw the *Daily Mail* lies but not the subsequent official correction. We hope the Cardiff "saints" will not be disturbed by such pious tricks.
- W. WILLIS.—What the Bishop of Chester says about the moral fruits of secular education is as valuable as what an old 'bus driver says about electric 'buses. See this week's "Acid Drops."
- C. PABSLOE.—We do not know of such a book as you inquire after. Votes of the Bishops in the House of Lords used to be given in the *Financial Reform Almanack*. They have always been wrong.
- X. Y. Z.—We have written on Shakespeare's religious views before, and may do so again, but cannot deal with them this week. Meanwhile you must not suppose that any pious expression put into the mouth of any of his characters represents his own opinions—especially those occurring in early plays like *Henry VI.* and *Richard III.*
- WATCHFUL.—Let them raise the hundred guineas, as far as we are concerned; perhaps the poor man of God wants it.
- G. TAYLOR.—Much obliged for the flowers.
- H. VOIGT.—We have noted what you say about University College School, which has always been secular, and may find good use for the information presently.
- 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.

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Sugar Plums.

There was a capital audience at Mr. Foote's second Queen's Hall lecture on Sunday evening. It included many strange faces and a pleasant proportion of ladies. The lecture on "God at San Francisco" was freely punctuated with laughter and applause. Mr. Cowell, who occupied the chair, warmly invited discussion, but only a few questions were asked. Prior to the lecture the artists who played the first evening delighted the audience again with some excellent selections admirably rendered. After the lecture Mr. Foote performed the ceremony of "naming" a baby girl—Hilda Martineau Charlton. A pin might have been heard drop while it was proceeding, and some of the ladies (Miss Vance tells us) were trying to keep back tears. Which shows that honest human emotion is not the monopoly of the Churches that trade upon it.

Liverpool "saints" will note that Mr. Foote lectures this evening (May 6) in the great Picton Hall on the burning question of "Simple Bible Teaching: Mr. Birrell's Recipe for Children." Admission will be free to all parts of the building, and a collection will be taken towards defraying the cost of the meeting, which of course is very considerable. No doubt the "saints" will come provided to deal generously with the collection boxes. We hope, also, that they will advertise the meeting as thoroughly as possible amongst their friends and acquaintances, so that the hall may be packed on this important occasion.

There will be no meetings at Milton Hall, Liverpool, to-day (May 6). A complete concentration will be made on the Picton Hall meeting. The "saints" will please note.

Mr. Cohen concluded his three series of Liverpool lectures on Sunday. There was an improved attendance both afternoon and evening. There were also improved collections. We hear that Mr. Cohen's lectures were very able and highly appreciated. Altogether the Branch feels that the prospect at Milton Hall is brightening.

The Bethnal Green Branch starts its open-air propaganda in Victoria Park to-day (May 6), when Mr. Cohen will be the lecturer. There should be a strong rally of the local "saints" around the platform. Of course the general public will be present too.

We commence this week the publication of what we believe our readers will find a very interesting mental biography. It relates the inner experiences of one who passed from Catholicism to Secularism, by slow but sure and certain stages. It is not an imaginary narrative, it is strictly historical, and palpitates with actuality. Mr. Bonto, the writer, is well-known to us personally, and has given tangible proofs, not only of his existence, but of his profound interest in the Freethought movement. As soon as the story of his emancipation has run through our columns it will be reprinted in pamphlet form for wider and more general circulation.

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference takes place at Birmingham on Whit-Sunday. There will be business sessions in the morning and afternoon, and a public meeting in the grand Town Hall in the evening, addressed by Messrs. G. W. Foote, C. Cohen, J. T. Lloyd, and F. A. Davies. There will also be an excursion on Whit-Monday to Stratford-on-Avon—the principal place of pilgrimage in the world. Branches of the N. S. S., and Secularists all over the land generally, should be preparing to take part in this great gathering. Notices of motion for the Conference agenda must be forwarded to Miss Vance, the general secretary, at 2 Newcastle-street, London, E.C., by Saturday, May 12, at the latest.

