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Philosophy is Life's one match for Fate.

—GEORGE MEREDITH.

Rallying Round the Bible.

THE Liberal party has become a religious party. It has even become a party of religious propaganda. The Nonconformists have captured it. Henceforth, no one knows for how long, it will speak their sentiments and uphold their interests. It almost flies their flag. All its old traditions have been cast aside—and may never be recovered. In a moment of self-forgetfulness, the other day, Mr. Lloyd George referred to the Rev. Dr. Clifford as "my leader." Mr. Birrell, in introducing the Education Bill in the House of Commons, spoke pointedly as a Nonconformist and the son of a Nonconformist. All the principal champions of the Bill in parliament are Nonconformists. Agnostics like Mr. John Morley and Mr. John Burns have not made speeches in the House in its favor, although they have voted for it as their party Bill. This is a point that must not be lost sight of. Not a single Liberal voted against the second reading. And the four Labor members who voted against it did so, apparently, at the behest of their Roman Catholic constituents. We are told that the Labor Party will fight hard for Secular Education while the Bill is in committee. But this is a matter of prophecy and speculation. The great fight over every Bill is usually on the second reading, and if the Labor Party could not vote against it then we can hardly expect any very heroic attack upon it at a subsequent stage of its progress. There is no special statute in the economy of the universe for the benefit of the Labor Party; the general law of life will remain the same for all parties—the law, namely, that opportunities cannot be created, but only seized and used, and that it is idle to labor and worry when the psychological moment has passed.

Common sense suggests that a Bill voted against by all the Conservatives except three, and by all the Irish Nationalists who took part in the division, and which yet passed through its second reading by a majority of 412 to 206, cannot be seriously damaged in committee. The Labor members are not numerous enough to put it in any peril, even if they had the mind to do so. And it is absurd to suppose that much mischief can be expected from any of the 384 Liberals who have already voted in its favor. Unless, therefore, the quarrel of the Churches over the Education Bill becomes so bitter as to menace the public peace and place social order in jeopardy, and thus to throw the Government and the nation inevitably upon the secular solution of the problem, we may conclude that a decisive victory has fallen for the present to the Nonconformists. Undenominational Christianity, which no one is able to define or explain, will now be the established religion of the State in the public schools; and "simple Bible teaching," which is the concrete expression of this theoretical mystery, will now have to be paid for by those who detest and deride it, as well as by those who approve it. And this not as a mere regrettable consequence of the faulty settlement of 1870, but as the result of a new and distinct affirmation of the will of parliament.

Mr. Birrell and Mr. Lloyd George—one representing England and the other Wales—are the accepted parliamentary exponents of the Nonconformist policy. There is a certain dry light of the intellect about Mr. Asquith which leads him to make occasional inconvenient concessions to logic and justice. Moreover, there stands behind him the waiting figure of Lord Rosebery, who, with all his faults, has more *mind* than the rest of these politicians. But both Mr. Birrell and Mr. Lloyd George are whole-hearted Nonconformists. What they say in support of the Education Bill is what the Nonconformists really mean. And each of them held in his right hand, as it were, a copy of the Holy Bible. This is the book, Mr. Birrell said, from which the English people derive their glimpses of spiritual life. This is the book, Mr. Lloyd George said, which the English and Welsh people have made up their minds to rally round. They argued that this is a Christian country—which is a falsehood; that this is a Protestant country—which is but partially true; that the Bible contains the religion of Protestants, and that it must therefore be placed in the nation's schools as the rule of faith and conduct. They took a long time in saying this, but this is really what they said.

What will happen in consequence? We shall have two forms of established religion; one in the State churches, founded upon the Prayer Book, the other in the State schools, founded upon the Nonconformist conception of the Bible. One is old and senile, the other is young and vigorous. One is an enfeebled enemy, the other is a fresh danger. One may be frequently ignored, the other meets us at every turn. Nobody need go to church. Everybody must go to school. The tyranny of the old Established religion is nothing, therefore, to the tyranny of the new Established religion. The Nonconformist has trumped the Churchman's last trick. He has the game in his hands. The new Education Bill is indeed the Nonconformist's act of conformity.

The religion thus established is the religion of the Authorised Version of the Bible. The Bible of the Catholic—the Douai version, is ruled out; the Bible of the High Churchman—which includes the Old Testament apocrypha, is also ruled out. The established Bible is the Bible of the seventeenth century Puritans.

This constitutes a fresh challenge to Freethought. Other questions, such as the existence of God and a future life, are for the moment swept aside. By a new deliberate law the Protestant Bible is set up as a fetish in English elementary schools. Freethinkers are thus called upon to subject it to a new deliberate attack. If one body of citizens as citizens have the right to cry "Up with the Bible!" another body of citizens as citizens have the right to cry "Down with the Bible!" If the one cry is legitimate on political platforms and in parliament, so is the other, and Freethinkers would be foolish not to shout it at the top of their voices.

What we have to attack is not the Bible of the "Higher Criticism," not the Bible as a book of ancient religious literature, but the Bible as the established rule of faith and conduct in the State schools. We have to fight the Authorised Version of the Bible as the Word of God. We have to do this now, not as critics, but as citizens. And we will do it

G. W. FOOTE.

Mr. Alfred Austin and Secular Education.

BEARING in mind how great is the task of Mr. Alfred Austin to induce people to take him seriously as a poet, it would seem a gratuitous creation of difficulties to challenge criticism in the garb of a philosopher. This, however, Mr. Austin has seen fit to do in a recent letter to the *Times*, in which he stands forward as a champion of religious instruction in public schools. And his defence is of the usual dual character—definite assertions, but with no proof, of the value of religious instruction, and wild prophecies as to the terrible things that will happen should a State policy of Secular Education become an accomplished fact. To the last portion of the defence it would be quite easy, and certainly as justifiable, to prophesy the exact reverse. One might as reasonably hold that the dawn of the Millennium will be seen when religion is cleared out of the schools as assert that the exclusion of priest and parson will mark the beginning of the nation's downfall—only there is no logical justification for either view. It does not follow—and no Freethinker who understands his case has made the statement—that the exclusion of religion will involve the immediate entrance of all the virtues. All that it involves is the creation of one of the conditions of their orderly development; but whether this development proceeds or not will entirely depend upon whether the nation is wise enough to avail itself of the opportunity offered.

It is, however, characteristic of the defenders of religious instruction that they should take the line of forebodings concerning the future. Religious instruction of some kind or other is a very old-established fact. Taking it on the whole, more attention has been given to this than to any other single subject; and one would think that some *positive* evidence in its favor might be producible if any were discoverable. Yet when one examines the defence it is of an entirely negative character—not the good it has done, but the evil that may be done by some other system is the burden of the cry, and if the picture is only sufficiently lurid it will always serve to alarm the timid; and these, added to the number actuated by self-interest or unreasoning conservatism, will generally total a respectably large following. What one would like to see, in place of these cheap prophecies concerning the future, would be a clear proof that religious instruction has ever done what its defenders declare secular instruction cannot do—build up a healthy character either individual or national. If Mr. Austin can do this, and can, by so doing, explain away the damning fact that the worst kinds of character have always co-existed with the most careful tuition in religion, he will have done something of which to be proud.

Mr. Austin says—and this is the one point in his letter with which I am in agreement—either the State must allow that “religious sentiment and opinion are of supreme importance in all teaching,” or it must affirm, “whether explicitly or implicitly, that it is not of the slightest consequence if they be excluded from the secular curriculum in elementary schools.” From the first of these, he adds, it follows that “the State must consult and abide by the wishes of the parents; from the second, that the wishes of the parents may legitimately be ignored, and religious opinion and religious sentiment may be treated as a superfluity, not to say a nuisance.”

The statement of the two courses open to the nation leaves nothing to be desired, although the conclusions—or, at least, the first—by no means logically ensues. But the first position is one that all Christians, if they were only logical, would heartily endorse. If religion is of supreme importance to the future well-being of the child, then the State cannot, and ought not to, leave it out of any scheme of State education, and, above all, no Christian ought to consent to its exclusion. And, therefore, it does *not* follow that the State must “consult and abide by the wishes of the parents”

in the sense of giving various forms of religion to the children of different parents. If religion is so valuable a thing, then the State not only ought to teach it, but it should say what form of this valuable subject is to be inculcated. To make the State say that religion is of paramount importance, but that it does not matter what sort you have, or you may even go without it altogether if you please, is so hopelessly absurd that to merely state the position should be enough to secure its rejection. In other matters of instruction no such latitude is given. The State does not consult the individual parent whether a child shall be educated, it is compulsory. It does not allow a parent to select the kind of secular instruction a child shall receive; that, too, is a matter of compulsion. Why should any greater latitude be permitted in matters of religion? The reply is, of course, that we are not agreed on religion as on other subjects, either as to its general value or as to its form. And this is quite true, only it breaks down the case for religion as a subject of paramount importance. For the whole case lies in a nutshell. If character cannot be properly formed without religion, every argument that holds good for the State teaching other subjects holds good for it teaching this also. And if the State is justified in teaching religion it must also be justified in saying *what* religion is to be taught. For it not to do so is an example of that lack of moral courage which is so great a contemporary disease, and from which the modern Nonconformist suffers most. If, on the other hand, we hold that the State, after arranging for religion to be taught, should allow individuals to select what form of religion they prefer, or even go without it altogether if they prefer that, we admit that it is not, after all, of much consequence; it is provided merely because the prejudice of some demand it, but the State, as a whole, is quite content with the character of the citizens, that can be developed in its absence. So that, on Mr. Austin's own showing, religious opinions may be—indeed, are—“treated as a superfluity, not to say a nuisance.”

Mr. Austin asks: “Are we, as a nation,” prepared to adopt Secular Education in State schools? Well, perhaps not, although there is by no means the general devotion to religious instruction that is so comfortably assumed. The clergy do not want Secular Education, needless to say, nor do various other people; but if the present government, whose moral courage seems to be in inverse proportion to size, had the hardihood to accept Mr. Chamberlain's challenge and poll the country on secular *versus* religious instruction in elementary schools, the number in favor of the former policy would be an eye-opener to those people who can conceive no stronger argument than a big vote. Besides, the question of whether “we are prepared” for Secular Education is of value only to such as live by votes. It is of no value whatever to those who desire to play the part of educators of the public conscience. Their duty is to convince themselves, first, what is right, and afterwards to convince other people. To refrain from advocating Secular Education because the people are not prepared for it (when have they had a chance of expressing a clear opinion on the subject?) is like the old lady's advice—never go into the water until you know how to swim.