Canon Jephson contributed a remarkably outspoken letter to a recent issue of the London *Daily Chronicle* on "Religion in the Schools." After referring to the long war between Church and Chapel over religious education in the schools, he declared that "the time has now come for the nation to interfere, and exclude this bone of contention from our schools altogether." "There is no greater reason," he went on to say, "for a clergyman to be interested in the teaching of arithmetic, geography, and grammar than any other well-meaning citizen. The clergy are only interested in education because it has so long been connected with religious teaching." Canon Jephson actually maintains that the Church is weakened, instead of strengthened, by its troubling about ordinary education; and that the money and effort it expends upon it would do far more good if applied in other directions. "We shall have a work to do," he says, "and concentrate ourselves upon it, and not dissipate our energies by half-doing religious and secular teaching in the day-schools."

Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, in an important letter to Mr. C. W. Clarke, President of the London Workmen's Council, says that there are only two just ways of settling the Education question. "One is that the State should confine itself to secular instruction, giving equal facilities to all denominations to provide the religious education which may be desired by the parents for their children. The other is that the State should provide religious instruction for all according to the wishes that may be expressed by the parents of the children." "Of these two alternatives," Mr. Chamberlain adds, "I myself greatly prefer the first, and believe that ultimately it is in this direction that a final settlement must be looked for." Mr. Chamberlain has always been in favor of secular education, and he has repeatedly said that it was the Nonconformists who made it impossible in 1870. No wonder he now says that, while he sympathised to some extent with the objections of the Nonconformists to the Education Act of 1902, he feels that "the present Bill is in every respect much worse, and that it transfers the grievance in an exaggerated form from the shoulders of the Dissenters to those of every other sect in the country." We look forward to an enjoyable spectacle when Mr. Chamberlain's keen rapier plays amongst the Nonconformist champions in the House of Commons.

The place of honor in the May number of the *Independent Review* is given to Mr. J. M. Robertson's able article on "The Secular Solution." Mr. Robertson makes great play with the shallow sophisms of Dr. Macnamara. He tells the Nonconformists how absurd and impossible is their present policy. He reminds them that they have no right whatever to determine the religious education of other people's children. He shows that it is not feasible to use the Bible in any way but as a book of religion. He argues that the secular solution is inevitable. And he points out that the Labor members, who are pledged to secular education, are only carrying out the mandate of the working classes. It is an excellent article and should do much good.

The Leicester Secular Society is going to hold another Bazaar in the spring of 1907, and asks friends and sympathisers to support it by "Making or purchasing articles for us" or "Giving us money." Useful articles, such as clothing and furniture, would be preferred, but books, pictures, etc., would be welcome. The 1900 and 1903 bazaars realised a clear profit of more than £150 each, and it is hoped that the new one will be still more successful. Intending contributors should write to Mr. F. J. Gould, Secular Hall, Humberstone-gate.

INSPIRATION.

Behind all these theories of inspiration stands the fatal objection of Thomas Paine, that inspiration, to be real, must be personal. A man may be sure that God speaks to him, but how can he be sure that God has spoken to another man? He may think it possible or probable, but he can never be certain. What is revelation at first-hand, said Paine, is only hearsay at second-hand. Real inspiration, therefore, eventuates in mysticism. The inner light shines, the inner voice speaks; God holds personal communication with the individual soul. Each believer carries what the author of *Hudibras* calls "the dark lanthorn of the spirit," which "none see by but those who bear it." And the very multiplicity and diversity of the oracle's deliverances are a proof that in all of them man is speaking to himself. He questions his gods, and hears only the echo of his own voice.—G. W. Foote, "The Book of God."

From Fiction to Fact;

OR,

HOW I CEASED TO BE A CATHOLIC.—I.

BY FRED. BONTE

(Late a Prison Minister.)

"To those who thirst after knowledge and are not deterred from seeking it by the fear of imaginary dangers."—DR. INDIAN'S dedication to *Ancient Faiths*.

LIKE every other sprig of humanity, I was a little Atheist when first ushered into the world; and, to believe the clergy, I was even a demoniac. Fortunately I did not remain long in this damnable condition; the day after my birth, according to ancient custom, two persons, oddly called god-parents, took me to a priest, who straightway set about casting the Devil out of me. Having successfully accomplished this uncanny task, he went on to ask me, Did I believe in God the Father Almighty? and a lot of other questions, to all of which the god-parents answered that I believed every one of them. Whereupon the priest, in total disregard of the known falsity of all these assertions, proceeded to wet my pate with water, suiting the action to some magic words of incantation, and then entered my name in a book as *Baptizatus* (dipped), though I had not been dipped in any liquid whatever.