At this point Mr. Austin trots out the bogey of consequences. He advises us to ask Bishop Potter, of New York, the consequences of Secular Education in America. But America has not a system of Secular Education. It has that Nonconformist fetish, Bible reading; and in addition religion is quite as powerful, if not more so, as it is here. And quite obviously Christian instruction has not made life in the States better than elsewhere, although it may have succeeded in giving statues of Apollo a pair of trousers and decorating Venus with a petticoat. And who on earth would dream of asking a bishop in America what *he* thought of Secular Education? Have we not enough bishops at home to whom we

might put the same question, and be sure of the same reply? Next, Mr. Austin sends us to ask "the most serious men in France" what they think of Secular Education there. We are not told who these "serious men" are; probably they are more bishops and cardinals; but the best commentary on the statement is that the French people endorse at the polls the action of the Government, and they have no interest in perpetuating a system that demoralises the country.

Mr. Austin next advises us to turn to Germany and note the appalling number of suicides and illegitimate births in those parts of Germany where "the religious sentiments" are more or less extinct. Again the districts are not named, and one would like to know how Mr. Austin arrives at the conclusion that in these unnamed parts the "religious sentiments" are more or less extinct. I have not the figures by me at the moment of writing for the number of suicides and illegitimate births in various countries, but if Mr. Austin will look up the statistics for illegitimacy in this country the facts will doubtless surprise him. He would discover that Scotland, the most Protestant portion of the United Kingdom, has about twice as many illegitimate births per thousand as England and Wales; while Wales, certainly not that portion of the kingdom where the religious sentiments are weakest, has more than twice the number of illegitimate births per thousand that England has. The same proportion, or nearly the same, holds good of even the religious and comparatively non-religious districts of England itself. In self defence I must point out that illegitimacy is a phenomenon not to be explained on the grounds of a difference in the strength of religious feelings, but it is Mr. Austin's argument, and I am meeting him on his own ground.

Finally Mr. Austin discovers there is no need to go abroad—we have examples enough at home, and ingenuously declares that "Materialism is rampant in the land; the pursuit of wealth, luxury, and diversion raging among men," etc., etc. And so where are the benefits of the religious instruction the children of this country have been receiving? Mr. Austin specifically disclaims using "Materialism" in its scientific or philosophic sense, so one may ask whether the people of this country could be more "Materialistic" without religious instruction than they are with it? Can anybody point to any influence religion has had in checking the mad race for wealth either here or in America? It has been stated that in America all but five of the hundred richest men are members of the Protestant Churches, while out of the 200 men who possess fortunes of £1,000,000 ninety-five are members of the Evangelical Churches. And in England what other ideal of national greatness has the mass of the people but to be wealthy and warlike? How often is there any other ideal but this held up before them? To do the biggest trade, to fight the most successful battles, to be able to "whip creation," is what a Christian people have come to regard as the real and valuable tests of national greatness and prosperity.

Mr. Austin may set his mind at rest. Whatever influence Secular Education may have, it cannot well fail to elevate more than religious influences have failed. And Mr. Austin's own fears are evidences of the demoralising effect of religion. Without that he might have evidenced a little more helpful faith in human nature. And without that faith no permanent good ever has been or ever can be done. To take human nature at its best, to appeal to it at its highest, is to pave the way for ultimate success. But to treat it as something essentially vile, only to be kept within the bounds of decency by fear of a hereafter or the belief in the jealous watchfulness of a heavenly despot, is to make for failure and retrogression. Religion's failure is written in the existence of those evils that Mr. Austin laments; pity it is that they have not encouraged him to look more hopefully at other methods.

C. COHEN.

Authority in Morals.

PROFESSOR MARGOLIOUTH argues that religion is morally useful because it teaches that there exists an invisible Policeman who is both omnipotent and omnipresent. This invisible Policeman deals with that department of human life over which the State cannot exercise any control, and must, therefore, be regarded as "an auxiliary to the thief-catcher and the hangman." Thus God is not only an invisible Policeman, but also a spiritual Judge, who inflicts punishment on those culprits who manage to elude the justice of the State. Criminals are to be assured that, though their misdeeds may remain unpunished on earth, because they never come to light, there is One who sees all they do, and who, in the world to come, will mete out to them their due penalty. "Appearance in such cases," the Professor says, "suggests that there is impunity for wrong-doing when it can either escape notice or is of a sort which the law does not undertake to punish; the religious teacher can give the most positive assurance that there is nothing of the sort. The same terror, then, which deters men from crimes, of which the punishment is obvious and certain, is thus employed to deter them from those of which the punishment is not apparent."

It is not necessary, for my present purpose, that I should follow Professor Margoliouth into a discussion of the Divine forgiveness and future reinstatement of criminals actually punished by society. It will suffice merely to call attention to his contention in the following significant passage:—

"The actual course of reasoning, whereby the necessity for a rule has been arrived at, can often, from its nature, only be communicated to mature intelligences, and the need for its observance comes long before maturity is attained, not only in the individual, but often even in the community. The ascription of a series of orders to a superhuman authority provides an immediate and, for a time, satisfactory answer to any questions that may arise as to the reason for a prescription. The effectiveness of authority at certain stages of the progress of both individuals and communities need not be dwelt on; and, indeed, the possession of a sacred book containing authoritative rules for life and conduct has in several instances caused a religion to triumph over others that had no such provision. The assumption that the rule is authoritative, and the possibility of indicating, without hesitation, its source, are valuable aids for dealing with minds at the stage when simple expedients are required, and when certainty and simplicity are thought to be characteristic of truth. The metaphysical difficulties which attend on such expedients are in neither case appreciated before a certain degree of maturity renders the mind more capable of understanding the relation of morals to the requirements of human society."

Now, the above paragraph makes it perfectly clear that, in Professor Margoliouth's opinion, the union between religion and morality is adventitious, casual, artificial, and temporary, and not by any means essential, vital, and permanent. As soon as men are able to perceive and understand "the relation of morals to the requirements of society" the need for religion as a moral guide ceases. A superhuman authority is needed only for immature minds. The Professor frankly admits that "probably, with the progress of mankind, the function of religion as moralising and strengthening loses in importance." "With the advancing knowledge of Nature whole regions, wherein man once found his way by prayer and sacrifice, are flooded with the light of Science. Bounded, indeed, by abysses, the road whereon he walks becomes continually broader and smoother; the fantastic figures which in the darkness or haze of ignorance filled the air are found out in the light of knowledge to be smoke and vapor." Religion is morally of value, therefore, only in times of ignorance and immaturity.

But, in this attitude, Professor Margoliouth stands practically alone among the religious teachers of the day. To the overwhelming

majority of them religion and morality are not only vitally related, but positively identical. The Rev. Dr. Forrest, a distinguished Scottish divine, maintains in his new book, *The Authority of Christ*, that "the best moral qualities can never be evoked in the child if we eliminate the religious element from his instruction," and that to teach religion in the schools is synonymous with training and directing the ethical instincts. Ian Maclaren, in reviewing the volume, says that this reasoning "seems unanswerable." It seems to us, on the contrary, that Dr. Forrest's plea, that in ordinary circumstances the State should afford religious education in the schools, is based on a palpable fallacy. Dr. Forrest is perfectly right in asserting that if the child's "ethical instincts are not trained and directed the quickening of his intelligence will not be a gain at all"; but his other assertion—namely, that "the best moral qualities can never be evoked in the child if we eliminate the religious element from his instruction," is fundamentally false. Man is a member of society whether there is a God or not, and this membership carries with it certain obligations and privileges whether there be a supernatural world or not. The existence of society and of social duties is an incontrovertible fact; and to patiently explain this fact, with all that it involves, to the child, is to train and direct his "ethical instincts," and to qualify him for a life of exalted morality; and this task can be efficiently accomplished, if intelligently and seriously undertaken, without introducing the religious element at all. What Dr. Forrest has not yet learned is that *secular* education, properly understood, embraces the training and directing of the child's ethical nature as its most important department. The quickening of the intellect is only a branch of education. The emotions need to be trained and directed quite as much as the intelligence. The heart requires to be disciplined as well as the head, and the discipline of the one is fully as *secular* as that of the other. Morality has reference alone to secular relationships, and can be taught and developed on purely secular lines. It is exclusively an affair of here and now.

The theological teaching is that morality is Divine both in its origin and in its sanction; or, in other words, that if God were left out of it there would be no adequate incentive to cultivate it. The assumption is that if men cease to believe in God, to whom they are said to be responsible for their conduct in society, they will cease to love and serve one another. That this is a wholly groundless assumption will be self-evident as soon as we look the facts in the face. One glaring fact is that the belief in a superhuman ethical authority has never acted, on any large scale, as an adequate inspirer of high morality. According to Matthew Arnold, the religious sense was nowhere so highly developed as among the Jews. To them, the thought of Jehovah was constantly present. He promised them overflowing prosperity if they obeyed his commandments, and He threatened them with all sorts of dreadful calamities if they rebelled against him. But read the Old Testament and you will find that neither the love nor the fear of the Lord kept the people morally straight. They were perpetually lapsing into all sorts of irregularities. It has been precisely the same under the Christian dispensation. Neither the hope of heaven nor the fear of hell has filled and beautified Christendom with ideal morality. People profess absolute devotion to Christ, who loved them and gave himself up for them, and declare that his authority over them is supreme; but the Sermon on the Mount is openly trodden under foot. Burns compares "the fear o' hell" to "the hangman's whip to laud the wretch in order"; but, as a matter of plain fact, the fear of hell does not hold the wretch in order.

Another fact is that it is historically demonstrated that a high state of morality has more than once existed in the absence of all religious incentives. In ancient Greece, for example, morality was not treated as a department of religion. Sparta had

the same gods as the other Greek states: what made the Spartans great and strong was their love of Sparta and their loyalty to Lycurgus. It is generally admitted now that the Japanese are morally a great people, not one whit inferior, if not, in some respects, actually superior, to the highest European nation. But this Eastern race is not pre-eminently religious. The majority of the people are Buddhists, and Buddhism, in the Western sense, is not a religion at all, but an ethical system.

But what about authority in morals without religion? If there be no God, why should we observe the moral law? Cicero's *De Officiis* may not contain a very high standard of morals, but on the subject of patriotism Cicero was thoroughly sound. He taught that no good man would hesitate to sacrifice all he was and had in order to defend his country. Referring to this, John Stuart Mill says:—

"If, then, persons could be trained, as we see they were, not only to believe in theory that the good of their country was an object to which all others ought to yield, but to feel this practically as the grand duty of life, so also may they be made to feel the same absolute obligation towards the universal good. A morality grounded on large and wise views of the good of the whole, neither sacrificing the individual to the aggregate nor the aggregate to the individual, but giving to duty on the one hand and to freedom and spontaneity on the other their proper province, would derive its power in the superior natures from sympathy and benevolence and the passion for ideal excellence: in the inferior, from the same feelings cultivated up to the measure of their capacity, with the super-added force of shame. This exalted morality would not depend for its ascendancy on any hope of reward; but the reward which might be looked for, and the thought of which would be a consolation in suffering, and a support in moments of weakness, would not be a problematical future existence, but the approbation, in this, of those whom we respect, and ideally of all those, dead or living, whom we admire or venerate."

Those are true and noble words. We cannot conceive of anything grander and sublimer than a life lived for the benefit of the community, which yields the deepest and most thrilling joy to all concerned. This would be morality touched with emotion in the highest sense. Well, if children were trained from their earliest years to regard the good of humanity as the worthiest aim of life, that conviction would be to them as authoritative and binding as the command of a hypothetical deity has ever been, and the realisation of it in practice would bring the most exquisite and enduring delight.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Apocryphal Gospels.

TWO of the most amusing of the Apocryphal Gospels are the Gospel of the Birth of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the Gospel known as the Protevangelion. In the former, which only consists of eight chapters, we are supplied with some interesting details regarding the birth and childhood of that remarkable woman who became the heroine of the Christian version of the legend of the virgin birth. The Protevangelion, while covering in its earlier portion much the same ground with the Gospel of Mary, goes into greater detail in its sixteen chapters and carries the narrative well on into the infancy of Jesus. In the Gospel of Mary we are told that prior to the bringing forth of that phenomenal child, who was destined to be Queen of the Christian Heaven, her mother Anna was a barren woman. Most women are barren until they conceive. The peculiarity about Biblical women is that a supernatural visitation appeared to be necessary before their child-bearing functions could be brought into play. The case of Mary's mother was—according to the veracious chronicler—no exception. She had lived for twenty years with her husband but was without child until she received the visit of an angel. The reasons given for her being waited upon by a heavenly agent are instructive. It

is not a difficult task when perusing the Holy Scripture to place one's finger on passages which could not have been written by other than a priest, they are so obviously dictated by consideration for priestly interests. We come across similar passages in the Apocryphal Gospels; which Gospels, be it remembered, though subsequently rejected, were quoted by the early Fathers as of equal authority with the present Canon, and undoubtedly used with equal if not greater freedom by the early Christians. We are informed that the lives of Joachim and Anna were "plain and right in the sight of God, pious and faultless before men. For they divided all their substance into three parts: one of which they devoted to the Temple and officers of the Temple (Italics ours); another they distributed among strangers, and persons in poor circumstances; and the third they reserved for themselves and the uses of their own family. In this manner they lived for about twenty years chastely in the favor of God, without any children."

The passage we have italicised marks a considerable advance on the Old Testament injunction regarding the giving of tithes to the priests. Those who find favor with God give a *third* of their income to the hangers-on of the skirt of Deity. Doubtless this is not meant as a command but as a counsel of perfection; it sufficiently indicates, however, what was regarded as specially meritorious in the sight of God by the priestly concocters of the Book of Mary.

The angel that visited the holy Joachim and the devout Anna seems to have been a remarkably loquacious and communicative spirit. He obligingly explains why God "closes the womb of some women," and exhibits his acquaintance with Old Testament literature by citing the instances of Sarah and Rachel and the mothers of Samson and Samuel, who were all childless until late in life, and till God took the matter in hand himself. In spite of the angel's eloquence, Holy Joachim appears to have been rather sceptical on the subject. It is really remarkable how obdurate the Old Testament and Gospel characters were. They never would take God's word for anything. They lived in a constant atmosphere of the supernatural, yet were always demanding fresh proofs for everything. And the still more remarkable circumstance is that they always got those proofs. Or so they say. Is it not unfair we moderns should be expected to take so much on trust, and should be denounced as infidels and moral monsters if we humbly crave just a little crumb of proof of the existence of the supernatural? Proof seems to have been very lavishly supplied in the old days. But we are keeping Joachim and the angel waiting.

The angel then, as we say, evidently realising the futility of appeals to what he calls "reason" on the abstruse subject of female barrenness, promises to Joachim, in order to convince him, the concrete fact of the birth of a daughter. This promise is accompanied by the usual instructions as to what she shall be called, and how she shall be brought up. They do not lack attention to detail in heaven. These instructions—with variations—are repeated by the angel on his subsequent visit to holy Anna. (It never seems to suffice that the angel should visit the husband only.) We note the fact that, according to this Gospel, Joachim and Anna were informed by the angelic messenger that their daughter would be the future virgin-mother of the Savior of the world. Which makes the innocence and ignorance of Mary on the subject—as recorded in the Canonical Gospels—somewhat surprising. Though parents do allow their children to grow up in considerable ignorance regarding matters with which they should be acquainted.

In due course little Mary appeared. Prodigies began to be worked early in her career. At the age of three, on being taken to the Temple by her parents, she mounted the fifteen steps leading to the altar of burnt-offering without any assistance! A separate chapter of the Gospel of Mary is devoted to the narration of this stupendous "miracle." A Mozart playing and composing music at the age of three is

as nothing to this. At the tender age mentioned Joachim and Anna left little Mary in the keeping of the priests of the Temple, and any further connection between Mary and her parents was apparently broken off. She entirely drops out of their life and it seems hardly worth their while to have had a child at all. Mary was brought up in the Temple amongst the other virgins, who in general do not seem to have been old enough to have been anything else but virgins, and in the words of the Gospel "her father and mother forsook her, but the Lord took care of her." Which is a nasty slap at poor old Joachim and Anna, who were, after all, only obeying the behest of the Almighty.

Mary enjoyed every day the converse of angels; every day received visitors from God, and correspondingly advanced in all perfections; so that when at length she had attained the hoary and venerable age of fourteen, "the wicked could not lay anything to her charge worthy of reproof." Most miraculous and unparalleled purity and innocence at the advanced age of fourteen, an age when ordinary girls are already steeped to the lips in iniquity! Though it does not say much for the reputation of the priests that the gospel writer should make such a to do about Mary's continued virtue after spending eleven years under their tutelage.

At this mature age of fourteen the high-priest made the discovery—or at any rate made a public order—that Mary, along with some other of the Temple virgins, should go home and get married. Or as the Gospel naively phrases it, "endeavor to be married." All the other damsels who had preserved their virginity for such an unconscionable period yielded ready obedience to the high-priest's decree. Mary alone created a difficulty by refusing to go. This recalcitrance on the part of Mary necessitated that the high-priest should consult God about the matter; and quite a fuss was made. A girl of fourteen who was not eager to jump at the first chance of marriage was clearly a phenomenon in Palestine at that date, and "all the principal persons both of Jerusalem and the neighboring places" had to be called together to deliberate and advise regarding such a remarkable circumstance. How ultimately Mary was consigned to the arms of the elderly Joseph is familiar history—we mean, fiction.

It is worthy of note in passing that Mary is declared in the Protevangelion to have been under fifteen years of age when she conceived by the Holy Ghost. This somewhat detracts from the truthfulness of the various paintings of the Virgin and child which artists turned out by the score when the Catholic Church was the paymaster of art. Christian artists, even of the most Bohemian type, have had the decency to represent the inamorata of the third person of the Trinity as being of a more mature age than fourteen. Possibly the author of the Protevangelion had more regard for the truth than for seemliness.

When we come to the Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus, the miraculous portents naturally begin to increase in number. This Gospel helps to fill up the hiatus in the life of Jesus as given in the canonical Gospels, in so far as it supplies many incidents connected with the childhood of Christ. Some of these incidents are of such a nature that we cannot repeat them even in the pages of an "obscene" journal like the *Freethinker*. Which may be matter for astonishment to the Rev. Stanley Parker of Woolwich with his opinion of this paper. The early Christian Fathers and Church writers had strong stomachs and were faithful to Old Testament usage in their disinclination to call a spade an agricultural implement. However, some of the reported incidents in the infantile career of Jesus are funny without being outrageously vulgar or of questionable propriety. We are solemnly assured that Jesus when in his cradle told his mother who he was and what he had been sent for. This was miracle number one. Then the midwife, who attended at the interesting function of his birth, was miraculously "made whole." Though no indication is given of the good woman being afflicted with

any precise ailment except old age. For the reason given above we must omit one or two incidents at this stage.

When Joseph and Mary and the infant Jesus took that trip into Egypt for the good of their health they had some lively adventures. In the course of their travels they came to a great city where there was an idol with an attendant priest. The priest had a son three years old who was possessed "with a great multitude of devils." Which was beginning rather early. This unfortunate infant had the peculiar habit of walking about "naked with his clothes torn." Though how he managed that remarkable feat is not explained to us. But the visit of young Jesus caused the idol to fall down and the devils to leave the priest's son, who (at the age of three!) forthwith, "began to sing praises and give thanks to God," and furnished to his father a most lucid account of how he had been cured.

Indeed, the Gospel of the Infancy presents us with a perfect string of miraculous occurrences. It reads like the *Arabian Nights*. Mary looks upon a woman in whom Satan had taken up his abode and she at once becomes dispossessed. The infant Christ is kissed by a bride who had been made dumb by sorcerers, and the dumb immediately speaks. Probably the bridegroom would not be grateful eternally. Then Satan is driven out of another woman in whom he had made his dwelling-place. Satan seems to have been partial to women in those days, and when he was evicted from one coolly took up his residence in another. One wonders where he lives nowadays. Then a leprous girl is cured, and the leprous son of a prince. Further, a young man who had been bewitched and turned into a mule is miraculously cured by Christ being put on his back. Not only so, but the metamorphosed mule marries the ex-leprous girl. The Jews are a practical people and even in their romancing have a fine sense of the fitness of things.