Having thus been forcibly cleared of my Atheism, and turned into a Christian, the process of drilling the tenets of that religion into my brain was industriously prosecuted. During my callow years I learnt to mumble, parrot-like, many pass-words and oracles of the faith. These rudiments of godliness, implanted at home, were further developed at school till I was of age to go to college and complete the building-up of that Catholic education which was to be my mainstay through life.

But fate would have it otherwise. The most anxiously elaborated plans are sometimes doomed to miscarry. The dogmas which had been so carefully rooted in my mind were eventually to give way before the disintegrating effects of observation, reflection, and research. When the stern realities of life began to press on me, many early impressions and cherished illusions grew fainter; and, as reason gradually asserted its sway with increasing force, the traditions of youth and early training faded away one after another.

It is now some years since the last vestiges of the Catholic faith vanished from my thoughts. Since that time I have often asked myself how so profound a change in my opinions, so complete an effacement of my religious convictions, had come to pass. The answer to this question may not be wholly devoid of interest to others, especially to those I have come across in life's journey.

In tracing to their first source the successive stages of my long course of disillusionment, I come to the conclusion that my natural temperament was the cause and beginning of it. I always was of an inquisitive turn of mind, eager to understand things and to examine their foundation. The first notable instance of this disposition occurred during my college days. We were reading a portion of the gospel where the efficacy of prayer is urgently insisted on. At that time there was at Bruges a young bishop of good family, so talented and so zealous that he was called the terror of the Liberals. Very devoted to Our Lady of Dadizeele, he undertook the building of a magnificent shrine for her statue there. But ere the church was completed, the bishop, to the consternation of the entire diocese, became very ill. Forthwith, from every church, congregation and confraternity, innumerable pilgrimages went forth to the shrine of the miraculous statue to obtain the recovery of so distinguished and holy a prelate. All felt sure that so just and reasonable a petition from so many thousands of loving children for their devoted father must be heard. But it was not to be so. The bishop died. This unexpected issue of so much devotion and prayer

caused me to reflect. We had learnt in the gospel that whatever we should ask of our Father in heaven it would be granted to us. Here was a just and holy object of petition, yet the countless prayers, fervent communions, and devout pilgrimages had all proved in vain. The issue puzzled and staggered me, without leading me to any definite conclusion. I might have said to myself, These alleged promises made to prayer either were never made by Christ at all, or, if they were made, they are wholly false; but my reflection did not go so far.

My next educational stage was at the English College of Bruges, where I found little that tended to edification. The students were of three nationalities—English, Irish, and Belgian—and between them the sentiments of mutual sympathy and Christian charity were not very conspicuous. But what really repelled me was the partisanship of the vice-president—a man of fanatical disposition, and a poet, but devoid of common sense. A number of students were his intimates and frequented his room, the rest being viewed with suspicion. This divided the college into two opposite sections, and produced much ill-feeling, leading at last to a distinct revolt, when, by a *coup d'état*, he tried to assume the presidency of the Debating Society, of which he was not even a member. One evening, when we were meeting for a session, we found the chairs in the room set in order, each bearing on a slip of paper the name of a member; and, to increase our surprise, the vice-president came and seated himself in the presidential chair. In our confusion we exchanged a few words in groups, and nearly all left the room. The time of the attempt had been well chosen: the proximity of the ordination would secure the submissive attitude of the students. But the anticipation was not realised. A ferment of murmuring and discontent arose throughout the college, with the result that most of the candidates for ordination, myself among them, were left in the lurch when the President came to read off the names. Thus were a score of us most sharply penalised through the folly of a domineering vice-president.

This event left a deep impression on me; it showed me that the most fervent Catholic piety is no warrant either of wisdom or of charity, and that religion is no guide of life. However, we were not the only sufferers. The cause of the mischief was himself soon after removed from his post. And when some years later I called on the President and conversed with him on the matter, he admitted that right and order were on our side, but that he was bound to support the authority of the Vice-President and chastise us.