Many other miracles are performed which considerations of space forbid us to recount. We are told that Joseph and Mary were handsomely rewarded by those in whose behalf the various miracles were wrought. On the whole Joseph must have found that the miracle-working lay paid much better than carpentry. The Christian Church subsequently also discovered the remunerative nature of miracles. They brought in much more money than honest work. In the case of the Holy Family, the miracle-working faculty must have been especially useful, as we are informed, somewhat ungenerously, that Joseph was unskilful at his trade. So much so that Jesus had miraculously to put right many of the jobs Joseph made a botch of. In fact, Jesus must have been a handy child to have about the place. Whenever Joseph made anything too long, or too short, too wide or too narrow, Jesus had but to stretch his hand towards it and presently "it became as Joseph would have it." In spite of Joseph's indifferent workmanship he secured an important contract. The King of Jerusalem sent for him one day and gave him orders for the construction of a new wooden throne. Joseph managed to make this job spin out to two years. He must have been on so much an hour. Even in the lengthy period of two years, however, Joseph failed to construct the throne to the exact specifications, and Jesus eventually had to stretch it out to the required size. One feels that Jesus might have done the whole thing from the start and not have had his old father toiling, and sweating, and addling his brains for two whole years to no purpose. But God's ways are not our ways. Many other amusing passages in the Apocryphal Gospels might be commented on, but perhaps enough has been said to show that much less entertaining books could be chosen with which to spend a pleasant Sunday afternoon.

G. SCOTT.

Life is girt all round with a zodiac of sciences, the contributions of men who have perished to add their point of light to our sky.—Emerson.

Acid Drops.

Mr. Bryce, defending the Education Bill in the debate on the second reading, said something which shows how Liberalism has strayed outside its province and traditions. Talking like a professor and a theologian, he said that "undenominational" Christianity—or, as he preferred to call it, "co-denominationalism"—was the Christianity of the first three centuries. Mr. Healy, who is as sharp as a needle, naturally called out "Are we to swallow that?" Mr. Bryce was talking the stock argument of Protestantism. Mr. Healy's challenge was that of a Roman Catholic. And the fact that theological controversy is perfectly in order in discussing the Education Bill shows with great clearness that it is constructed on radically wrong lines.

Mr. John Dillon, speaking as an Irish Nationalist, and one holding the ancient faith of his country, warned the House of Commons that "if Catholics were forced to a choice they would prefer a secular system to mere Bible teaching." Quite so. They would prefer no religious teaching to bad religious teaching. Which is perfectly intelligible. It is better to start teaching one who has never had any education than one who has learnt everything wrongly. This may sound strange to Nonconformists, but these gentlemen are stone deaf and blind in this Education debate. They are quite incapable of hearing or seeing any argument which is opposed to their own position—which is merely the concrete expression of their own interests.

It was this state of things that gave point to one of the many good things in Mr. Chamberlain's remarkable speech on the Education Bill; the only one, by the way, in the whole debate that showed any independence and originality. "What has struck me in this debate," Mr. Chamberlain said, "is its essential unreality. We are each arguing from our own side in opposite directions on parallel lines, and we never meet. Each side puts forward its own views. It argues that its own views are absolutely reasonable, that they are not unjust, that they do not interfere with anyone's conscience, and that they have no desire to interfere with anyone's conscience." This would be all right, he argued, if they were dealing with a secular subject, but it was useless where religious beliefs were involved. Saying that what you do is perfectly reasonable cannot make it so to a man whose conscience it outrages; and he has to follow his own conscience, not yours, when all is said and done. Mr. Chamberlain might have added that the Christians who burnt "heretics" always assured them that they were most unreasonable persons in obliging their executioners to put them to death.

Mr. Bryce argued that both Catholics and Churchmen ought to be satisfied with Board School religion, but he was only wasting his own time and the time of the House. "In these matters of conscience," as Mr. Chamberlain told him, "there is only one judge—not the man who makes the law, but the man who suffers."

Mr. Chamberlain put his rapier very neatly through the Nonconformist glorification of "public control." Public control of secular instruction was all right, but public control of religious instruction was what the Bill provided and what the Nonconformists upheld, although "the principle of the control by the State of religious instruction is entirely opposed to every principle which the Free Churches have ever laid down." This was driven home by an appeal to the printed principles of the Liberation Society. One of them is "to oppose any payment for religious purposes out of public funds compulsorily exacted from all classes of the community." How could gentlemen opposite, so many of whom belonged to the Liberation Society, support an Education Bill which embodied the very principle that the Society was organised to combat? It was a most pertinent question—and it was not answered.

Dealing with the Government's concession to Catholics, probably made for the sake of conciliating them and retaining their support, Mr. Chamberlain wanted to know why concession should be limited to that religious denomination. He agreed that parents should, as far as possible, decide what religious education should be given to their children. Mr. Asquith rather fatuously interjected "At the cost of the State?" This gave Mr. Chamberlain the very opportunity he wanted. "Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer," he replied, "wait a little? I say if anybody gets it at the cost of the State then it is the inalienable right of everybody." Is there any possible answer to that argument?

Mr. Chamberlain reminded the House that he had always been in favor of the secular solution. He had pressed it upon the House thirty years before, and he ventured to press it upon the House again. "I say," he continued, "that the most logical, the fairest, the most reasonable, and the most easily obtainable of all systems is that which separates the duty of the State from the duty respectively belonging to the parent and the sect." This was loudly cheered by the Radicals, who must have felt that they were at last in touch with the Joseph Chamberlain of olden times.

Those cheers, coming from the Government side of the House, gave Mr. Chamberlain another good opportunity. "One of the main objects of this Bill," he proceeded, "is to prevent the adoption of that system which members of the Government describe as a secular system, and which they call turning the Bible out of the schools, and bringing up the children in atheism and irreligion." "There is nothing substantial in that cry," he added disdainfully; and the Government and its supporters knew that he was speaking the truth.

The dear *Daily News* was fairly flabbergasted by the speech of that "extraordinary man." Referring to Mr. Chamberlain's declaration in favor of secular education, and also to his reminder that the Education Bill would have to pass through "another place," our contemporary burst forth as follows:—

"Can he persuade the House of Lords to eliminate Bible teaching from the schools and to accept full popular control and the abolition of religious tests? If so he will add one more element of marvel to an astonishing career. A large section of the Radical Party would accept Mr. Chamberlain's scheme, which, indeed, is Radical in origin and owes its origin to the old Central Nonconformist Committee. Let him convert to it the Church of England and the Tory Party, and the long educational warfare is at least within the prospect of an end."

We are glad to read this outburst, and hope it did not merely express the excited feelings of an unguarded moment. But we must point out that the idea of Secular Education did not owe its origin to any Central Nonconformist Committee. It was the idea of Owen, Bentham, Place, Grote, Mill, and the rest of that band of Froethinking, and even Atheist, reformers who did so much for the intellectual and moral progress of Great Britain. It was the idea of the thinkers and educationists who established the London University College, which was secular from the very beginning.

"The advocates of a secular system, Liberal and Labor members alike," the *Tribune* said, "speak very highly of Mr. Chamberlain's speech. One earnest Secularist on the Liberal side expressed the opinion that it was the most convincing and interesting speech of the session, and that he wished Mr. Chamberlain were in charge of the Bill." Who was the "earnest Secularist"? Was it Mr. J. M. Robertson?

Mr. Lloyd George's speech on the second reading of the Education Bill was a lawyer's speech. He had a brief and he spoke to it. You could not discover that the other side had any position at all. But he was twice badly tripped; the first time by Mr. Dillon, the second time by Lord Robert Cecil. Mr. Lloyd George laughed at the idea that parents should decide how their children should be religiously instructed. He asked how the Tory government had respected the parents' right in 1902. Mr. Dillon had tried to assert the parents' right, but "the champions of the parents went solid to the lobby and wiped out the parent." This party logic—it deserves no better name—was greeted with ministerial cheers. But a word from Mr. Dillon pricked the bubble. He remarked that "the whole of the Radical party voted for the parent then"—ironically adding that he did not mention it by way of reproach, but rather by way of compliment. Mr. Lloyd George could only escape under cover of more party rhetoric. As soon as he returned to the subject he began arguing that "simple Bible teaching" was not Nonconformist religion. Nonconformists had their different creeds. Did honorable gentlemen suppose that "the different sects of Nonconformists could lump their dogmas"? Whereupon Lord Robert Cecil blandly inquired: "Has the right honorable gentleman never heard of the Free Church Catechism?" This was a hit, a palpable hit. And the orator had to escape under cover of more party rhetoric.

Mr. Lloyd George's peroration was that of a Protestant preacher. Look at it:—

"The people have made up their minds to take their stand and to rally round the Bible. (Loud ministerial cheers.) The true parental demand is this, that no ecclesiastic or politician should be allowed to stand between the child and the light of

the Great Book, which saved England from darkness, and which will continue to illumine the gloom that oppresses human life after the last sect shall have vanished from the scene. (Loud ministerial cheers.)"

This is not the peroration of a political speech; it is the peroration of a sermon. And the very fact that such utterances can be heard in the House of Commons, and applauded there, shows how the will-o' the-wisp of religious education is leading Liberals a mad dance at a great distance from their old principles.

"Rally round the Bible." That is Mr. Lloyd George's cry. That is the Liberal policy. Very well, then. The Liberal party has become a religious party. It has definitely taken its stand on the Nonconformist platform. Toryism represents religion as established in the State Church. Liberalism represents religion as established in the State School. All right. We know where we are now. Some of us will have to carry on a fresh attack upon the Bible. And as the Liberal party is determined to use the nation's schools to teach the nation's children Bible religion, it may be the duty of some of us to carry the crusade against the Bible amongst the children too. This has not been done hitherto. It is pointedly invited now.

Mr. Asquith's speech on the second reading of the Education Bill was notable for an important admission. He confessed that there was really no such thing as "undenominational" religion. "I will start," he said, "by making an admission that even the very simplest form of religious teaching cannot accurately be called undogmatic. It is true that the most elementary proposition as to the relations of man to a higher Power and the unseen world involve a dogmatic element, and as a mere matter of logic you may urge without any extravagance of paradox that such propositions for instance as those which affirm the Fatherhood of God or the existence of a future state are as much dogmatic as the doctrine of the Eucharist or of the Immaculate Conception." This is perfectly true. And it follows, therefore, that the religious dogmas approved by the Nonconformists at present, such as the Fatherhood of God, the Deity of Christ, and the Inspiration of the Bible, are to be taught in the nation's schools at the nation's expense, while the further religious doctrines approved by Churchmen and Catholics, such as the Eucharist and the Immaculate Conception, are not to be taught in the nation's schools at the nation's expense. And if this is not the establishment of Nonconformist religion in the nation's school we should like to know what would be.

Mr. Birrell wound up the debate by distinctly declaring that England was a Protestant country, and that the Education Bill was intended to educate the children in "the Bible as a rule of faith and conduct." The cat is out of the bag at last. We are to have Protestant education in the schools—or rather Evangelical Protestantism. This is the standard to which the Liberal party has nailed its flag.