During the four years of college life my disposition often led me to stay in, and spend my afternoons in the library, while the rest of the students were in the town or in the country. At last I was sent to Liverpool on the mission, where more disillusion awaited me. The frequent sumptuous dinner-parties celebrated at the presbytery where I resided, seemed to me incongruous to the Christian ideal and grated on my frugal tastes, nor did the earnestness and zeal of the clergy generally come up to my expectations. It is often thought that priests are hard worked. Such is not the case. I have lived among them for thirty years and I know that they lead very easy lives, being by no means enamored of work unless it brings them some advantage. My work lay mainly at the Workhouse in whose hospital wards I witnessed many sad sights. What struck and surprised me in observing the sick and the dying, was the absence of all difference between the Catholics and the Protestants. The death-bed of the Protestant was just as calm and resigned as that of the Catholic. The so-called consolations administered to the Catholic by the priest showed no visible result. The rites of the Church were generally received with indifference and from a sense of duty. I had been brought up to believe that Catholics had many advantages over all others, especially at the approach of death. This illusion was now dissipated. I had read that as the last hour drew near patients were

tortured by fierce assaults of the Devil, frightful visions and temptations of despair. The *Litany for a Happy Death*, found in most Catholic prayer books, draws a truly appalling picture of a patient in his agony. And who has not seen pictorial representations contrasting the awful death-bed of the sinner with the sweet and holy decease of the just? I must confess, as a result of long observation, that such representations are wholly imaginary. I have watched many hundreds approaching their end, and I have not observed a single one who displayed the least sign of anguish or terror. All alike departed in complete calmness of mind and for the most part free from bodily pain, appearing to wait patiently and peacefully for their great rest.

To fill people with the terrors of death is doubtless very useful to the Church in magnifying the alleged consolations of religion administered by the priests, and in bringing gifts and legacies into their hands; but the process cannot be called either honorable or moral, for it springs from the lowest motives and is totally devoid of justification.

There was a further part of my ministry at the Workhouse which contributed to my disenchantment. Each Sunday I had to baptize in the lying-in ward some ten babies, half of them illegitimates. Some pauper woman served the purpose of God-parents—a sheer farce. These red, unconscious innocents were ranged in a semi-circle, and I had to go and breathe on each in turn and say in Latin: "Go out of him thou unclean spirit, and give place to the Holy Ghost," with many other equally antiquated ceremonies. I had not performed this duty many times before it began to nauseate me and the repugnance has grown ever since, till now the entire ceremony of baptism stands out before me as a remnant of sorcery and the idlest of superstitions.

The three years of my engagement at the Workhouse brought my restless nature occasionally into play. Not only did I spend much time in the library of the presbytery, sorting the books, but I brought about several discussions. At the opening of the mortuary in Colingwood-street, Bishop Goss used as an argument in favor of the existence of purgatory the words of St. Paul, "He shall be saved yet so as by fire"; and for several days I held on to the contention that this is not a legitimate argument, as those words have no reference to purgatory, but regard solely the fire that is to consume all things at the consummation of the world. I supported my position by many quotations from Catholic authors in the library. I also contended on several occasions that the singing of the Litany of Our Lady during benediction was incongruous, as it converted the worship of God into the invocation of a creature; that it was like presenting an address to a Prince, the main argument of which was a petition to his mother. I also noticed, with some disedification, the hurried way in which the Rosary was recited in the church, and I argued that this devotion was much better suited for private than for public use.

In the year 1867 I was removed to the service of one of the Liverpool prisons and a large industrial school. This service necessitated the frequent imparting of religious instruction. It was my invariable practice to give an instruction of at least twenty minutes' duration every morning to the prisoners. Such a succession of addresses needed a plan. First came the historical aspect of religion, as given in the Bible; next the theoretical, as given in the Catechism; and lastly the evolution of Christianity in the history of the Church—the series covering about three years. This work did not go on year after year without giving rise occasionally to questionings as to the historicity of certain Biblical narratives. But no serious shaking of my thoughts occurred till a certain event of an apparently trifling nature roused my suspicions. In the *Dublin Review* appeared an article by Bishop Clifford setting forth the thesis, novel and startling at the time, that the account of creation as related in Genesis was to be viewed as a poem, and not as history. Naturally I read all the

details of the case with avidity, as they opened new and wide vistas bearing on every part of the Bible. It became a crucial question: what is poetry in it and what is history; what are we to accept as fact, and what may be regarded as fiction? Indeed, I expressed my perplexity to one priest in particular thus: If the creation of the world in seven days is not history, why should the message of the angel Gabriel to Mary be regarded as history? Seriously as this doubt affected me, it had no lasting result. Faith maintained the upper hand, though it never quite recovered its pristine vigor, and often evinced its weakness in a contest.