Mr. Tim Healy made great fun of the Education Bill. Speaking on the last night of the debate he called it a Nonconformist act of conformity. "Who was Cowper-Temple?" he asked, and the answer was, "One of the new British apostles." Mr. Birrell had praised the Hampshire syllabus of religious instruction concocted by all parties. "Happy Hampshire," said "Tim," with its "formula which had been agreed to by the Catholics, Protestants, Nonconformists, and Atheists of Hampshire." County Councils, he added, who were appointed to look after the drainage, would in future have the right to deal with the Doxology. And so on, and so on. And the House laughed heartily at "Tim's" witticisms. Most of the members knew that the Bill was only a farce at bottom.

The Labor Party in the House of Commons did not find courage enough to vote against the Education Bill on the second reading. Two members were absent through illness—Messrs. C. W. Bowerman and G. D. Kelly. All the other Labor members—with four exceptions—voted for the Bill. The four exceptions were Mr. T. Glover (St. Helens), Mr. J. T. Macpherson (Preston), Mr. J. O'Grady (Leeds), and Mr. J. Seddon (Lancs., Newton). We believe these four gentlemen voted against the Bill to please the numerous Roman Catholic voters in their constituencies. On the whole, therefore, the analysis is not very edifying. The stand made by the Labor members on the question of Trade Union funds contrasts with their attitude towards the Government when nothing but principles and the future of children are at stake. We quite understand, of course, that amendments may be moved in committee, but the main principle of the Bill—the establishment of Nonconformist religion in the nation's schools—is now sanctioned by an overwhelming majority, and nothing that the Labor members

can do in committee can seriously affect it. It was only on the second reading that any real stand against the Bill was possible; and the result is that if the Labor Party really meant to fight for Secular Education it has missed its opportunity.

The Liberals gave a pure party vote for the Education Bill on the second reading. They were more sheep-like even than the Conservatives. Three Conservative votes were recorded for the Bill, and 122 against; while the Liberal vote was 384 for and not a single one against. Mr. J. M. Robertson appears to have gone with the stream. Whether he will do anything better when the Bill is in committee remains to be seen. Our readers know that we have never expected much help from members of parliament in such matters. We are quite willing, however, to be agreeably disappointed.

The humbug of the abolition of religious tests for teachers in the Education Bill was demonstrated during question-time in the House of Commons:—

"Mr. Balfour asked the President of the Board of Education whether the words in Clause 7, section 2, of the Education Bill: 'A teacher employed in a public elementary school shall not be required as a condition of his employment to subscribe to any religious creed,' excluded, or were intended to exclude, inquiries as to the fitness of the teacher to give the religious instruction contemplated under the Bill; or whether they were merely intended to prevent such subscription to a dogmatic formula as used to be required in the case of University fellowships, but which, so far as he knew, had never been required in the case of elementary teachers.

Mr. Birrell—So far as intention is concerned, the answer must be in the negative. No restraint is intended to be placed on the local education authority in satisfying itself that its teachers who undertake to give religious instruction are not unqualified for doing so."

Teachers who do not openly object to giving the "simple Bible teaching" are to be subject to an inquisition as to their fitness to give it; and if this does not ferret out their conviction as to the inspiration of the Bible there's witchcraft in it. The abolition of religious tests will not apply to the Nonconformist schools.

Some time ago when some missionary boss ventured to assure the British public that the commercial morality of Heathen Japan was a good deal below par, the manager of the *Times* "Encyclopædia Britannica" department declared that of all the myriads of subscribers in all parts of the world the Japanese paid the most punctually. They excelled all the Christian nations in that respect. Now we see Professor Henry Dyer, in the *Financial Review of Reviews*, bearing similar testimony. "It cannot be denied," he says, "that the impression is very general among foreigners that commercial morality is low among the Japanese. History, however, flatly contradicts that verdict. So far as the Government, the municipalities, the banks and similar institutions are concerned, there is no question about a want of commercial morality in their transactions."

King Edward must have had his tongue in his cheek when he authorised the Archbishop of Canterbury to say that the Sunday (National Observance) Conference had his warmest sympathy. We all know how his Majesty enjoys Sunday when he has the chance, especially when he visits "infidel" France.

The Bishop of London, speaking at that Conference, said that Voltaire was right when he said that "to destroy this Christianity we must destroy the Sunday." Some time ago this same statement about Voltaire was made in the "Labor" column of the *Daily News*. One of our own readers wrote asking the editor of that column for his authority. The answer was characteristic. The gentleman couldn't point to the sentence in Voltaire's writings, which were very voluminous; but his father, who was a Christian minister, had heard another Christian minister ascribe the sentence to Voltaire, and surely that was good enough. Why, certainly.

The late Mr. Horatio Bright, of Lydgate Hall, Sheffield, who died in February, had what the *Daily Chronicle* calls "an eccentric funeral." He directed that his body should be taken to his private mausoleum on a dray, and be laid to rest there without any religious or other service. We presume, therefore, that he was a bit of a Freethinker. And we are not surprised that his will is "eccentric" in its abundant benevolence. He leaves over £100,000 out of £137,500 to various philanthropic purposes; including £50,000 to Buxton Bath Charity, £20,000 to the National Lifeboat Institution, £10,000 to Manchester Royal Infirmary, £10,000 to Leeds Infirmary, and £10,000 to Guy's Hospital, London.

"Why We Don't Go to Church: Reply of the 'Lapsed Masses' to the Ministers" is appearing in the *Weekly Scotsman*. Here are a few samples selected by the editor himself and placed right under the headline:—

"I don't go to church because I want to be a Christian."

"The ministry estrange the poor and drain the rich."

"The clergy are, as a class, notoriously insincere."

"Thoughtful young men are the greatest enemies the church has got."

"The clergy have come to regard their calling chiefly as a means of earning a livelihood."

The person who wrote the last sentence appears to be under the odd impression that the clergy used to be all philanthropists.

Old Dowie and Boss Voliva have made up their quarrel. It is not to be a fight to a finish. There is room for doubt which would win, and the estate is worth sharing. So they are going to rule Zion City together—and divide the spoil.

The Congregational Union, with only one dissident, has passed a resolution in favor of Old Age Pensions. Nearly a hundred and twenty years ago the policy of Old Age Pensions was first propounded by Thomas Paine. It has taken Congregationalists more than a century to overtake the "Infidel." Christians are generally that distance behind Freethinkers.

Children take a lot of religious drilling before they turn out good soldiers of Christ. According to Miss Sullivan, headmistress of St. Edmund's Infants' School, Miles Platting, who recently addressed the Manchester Branch of the Catholic Truth Society, one child, on being told that she would have a golden gallery to sit on in heaven, flatly refused to go there, as a gallery of any sort was not her idea of celestial felicity. Another child, interested in guardian angels, on being told that the angel was always with her, asked "Please, miss, is he under my pinafore?" "He is very near you, dear," was the response. "What a funny place for an angel," the little one rejoined. Another child got the religious lesson and other things mixed up, and, being asked, "What is a lady?" replied, "Please, miss, a mystery." On the whole it seems that religion is always more or less exotic to the juvenile mind.

In an East London seduction case it was given in evidence that the defendant, a man named Baker, was secretary of a mission church at Southernwood, that the girl first met him at a Sunday-school picnic, that misconduct took place one evening when the defendant took her home from church, and that the same thing happened after a prayer meeting three weeks later. A peculiar instance of the chastening and elevating influence of religion.

William Morgan, of Pontyberem, committed suicide by jumping over Drysbwyn Bridge, Carmarthen, into the river. He was suffering from religious mania. One of the fruits of the Welsh revival, we suppose.

"Paterfamilias" in the *Portsmouth Evening News* gives an extract from a letter written home by his daughter in Canada. "Everybody," she says, "attends divine service on Sunday. Should any, from no justifiable cause, refrain from so doing, they are looked on as persons whose society it is well to avoid. The result is churches and chapels are crammed on Sundays." The father of this pious female yearns for the time when Portsmouth will solve the problem of "Why do people not attend church?" in like manner. But we believe he will yearn in vain. The "come and be saved or stop away and be damned" style is out of date with a lot of people in this country. It may succeed still in the wilds of Canada, but wait till the population gets thicker.

Dr. Torrey explains the California earthquakes. One of our American exchanges reports him as saying:—

"The fearful earthquake and fire in the far western city is a visitation from God on account of its wickedness, and may prove a blessing in disguise. Owing to its wickedness San Francisco has been on the hearts of Mr. Alexander and myself these many months."

What a fool of a God this revivalist travels for! Instead of destroying the "wicked" parts of San Francisco he knocked down everything indiscriminately. His own buildings, the churches, shared the fate of theatres, music-halls, gambling hells and brothels. Nor is that all. Dr. Torrey's deity might have deferred the catastrophe until Dr. Torrey had raked in a lot of converts and shekels in San Francisco. That harvest is now postponed indefinitely.

The human being has the saurian and the plant in his rear.—Emerson.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

June 3, N. S. S. Conference, Birmingham.