At that time the chaplain of a convent in town paid me lengthy visits once a week, and on many occasions we held long disputes on religious topics. He was a simple believer, gallantly defending the faith, while I acted as *advocatus diaboli*. Many times we went over the history of the Fall, which I always viewed as an insoluble puzzle. Why was Adam's fidelity tried if the issue was certain beforehand? If he was perfect, if his will was subject to his reason, if he had no *fomes peccati*, or lust of sin, how came he to yield to the evil suggestion? His exceptional perfection is hopelessly irreconcilable with his childish fall. The more we discussed the Garden of Eden with its tenants, its four wonderful rivers, its more wonderful trees, its talking serpent, telling the truth when Javeh did not, the marvellous angel with his flaming sword turning every way, so much the more did the conviction grow upon me that we were in the presence, not of historic facts, but of allegories and fables. There was no intimation in the narrative, I urged, that the serpent personated the Devil. It was the serpent itself that was cursed, though the curse was mythical, as serpents do not eat earth. Indeed, the Devil seemed to be an unknown quantity; now he is one, then he is a legion; one version says deliver us from *evil*, the other deliver us from *the evil one*; thus calling his personality in doubt. And after all, if the Devil exists God is responsible for his being, for God has made all things. The petition, lead us not into temptation, is startling enough itself—as if God could treat his children in that way; but it becomes much more startling in the presence of the fact that the devils are liberated from hell and free to prowl on earth seeking whom they may devour. What earthly father would let a roaring lion loose among his children? On several occasions we also discussed the basis of Christianity, for I held that, in the last resort, it is based on historical evidence, while he defended faith as its foundation. With these and similar disputes did we pass many an afternoon, often leaving the table littered with the books we had consulted.

(To be continued.)

God's Point of View.

"Has this God good sense? Not always. He creates his own enemies and plots against himself. Nothing lives except in accordance with his will."—INGERSOLL.

".....He arranged everything himself, and brought everything to pass just as he had predestined it an eternity before the world was."—INGERSOLL.

I AM, for before Time was did I exist. Here, alone in my superb isolation, for millions on millions of years have I looked down from this topmost height of autoeracy and power on the creatures of my own conception, on the beings of my own creation.

What I am I know not, because there is none to analyse my being. Does the toy of a man's manufacture know what are its maker's attributes? Does a man of himself know what he is, except as he sees in others the reflection of his own ego?

And there is none to analyse or reflect my being.

Alone, in utter, absolute solitude—alone for ever; and in the myriads of ages that have passed in the millions of worlds around, peopled by the numberless puppets of my mind, I look for that pastime, that amusement, that I may find in unravelling the skeins

I have myself entangled, watching the working out to their miserable ends of the sordid destinies I have shaped.

And ever from my worlds come up to me cries of bitter agony; wild, fierce, rageful laughter; anon a smile of temporary peace and happiness, so soon to be dashed with the tears of distress and grief.

And these puppets of my will, this spawn of my desire, those pigmies created by me to dance a jig called life for my own pleasure, dare to say I am unjust—I who gave them being, I who made them what they are, I who placed them where they are for the good and wise purpose of my own glorification.

Let them suffer. Let their blood pour out in rivers and their ghastly faces twist and writhe and sweat in their agony of being. What is it to me? Have I not the right to make laws for them, and make it impossible for them to keep those laws, and so merit the punishment I have prepared for them in consequence?

Why should they murmur? Is it not I who have done this thing, and will not the God of all the worlds do right?—nay, can I do wrong?

But how can they understand who are not gods and—only have to suffer?

Listen, my people, and I will show you my point of view. I will pick out for you some of the threads running over my mighty loom. What matter if they suffer with the senses I have given them, if they become bruised and frayed in the weaving? Is it not for my great pleasure and glory, and are they not *mine*? for I made them.

There, on that orb called Earth, where now the first faint blush of light that heralds the coming dawn begins to shine—there, where the erstwhile pure white snow is now trampled, bloodstained and dirty, round the camp of two hostile forces. See where yonder I have made the land to dip into a hollow, out of sight of both camps. There lies one of my creatures. Yesterday he was wounded, and crawled thus far. Farther he will never get, for when the time arrives that shall bring to pass what my creature man calls daybreak he will die.

Yes, at daybreak his soul shall leave his physical being, to begin his period of hopeless, eternal, absolute agony.

During the twenty-six years since I sent him into the world to do what I required of him I have kept him so fully occupied with other things, "toiling for the bread which perisheth," and sleeping the sleep of the jaded, toilworn laborer, that he has never even thought of me.