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—May 20, m., Brixton; a., Brockwell Park; 27, a. and e., Victoria Park. June 3, Birmingham.
- J. G. FINLAY.—Thanks for the French clericalist postcard. It is, as you say, playing it rather low. Did you notice the perfectly feminine type of head given to Christ? The beard and the neck are masculine; but the nose, eyes, and brow—especially the last—belong to the other sex.
- D. RUSSELL writes:—"Many thanks for the six copies of the *Freethinker* which I received from you. I enjoyed them thoroughly, the reading being excellent and entirely suited to my way of thinking. I have made arrangements with my news-agent to get me the paper regularly." This should encourage our friends to keep sending us addresses of persons whom they believe to be likely to become regular readers of the *Freethinker* if it were only introduced to them. We undertake to post a free copy of the paper to any such address for six consecutive weeks.
- E. GWINNELL.—The tract you mention would be worth printing at the opportune moment. Mr. J. M. Robertson says he is ready to take up Bradlaugh's old Bill for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws if he can find an opportunity; for the privileges of private members are now very restricted. When this Bill is likely to be introduced the tract on the Blasphemy Laws will be very useful. We do not know the address you enquire for.
- H. T.—The Christian Evidence Society's report which you send us for criticism is nearly twelve months old. Send us something fresher. You mistake us for Rip Van Winkle.
- A. J. BROWNING.—Pleased to hear from you. Shall be glad to receive the paper you mention from Canada. Mr. Keir Hardie did not notice our article, and we do not hear of any explanation or apology. He appears to think he has a perfect right to libel his father and mother, who committed the offence of being Secularists without first obtaining his permission.
- H. GRAYTON (Birmingham) says that "Mr. Chamberlain's speech on Secular Education was splendid" and suggests that we should "do much good by printing some of the most telling extracts for the edification of the unconverted." The matter is referred to in this week's "Acid Drops."
- JAMES GORDON (48 Easter-road, Leith).—We print your address again as it may do you a benefit. Glad to hear that you found our book and pamphlet catalogue useful in obtaining fresh orders; also that "the cause" appears to be making headway in your locality.
- F. S.—Thanks; see "Acid Drops."
- W. VILE.—You say that Sir Oliver Lodge and Mr. Robert Blatchford don't get any nearer each other on the question of Determinism, and suggest that we should send in an article to the *Clarion* on the subject. What we intend to do is to write upon the subject in the *Freethinker*, with reference to Mr. Blatchford's book. This will be commenced shortly. We will consider your suggestion as to reprinting Mr. Ball's old article on the subject. What he writes is always very able and suggestive.
- R. J. HENDERSON.—Pleased to read your bright and encouraging letter, and to know that you are happy in having come across the *Freethinker*.
- LOCAL SAINT.—The "glorious free press" is a perfect farce.
- G. ROBERTS.—We don't know, and don't care. Ask the gentleman himself.
- FRIENDS who send us cuttings for use in concocting "Acid Drops" will please recollect that we can seldom use much that arrives so late as Tuesday morning, though something may be useful afterwards.
- E. J. WEAVER.—The Atheist does not say "There is no God." That would be dogmatic. He says he sees no evidence of God's existence. That is frank and modest.
- H. NICHOLSON.—If, as you suggest, Mr. Chamberlain borrowed from our *Freethinker* article in his speech at the Liberal Union Club, we see no reason for annoyance. We have been lending ideas to others all our life. Our complaint is that they are too slow in borrowing.
- W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.
- E. PINDER.—Shall be happy to meet you. Thanks for extract.
- F. R. THEAKSTONE.—Our views are stated in our pamphlet entitled *What is Agnosticism?* You can see for yourself how far your own views accord with them.
- O. A. JONES.—The suggestion you make has been in our mind and may be carried out shortly.
- F. G. A.—Will deal with it next week. Glad to learn you look forward so to the *Freethinker* every week.
- W. HASKELL.—Will see what can be done with it. We are trying to keep as well as possible.
- H. G. F.—Sorry we must defer dealing with it till next week. Best wishes meanwhile.
- T. H. STORK.—Thanks for cuttings.
- FENDLETON.—Much obliged.

E. G. JAMES.—Shall have attention in our next.

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

Sugar Plums.

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference will be held at Birmingham on Whit-Sunday. There are many reasons why it should be made a large and representative gathering; not the least important being the value of a demonstration by the surest friends of Secular Education. The business sittings of the Conference will be held, morning and afternoon, in the small theatre of the Midland Institute, Paradise-street. A public meeting will be held in the evening in the grand Town Hall, and addressed by Messrs. Foote, Cohen, Lloyd, Davies, and perhaps other speakers. For an hour before the chair is taken there will be an organ recital. No doubt there will be a great gathering, to see which will be in itself well worth a visit to Birmingham.

The Conference reception room will be at the Market Hotel in Station-street. Delegates and visitors arriving on Saturday afternoon or evening should go there, if they are missed by the stewards (wearing the old Bradlaugh colors) who will do their best to meet all trains, if duly notified beforehand. Station-street is close to the London and North Western and Midland railway stations, and about half a mile from the Great Western station.

Owing to the Co-operative Society's Conference being held at Birmingham at the same time as the National Secular Society's Conference there is a great demand for hotel accommodation. Delegates and visitors to the N. S. S. Conference will please remember this, and secure what accommodation they require by writing at once to Mr. J. Partridge, 183 Vauxhall-road. Early application should also be made for tickets (2s.) for the Whit-Sunday dinner at the Market Hotel, between the morning and afternoon sittings of the Conference.

On Whit-Monday there will be an excursion to the greatest place of pilgrimage on earth—Stratford-on-Avon, the birth-place of William Shakespeare. Tickets at 5s. 3d. each will cover train fare, a substantial meat dinner, and an hour's trip by steam launch on the river. Train fare alone is 2s. 3d. Special arrangements are being made for visiting spots of special interest, including the Memorial Theatre.

We have just received a letter from Mr. Joseph Symes, dated April 9, in which he says that he intends to leave Melbourne for London on May 19 or June 19, but will write again as soon as he can speak quite positively. His wife and daughter will accompany him if he comes. We need not say how delighted we shall be to grasp his hand again, and to do all we can to make his stay in England as pleasant as possible. Perhaps he will resolve to spend the rest of his days in the land of his birth.

There was a Cinderella Night at the Ardwick Empire Theatre last Sunday, with Mrs. Pankhurst in the chair, and some resolutions on the program anent the Education question, to be moved by Mr. F. W. Jowett, M.P. A member of the audience got in an amendment altering "free education" to "free secular education." This was carried unanimously—although the fact was not reported in the newspapers.

Under the general title of "Anti-Religious Cranks"—which is rather an ill-conditioned heading, seeing that the writer lectures other people on taste and manners—the Liverpool *Porcupine* gives a nearly two column descriptive report of Mr. Foote's lecture in the big Picton Hall on Sunday evening, May 6. The writer does not seek to minimise the importance of the meeting. He frankly admits that "the Picton Hall was packed with all sorts and conditions of men and women." He also admits that, although "the strength of the police in the neighborhood" was calculated to lead one to believe that "interruption—

possibly a row—was expected," nothing of the kind occurred, and "there was not, during the whole of the speech, a dissentient note sounded."

Mr. Foote's "platform manner is quiet, almost unobtrusive," the *Porcupine* writer said—as though there were some special reason why Freethought oratory should be different from other oratory, except as far as its substance is concerned. On the other hand, it was allowed that Mr. Foote could talk, as the Americans say:—

"Mr. Foote has all the powers of a public speaker which men who advocate such fads usually possess, and while his expressions were forcible, they were quite lucid, and his illustrations were apt in character. His description of the dinner prepared by Mr. Birrell for his Nonconformist friends was very rich. He said it was in payment for services rendered at the last election, and the Bill represented a very succulent joint. Dr. Clifford and his friends looked forward to an enjoyable repast. Of course there were a few who grumbled and said it was underdone, but the majority were well pleased. In the background were, however, some lean and hungry figures belonging to the different churches who would be deprived of their schools, and to them Mr. Birrell threw as a sop a few bones in the shape of a four-fifths clause and such-like concessions. The manner of the delivery of this part of the speech was unexceptionable, and was quite the tit-bit of the evening."

But it was complained that Mr. Foote "could not confine himself to the subject in hand—the Education Bill." Begging the *Porcupine* writer's pardon, but that was not the subject in hand; or rather that was the general subject in hand. The particular subject in hand was "Simple Bible Teaching: Mr. Birrell's Recipe for Children"—and surely Mr. Foote had a perfect right to criticise the recipe, and in doing so it was not to be expected that he would take quite the same view of the Bible as the *Porcupine* writer does. Mr. Foote certainly admits "the beauty of many of the passages of the Bible from a literary point of view," but he is astonished that Christians attach so much importance from that point of view to the twenty-third Psalm. And when the *Porcupine* writer ventures to remind Mr. Foote that denominational religious instruction is given in the day schools "in America and in Germany," we can only observe that he is seriously misinformed. On the whole, however, we believe that the writer did not intend to be unfair or offensive, and what he had to say was a great improvement on the silly old conspiracy of silence, varied by occasional rabid abuse.

The new North London Branch had a splendid outdoor meeting at Parliament Hill on Sunday afternoon, Mr. James Rowney being the lecturer. The meeting was so successful that it was suggested that another meeting should be held in the evening. This was done. Mr. Rowney delivered a second lecture, which was followed by many questions and much courteous discussion.

A number of the *Yarmouth Mercury* that has just reached us shows that our veteran friend, Mr. J. W. de Caux, is still an active controversialist on the Freethought side. There are two brief, pointed letters of his, and other writers are replying to him all over the correspondence department. An excellent letter in his support is contributed by Mr. A. H. Smith; and a lady (Mary Panchen) also writes admirably with regard to the use of the Bible in schools. Correspondence like this is sure to do good. It reaches people who could not be reached otherwise, and sets them thinking.

Mr. Joseph Collinson, one of the honorary secretaries of the Humanitarian League, and one of its most active and effective workers, is a good Freethinker. He is also too modest to like public demonstrations in his favor. A number of his fellow-workers in the Humanitarian League, therefore, put their heads and their purses together and presented him with a testimonial to mark the successful result of his long labors against flogging in the navy. It took the form of a handsome library bureau, with a purse of gold; the latter being an excellent idea—for a library bureau wants something of a library about it.

Truth leaks out now and then even in pious papers. Reviewing a new book by Mr. J. Morris, called *Makers of Japan*, the daily organ of the Nonconformist Conscience, after referring to some of the great men who have made Japan what she is to-day, continues in this fashion:—

"Many other great men are here passed in review. There are the makers of the navy, the reformers of education, and the inventors of the financial system. Everywhere we see high ability joined to uprightness of character, both heightened by an astonishing devotion to the country they served. Of religion and religious reformers there is no mention. Patriotism and Bushido, the military code of honor, take the place."

Modern Japan owes nothing to "religion and religious reformers." Good!

From Fiction to Fact;

OR,

HOW I CEASED TO BE A CATHOLIC.—III.

BY FRED. BONTE
(Late a Prison Minister.)

(Continued from p. 300.)

It was my duty to hear periodically the confessions of the school children and as I sat listening patiently to their peccadilloes, I asked myself what good I was doing: was the moral condition of the Catholic children better than that of the others? When the Reformation broke out Catholics fondly expected that the abolition of confession must destroy morality; but that expectation has not been fulfilled. The Protestant nations, without crawling before priests, have maintained a proud record for manly virtue, for mercy, justice, and truth.

At college I had often heard King David spoken of as "the holy King David," and I was not a little shocked to find him pictured in the Bible as one of the most revolting and cruel characters in all history. Equally startling to the awakened reader is the low, the barbarous standard of morality conspicuous throughout the Old Testament, together with the fabulous character of most of its narratives: the Deluge, the Tower of Babel, the destruction of the cities of the plain, the history of Samson, the thousand wives of Solomon, the absurd details of the building of the temple, the five hundred thousand men of Israel that fell in one battle against Judah, the million men of the army of Zarah, the angel carrying Habacuc by the hair of his head from Judea to Babylon. These cock-and-bull stories go on to the very last books, where we read of war-elephants bearing each strong towers and engines and thirty three men, each beast defended by a thousand men in coats of mail and five hundred horsemen, and yet Eleazar is able to approach one of these beasts and kill it. These are Baron Munchausen adventures.

False presentations of the Bible were also a frequent cause of offence. The headings of the chapters in many books are misleading, or mendacious, being made to refer to Christ, his kingdom, his passion, his church, where no such reference can be justified. This is especially the case in the Catholic Bible, which is moreover disgraced by much misleading translation. A glaring instance is that of the curse on the serpent: I will put enmities between thee and the woman and thy seed and her seed: *She shall crush thy head.* The correct version is: *It shall crush thy head;* the seed of the woman, man, shall conquer the serpent, evil. Rome has made great capital out of this mistranslation. In all books, pictures, statues, sermons, Mary is constantly represented as crushing the head of the serpent. In the book of Revelation, which reveals nothing, there is a text which is similarly misused: "A great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars." As the following verses show, this text cannot possibly refer to Mary, yet Catholic writers, preachers and artists ostentatiously apply it to her. Who has not seen statues and paintings representing Mary on the crescent of the moon, one foot on the head of the serpent, twelve stars round her head, and bathed in the effulgence of the sun? All this gorgeous imagery is based on a false translation and equally false interpretations. The Church of Rome celebrates many feasts of the Virgin Mary and on all of them there is usually a sermon or a panegyric preached on her, in which her crushing of the serpent's head and her crown of twelve stars fill a large part of the glowing oratory. Such practices give us a glimpse of what religions are based on, and how much regard their preachers pay to truth. By the way, the prophecy is unfulfilled, the serpent's head is not crushed. A close inspection of the Catholic Bible will reveal that the translators usually aimed at correcting the

original, or harmonising it with itself or with the teaching of the Church. "God is a man of war" is corrected into "God is AS a man of war." The words of St. Paul, "For that all sinned," do not express the idea of the transmission of Adam's sin; the Catholic version therefore paraphrases them into complete harmony with the Council of Trent by saying: "In whom all have sinned"! In Matthew it relates that Judas hanged himself, while Acts states that he died by accident. The Douai version, true to its character, corrects the text of Acts and removes the contradiction by changing the words *falling headlong* into *being hanged*. This dishonest system of translation pervades the entire work. Eusebius himself was less dishonest; he only concealed in his writings whatever seemed unfavorable to the interest of the Church; he did not distort facts.

Alzog's *Church History* was one of the manuals used at college, and many a time were my ideals of Christianity shocked by the display in its pages of the dissensions and immorality of the clergy. When Hildebrand enforced celibacy the relaxation had become all but universal. In the fourteenth century there broke out the great Schism of the West, which divided the Church for half a century. During thirty-eight years Christian Europe was scandalised by the spectacle of two Popes, one at Rome and the other at Avignon, hurling the most awful anathemas at each other, "like two dogs snarling over a bone," in Wyclif's phrase. This disastrous schism was due to the residence of the Popes in France; a sad period in the history of the Church, sometimes called the seventy years' captivity—the baneful effects of which were never effaced. The relaxation of morals at the papal court and among the clergy continued to spread till the great upheaval of the Reformation shook the Church of Rome to its foundations and rent half of Europe from its ancient allegiance.

In reading these vicissitudes of church history, doubts used to rise before me whether an organisation, torn by repeated dissensions, heresies and schisms, and disgraced by scandalous dissoluteness of morals, could be a divine institution. Had God really founded a church, he would have stood by it, guarding it from disruptions and moral decay. The history and character of the church gave the lie to the claims of its divine origin. The evidences are before us at this day.

On October 20, 1893, appeared the following sentence in a leading article of the *Catholic Times*: "It is our confident belief that the Catholics lost to the Church every year through this vice [drunkenness] outnumber the converts made in the course of any five years, and to it are attributable nine-tenths of our poverty and well-nigh all our crime." Again I was led to ask, How is this lamentable condition to be reconciled with the lofty claims of Catholicism, which pretends to hold a monopoly of grace and truth? Do not the facts give the lie to the pretensions? It claims to be the only true Church of Christ, yet it has, from the beginning, utterly failed to moralise the nations or to bring about the brotherhood of man.

In my early college days I had observed that a flood of prayers addressed to a statue of the Blessed Virgin had failed to restore a beloved Bishop to health. Similar cases abound. Ever since the Pope was dispossessed of his temporal power he has directed the Catholics everywhere to pray assiduously for its recovery; no full indulgence could be gained without long prayers for the Pope; yet these countless prayers from every part of the world seem to make their object only more visionary. The burning cry of the French Catholics, "Sauvez Rome et la France," uttered in such fervent accents at Lourdes and throughout France in prayer and song, produces no result. France persists in voting for the Republic and forsakes the Pope, whose anathemas hurt no one. It has often been contended that they who eat of the Pope die of it, but history does not bear out the saying. Mahomet, Luther, Henry VIII., Queen Elizabeth, Voltaire, Garibaldi, have all waged dire war against the Pope, and, instead of dying of it,

they greatly prospered and ended their lives in peace. The Pope claims to be the Vicar of God; a vicar has full power in the absence of his principal; but the evidence of the Pope's power is absolutely invisible. The shafts of his fulminations have no point. Legend tells that a Pope of old arrested the march of Attila on Rome, but the feat was not repeated when the troops of Victor Emmanuel came before Porta Pia; nor have the thunders of the Vatican prevented the statue of Bruno from glorifying the spot where he was burnt at the stake. When the Spanish Armada came to reduce England to the obedience of Rome, and break the back of Protestantism, the entire Catholic world assisted the expedition with fervent and ceaseless prayer, while the devout sailors were fighting for the faith; but the invincible fleet speedily collapsed in hopeless disaster. Half a century ago we had Father Spencer spending his life inducing the world to pray for the conversion of England. Much of the praying has been going on ever since in England, in France, and other countries, but the desired object is no nearer attainment. England is Mary's dowry, and Mary is reported in the Breviary to have destroyed all heresies throughout the whole world, but England shows no sign of repentance.

While under these impressions I happened to meet in a railway carriage in Belgium, during my holidays, an old schoolmate, a Dean in Flanders. The conversation naturally turned on the state of religion in England, and as I insinuated that the historic value of the Bible was a common subject of dispute he showed surprise and alarm. Then I urged that it was hard to view as actual history such a story as the voyage of Elijah in a fiery chariot to the clouds; was he still driving his fiery steeds there and did the ravens bring him bread? The Dean was shocked at my profanity, and when he had stated that God could provide for the prophet we had reached his station and parted. But this was not the end of the matter. The Dean was an intimate friend of Canon V., and wrote to him an account of our meeting, expressing to him his anxious concern about the appalling calamity that threatened me—the loss of my faith. Canon V. communicated the contents of the letter to me, and I sent him in reply a long exposition of my views on the Bible and religion. This statement he naturally forwarded to the Bishop, who took so serious a view of it that he ordered several copies to be taken and forwarded to so many officials, who were each to draw up a report. When these reports were all in his hands, he called me before him to deliver sentence. It appears from the various extracts read to me that there was little in my declaration that was positively at variance with faith. These reports abounded in "if's," "if he means this, if he means that," and the conclusion was a withdrawal on my part of any statements that savored of unorthodoxy and a promise to be more faithful to the doctrine and spirit of the Church in future.

It was not long after this that Professor Mivart commenced a series of articles on the relation of the Catholic Church to the Bible, and in particular about post-mortem retribution. His opinions were widely reported in the papers, causing some sensation and much discussion. It was freely admitted that unbaptized children in limbo, enjoy a perfect natural happiness after death; and Professor Mivart contended that even in hell there was comparative happiness, as existence there was stated to be preferable to extinction. A correspondence on this point was started in the *Catholic Times*, and I joined in it, urging that, as children stained with original sin, which is mortal, could be happy after death, why could not adults, stained with mortal sin, be happy likewise? If one kind of mortal sin did not exclude from felicity why should another? And I urged as a corollary that if hell is eternal, purgatory must be eternal too. Souls in venial sin go to purgatory, but as there is no repentance or remission of the guilt of sin after death, the venial sin must remain for ever. If it is contended that venial sins are remitted by a

burst of perfect love when the soul in venial sin first appears before its judge, I ask: what particle of proof is there of such a statement? And if it were true, could not this burst of love wipe off the mortal sin as well as the venial? There is no essential difference between venial and mortal sin; they are alike offences against God. The contention was unanswerable but was wholly at variance with the current Catholic twaddle on the subject and it sealed my ecclesiastical death-warrant. I had committed an unpardonable offence. I had outraged current conventions in daring to speak the truth. This happened in February, 1898. The prison had been closed some months, but I still held a minor office under the bishop; from this post I was now rather rudely dismissed and an avalanche of abusive letters from Catholics was the echo of my condemnation.

This was a sudden blow which I had not anticipated and it disconcerted me somewhat, but I bore it philosophically. My faith had still some degree of stability and I continued for a time to practise my religious observances. I might after a while have regained my previous footing, as the altar remained accessible to me and I was not debarred from any priestly functions. But the idea of retracing my steps was uncongenial to me. All my thoughts and inclinations tended in the opposite direction, and as I read and pondered, the conviction grew every day stronger that the Catholic system is indefensible, that it is built upon the sand of untrustworthy tradition, and like all human institutions is doomed either to a fundamental transformation in harmony with science, or to inevitable decay. Its appeal to the scripture is out of date, the scripture itself being hopelessly discredited in the eyes of educated readers. Science, which has been despised and oppressed, as the history of Friar Bacon witnesses, is now in the ascendant. Geology and Astronomy prove to demonstration that the cosmology of Genesis is a childish fiction. The nebular evolution of the Solar system is no longer called in question. The sun has cast off the planets, as these have in turn cast off moons. The earth, at first a whirling cloud of fiery gas, has condensed in its age-long revolution round its parent, the volcanoes and stratified rocks bearing witness to its origin and evolution, while the countless fossils in the geological strata testify to its prodigious antiquity.