I, the omnipotent, decreed that he should not, and he has therefore broken my law. He never believed, therefore how could he be saved from the punishment I have prepared for him?

Twenty-six years has he broken my laws by doing what I have decreed in my own inscrutable mind he should do, and now shall he be punished by enduring for all eternity the utmost agony of which I have made him capable. This I do out of my love, and for mine own great glory.

See, he writhes. That is because I have given him nerves sensitive to pain. Now he tries to rise. Aha—why struggle, my puny puppet? There, at daybreak you are to die. But this you do not know, for I, with a good and wise purpose, have hidden the future from human ken. But have I not given you the hope—a hope that springs eternal so long as life shall last—hope, that you may be tempted to prolong your agony to the utmost limit of my loving decree?

Ah! Does the torture get too much for your endurance? Do you struggle? Do you clasp your hands in mute prayer to—you know not what? Do you wish to be released from present agony, not knowing that the tortures of the damned soul are keener, fiercer, and more excruciatingly intense than physical being can possibly endure?

Nay, nay. At daybreak. I have spoken. Ah! is the physical pain for the moment less keen? Then you will suffer the more intensely mentally.

Do you remember the sweet girl-wife you have left behind with the tiny babes?—only two; but each is

capable of suffering as much as you can—perhaps more. And your death means certain suffering to them?

Do you see the dear one grown old in your absence—old with want and care; the little ones pining away in starvation; and the mother, because she loves them, hungry and cold with *their* hunger and shivering; and she feels thus through her love for them because it is only the love of the human, not a godlike love like mine, that cannot feel the pain that others feel; for have I not made that pain?

Yes, think of them as you saw them last. She, full-eyed and trembling at the garden gate, wistful and drawn of face, in the agony of parting.

The little ones, as their eyes sparkled and laughed in the sunlight that golden afternoon, not knowing what I had designed for them.

Ah! think of them now, and the sweat pours down your pallid, blood-stained cheeks at the thought of what their future may be. Rest, fool. I shall see that they drain their cups to the uttermost dregs.

Aha! has the pain come back, and you grip the earth in your wild intensity of feeling? No thought of aught else now. "Let me die," you say. Nay, not yet. At daybreak. Have I not said so?

Do you not know that there are millions of tragedies going on in your world alone as great as yours?

Why should *you*, puny you, cause me to alter the unalterable for the sake of sparing you a pang or two, more or less?

You curse the pain and him who caused it. Know you not you curse the mighty God? Know you not that you curse me, the Maker and Destroyer of everything, and that I will require of you, for that curse, a full requital of pain and suffering that shall run round and round the cycle of eternity?

G. D.

National Secular Society.

REPORT of monthly Executive Meeting held at the Society's offices on Thursday, April 26; the President, Mr. G. W. Foote, in the chair. There were also present: Messrs. J. Barry, C. Cohen, H. Cowell, F. A. Davies, W. Leat, Dr. R. T. Nichols, J. Neate, V. Roger, S. Samuels, F. Schaller, H. Silverstein, F. Schindel, T. J. Thurlow, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed. Cash statement adopted. The further arrangements for the Annual Conference were discussed.

Messrs. Roger and Cohen were elected, with the President's assistance, as an Agenda Committee, and the Executive decided on various resolutions to be submitted to them. The President was asked to undertake the preparation of the Annual Report. The speakers were appointed for the evening meeting, and it was resolved that the usual Whit-Monday Excursion should be to Stratford-on-Avon.

The following resolution was carried, and the Secretary instructed to send it to the public press:—

"This Executive of the National Secular Society recognises in the new Education Bill nothing but an attempt to satisfy the Nonconformists first, and the other religious bodies in subordinate degrees afterwards; and hopes that the conflict of sects which is thus renewed will eventually force the Government to fall back upon the Liberal principle of State neutrality in matters of religion, and to incorporate in the Bill a clause definitely establishing Secular Education in the nation's schools."

The meeting then closed.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

Eden Forfeit.

"The fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe,
With loss of Eden." —*Paradise Lost.*

Time was, in Eden's drowsy keep,
When knowledge had not come to dawning;
When laughing Love still lay asleep,
And Adam spent his leisure yawning.

Fair, at the garden-centre, stood
The tree forbidden, all untasted:
And bonny Eve was yet unwoo'd,
And time in Paradise was wasted.

But (evil hour!) the Serpent spake,
And proffered Eve a daring wrinkle,
And (were the angel guards awake?)
Eve pluck'd an apple in a twinkle.

Of knowledge she and Da partook.
And need one tell of what came after?
Of snugging in the shady nook,
Of Eden changed with love and laughter;

That, when the stars came out, the twain
Forgot old Jove, and sang no pæan,
While Nick, who had strung his harp again,
Sat down and twang'd the hymenæan.

Afar in heaven sat frowning Jove;
Beside him Juno, looking grumpy:
Little between them now of love,
Juno was grown so fat and lumpy.

Jove closed his eyes, and feign'd to nod,
His sullen lips all parle disdainful;
When spies brought word unto the god,
With those in Eden love was reigning.

Moody and jealous, Jove took whip
And drove them forth the happy portals.
Ah! loss of Eden! Yet, ah! lip
Of love! which would ye, modern mortals?

Say! would you turn the snugging grove
Into a doleful Wesley chapel?
Or are you glad, in spite of Jove,
That Eve was game, and pluck'd that apple?

CONTRE L'IDOLE.

"What is my faith?" I do believe
That ladies never would deceive,
And that the little fault of Eve
Is very easy to retrieve.

"She lost us immortality!"
Well, so she might; and what care I?
Eden and Paradise are nigh
As ever: should we pass them by?

—*Landor.*

BRITISH "RESPECT" FOR THE DEAD.

I must ask you to reflect if there is any way in which waste money more in England than in building fine tombs. Our respect for the dead, when they are *just* dead, is something wonderful, and the way we show it is more wonderful still. We show it with black feathers and black horses; we show it with black dresses and bright heraldries; we show it with costly obelisks and sculptures of sorrow, which spoil half of our most beautiful cathedrals. We show it with frightful gratings and vaults, and lids of dismal stone, in the midst of the quiet grass; and last, and not least, we show it by permitting ourselves to tell any number of lies we think amiable or credible, in the epitaph. This feeling is common to the poor as well as the rich; and we all know how many a poor family will nearly ruin themselves, to testify their respect for some member of it in his coffin, whom they never much cared for when he was out of it; and how often it happens that a poor old woman will starve herself to death, in order that she may be respectably buried.—*John Ruskin, "A Joy for Ever."*

GETTING PARTICULAR.

Traveller: I hear you have had a great religious revival in this town?
Westerner: Yes-sirce. Why, even the gamblers had to jine th' church or lose their customers.

SOURCE OF SUPPLIES.

"William," said the minister's wife, "if you want me to repair your trousers you'll have to go down town and get some buttons."
"Never mind, dear; let it go till next week," replied the good man. "I'm going to take up a collection for the benefit of the heathen Sunday."

AN APPEAL TO A LADY.

There is a lady in this place, who professes to be a Christian, offers up prayers at every opportunity, who has recently told several pino blank lies about us. In looking at our books we find that she owes for the paper from Oct. 24, 1904. Please call and settle up "sister," and you can blow to your heart's content, for your stories, like your prayers, don't go higher than the smoke from a hot biscuit.—*Antwerp (Ohio) Bee.*

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.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Liberal Hall, Broadway, Forest Gate, E.): 7.30, R. Rossetti, "The Origin of Man."

OUTDOOR.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Rushcroft-road, Brixton, 11.30, F. A. Davies; Brockwell Park, 3.15, E. Edwin.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road, Dalston): 11.30, W. J. Ramsey, a Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill, Hampstead): 3.30, W. J. Ramsey, "What think ye of Christ?"

WOOLWICH BRANCH N. S. S. (Beresford-square): 11.30, A. D. Howell Smith, B.A.

COUNTRY.

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (110 Brunswick-street): 12 (noon), Annual Business Meeting of Members: Election of Office-Bearers for 1906-7; 6.30, Social Meeting in Commemoration of Mill and Owen.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Picton Hall, William Brown-street): 7, G. W. Foote, "Simple Bible Teaching: Mr. Birrell's Recipe for Children."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints): 6.30, William Simpson, "Why 'Nunquam' has Failed to Prove that Man is Unmoral."

PORTRH BRANCH N. S. S. (Room, Town Hall, Porth): 6.30, "Do Christians Believe what they Preach?"

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School, Market-place): 7.30, Conference and Federation.

WEST STANLEY BRANCH N. S. S. (4 Kip Hill-terrace): 3.30, R. Robinson, "Anti-Vivisection."

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