When we turn from these incontestable data of science to the first chapters of Genesis, we find ourselves suddenly in the presence of a fairy-tale. Six thousand years ago Elohim (the gods) created the universe in six days, beginning with the earth and its canopy as a preface. The first day they created the light; but, strange to say, they put off till the fourth day the making of the sun, which is the source of light. How, under those circumstances, the mornings and evenings of the three first days were produced remains among the unsolved mysteries. To slur over the difficulty, the priests, who never change their doctrine, have quietly turned the days into periods, despite their being limited by morning and evening; and now even the school-children have it all pat: God created the world in six days or periods! Unfortunately, these periods, which had never been heard of till geology revealed them, have not removed the contradiction. If the days were periods, then there were three vast periods of time without the sun, who gives light, heat, and life. Again, when we think of the mass of animal fossils imbedded hundreds of yards deep in the marvellous coalseams or stratified rocks, and of the flint instruments of palæolithic man found side by side with the bones of extinct animals in caves of the ice-age, and when we compare these facts with St. Paul's solemn assertion that only six thousand years ago did death come into the world, we are forcibly struck with the irreconcilable antagonism between the facts of science and the fictions of the Bible. It is impossible to bridge the gulf between them.

Once, in conversation with a priest, I mentioned these signs of the extreme antiquity of life and death on earth, and received for reply: "Why should not God have created the geological strata with the fossils in them?" To such contemptible straits are apologists driven when they refuse to see the truth. Such was not the great geologist, Lyell: the glaring contrast between Revelation and Science affected him so deeply that he renounced all belief in the Bible, and abandoned the Anglican Communion.

For fifteen hundred years had a false cosmogony been taught by the Church. The earth was held to be the centre of the universe, above it was a firmament or firm dome bearing the sun, moon, and stars; beyond was the heavenly court; beneath was hell with the volcanoes as its gates, whence issued evil spirits to seduce mankind, while angels descended from above on errands of beneficence. What must have been the shock to men, brought up in this belief, to learn that the sun did not travel round the earth, that the earth was not flat but a globe, revolving on its axis in a yearly voyage round the sun; that the earth was but a speck in the universe, the sun being a million times larger, and ninety million miles distant. A score of times had popes and councils condemned the belief in the earth's rotundity and motion, and in the existence of antipodes. And when Galileo published his *Dialogo*, setting forth the new doctrines, these were first condemned by a commission of theologians and then by the Cardinals of the Holy Office, presided over by the Pope. They were declared to be absurd, false, heretical, and subversive of Holy Scripture. Under threat of torture the feeble old astronomer renounced his doctrines and escaped with the sentence that his *Dialogo* should be prohibited, that himself should be formally imprisoned during the pleasure of the Holy Office, and recite once a week, for three years, the seven penitential psalms.

This ignominious condemnation of a distinguished scientist is an indelible stain on the escutcheon of the Catholic Church, and will ever stand out as a denial of her claim to be regarded as a teacher of truth. Yet this is only an incident in the long struggle between advancing science and stationary traditions; for, as Mr. Foote eloquently says, "The priceless freedom of thought has always been hated by Christianity. No religion has ever equalled it in steady, relentless oppression. In every age and in every nation it has called unbelief a crime. It has punished honest thinkers with imprisonment, torture, and death, and threatened them with everlasting hell when beyond the reach of its malice. It has blessed ignorant faith, and damned earnest inquiry. It has prejudiced the child, and terrorised the man. It has protected its dogmas with penal laws after usurping authority in the schools. It has excluded Freethinkers from universities, parliament, and public offices when it could not murder them, and even in the most civilised countries it still clings to enactments against blasphemy and heresy. It has fought science, trampled upon Freethought, and opposed every step of progress in the name of God." With equal appositeness has Huxley characterised the situation. "The cosmogony of the semi-barbarous Hebrew," he says, "is the incubus of the philosopher and the opprobrium of the orthodox." Is it any wonder that a man like Dr. Mivart, the only Catholic scientist in England, found science and his creed in such antagonism that he felt it impossible to remain in communion with his Church, just as the geologist, Lyell, unable to reconcile geology with the Bible, felt bound to renounce Anglicanism?

(To be continued.)

Where Cicero and Antoninus lived
A cowed and hypocritical monk
Prays, curses, and deceives.

—Shelley

National Secular Society.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

LECTURE THEATRE, MIDLAND INSTITUTE, PARADISE STREET,
Birmingham.

WHIT-SUNDAY, JUNE 3, 1906.

AGENDA.

1. Minutes of last Conference.
2. Executive's Annual Report. By PRESIDENT.
3. Reception of Report.
4. Financial Report.
5. Election of President.
Motion by Finsbury, West Ham, and Birmingham Branches:
"That Mr. G. W. Foote be re-elected President."
6. Election of Vice-Presidents.
(a) The following are nominated by the Executive for re-election: J. G. Bartram, J. Barry, Victor Charbonnel, H. Cowell, R. Chapman, C. Cohen, W. W. Collins, F. A. Davies, J. F. Dewar, R. G. Fathers, Léon Furnémont, T. Gorniot, John Grange, W. Leat, W. C. Middleton, J. Neate, R. T. Nichols, J. Partridge, S. M. Peacock, C. Pegg, C. G. Quinton, J. H. Ridgway, Thomas Robertson, Victor Roger, F. Schaller, W. H. Spivey, Charles Steptoe, Joseph Symes, S. Samuels, S. R. Thompson, W. B. Thompson, T. J. Thurlow, John H. Turnbull, E. M. Vance, Frederick Wood, W. H. Wood.
(b) Motion by Executive:—
"That Mrs. E. Pegg (Manchester), Mr. Richard Johnson (Manchester), Mr. G. B. H. McCluskey (Plymouth), and Mr. G. White (South Shields) be elected vice-presidents."
(c) Motion by Kingsland Branch:—
"That Mr. William Davey be elected a vice-president."
7. Election of Auditors.
8. Motion by West Ham Branch:—
"That a Treasurer be appointed to the National Secular Society."
9. Motion by Executive:—
"That this Conference protests against the establishment of 'Simple Bible Teaching' as the State religion in elementary schools, to be given daily by the ordinary staff at the public cost, and calls upon the Liberal party to revert to its old principle of the neutrality of the State in matters of religion—a principle which is violated by appropriating the money of all citizens to pay for inculcating the religious ideas of a section of the people; and this Conference further declares its opinion that, apart altogether from justice and equal citizenship, it is impossible to bring the educational strife to a peaceful conclusion except by the policy of Secular Education."
10. Motion by Birmingham Branch:—
"That this Conference requests the Executive to take steps to arrange demonstrations in support of Secular Education in the principal towns of England and Wales."
11. Motion by Executive:—
"That this Conference calls upon all non-Christians to take advantage of the new Conscience Clause in the Education Bill by withdrawing their children from school until the religious instruction is over and the legal attendance sheets are marked for the secular instruction."
12. Motion by Executive:—
"That steps should be taken by N. S. S. Branches, and by progressive societies generally, to guard against the sinister alliance of the otherwise inter-militant Christian Churches for the purpose of restricting Sunday freedom and suppressing counter-attractions to the various forms of religious worship."
13. Motion by Kingsland Branch:—
"That this Conference strongly protests against the exclusion of the *Freethinker* and other Freethought publications from the tables of rate-supported public libraries."
14. Motion by Executive:—
"That this Conference hails with satisfaction the friendly understanding which now exists between Great Britain and France, and hopes the same friendly understanding will be extended to other countries; and further trusts that the present Parliament will take

practical steps to promote and consolidate the principle of international arbitration, in the interest of the peace of the world and the progress of mankind."

15. Motion by Mr. Thurlow:—

"That this Conference earnestly hopes that the Government, in the exercise of its power of veto in the case of all new legislative enactments by self-governing British dependencies or crown colonies, or in the granting of self-government thereto, will see that the aborigines are justly and humanely treated, and that such treatment is secured to them by statute law."

16. Motion by Mountain Ash Branch:—

"That in view of the reaction against religion caused by the Welsh revival it would be advisable to carry on a strong Freethought propaganda in South Wales, under the management of the N. S. S. Central Executive."

17. Motion by West Stanley Branch:—

"That the National Secular Society should adopt some emblem whereby the members could recognise each other."

18. Motion by the Executive:—

"That the N. S. S. be represented in what manner is possible at the approaching International Freethought Congress in South America."

The Conference will sit in the Lecture Theatre of the Midland Institute; the morning session lasting from 10.30 to 12.30, and the afternoon session from 2.30 to 4.30. Both are business meetings for members of the N. S. S. Only members of the N. S. S. can speak and vote. A public meeting will be held in the evening at 7 o'clock in the Town Hall. The President of the N. S. S. will occupy the chair on each occasion. A luncheon for delegates and visitors will be provided at the Market Hotel, Station-street, at 1 o'clock.

By order of the Executive,

G. W. FOOTE, *President.*

E. M. VANCE, *Secretary.*

The Alco-holy Communion

OR, DOWN AMONG THE DAMNED MEN.

TUNE: "Down Among the Dead Men."

HERR's a health to th' Jew called "Th' Prince of
To friendship an end, to strife increase; [Peace,"
In alcohol, as Jesus saith,
Let's drink it to his two-day's death;
And he that will this health deny,

Down among the damned men,
Down among the damned men,
Down, down, down, down,

Down among the damned men let him lie!

Let cleric booty's health go round
In which terrestrial joys are found;
And may damnation still pursue
The scientific thinking crew;

And he that will this health deny, etc.

The godless foes of alcohol
Imperil man's immortal soul,
Since Christ commands us all, in wine,
To drink to him for Auld Lang Syno;

And he that will this health deny, etc.

A cup of wine we'll quaff to Christ
Whene'er we keep a Christian tryst;
A cup of grape's fermented juice,
Prescribed by Christ for Christians' use;

And he that will this health deny, etc.

While Alcohol and Faith maintain
Their stimulo-narcotic reign
We'll drink and worship at the board
Of Christ our alco-holy Lord;

And he that will this health deny,
Down among the damned men,
Down among the damned men,
Down, down, down, down,

Down among the damned men let him lie!

G. L. MACKENZIE.

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, W. J. Ramsey, "How I Fell Among Thieves: an Episode of The Bradlaugh Struggle."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 3.15, J. Rowney; 6, J. Rowney.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Rushcroft-road, Brixton, 11.30, C. Cohen; Brockwell Park, 3.15, C. Cohen.

HYDE PARK BRANCH N. S. S. (Marble Arch): 11.30, H. B. Samuels, "Secular Education."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill, Hampstead): 3.30, H. S. Wishart, "Christianity and Atheism."

WOOLWICH BRANCH N. S. S. (Beresford-square): 11.30, W. J. Ramsey, "God so loved the world."

COUNTRY.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Milton Hall, Daulby-street): 7, W. C. Schweizer, "Was Jesus a Social Reformer?"

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints): 6.30, John Rhind, "Socialism and the Population Question."

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

WEST STANLEY BRANCH N. S. S. (2 William-street, South Moor): 3.30, H. Johnston, "Atheism."

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