

THE Freethinker

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As of love, so of all the other passions, the right government and exaltation begins in that of the Imagination, which is lord over them. For to SUBDUCE the passions, which is thought so often to be the sum of duty respecting them, is possible enough to a proud dulness; but to EXCITE them rightly, and make them strong for good, is the work of the unselfish imagination. It is constantly said that human nature is heartless. Do not believe it. Human nature is kind and generous; but it is narrow and blind; and can only with difficulty conceive anything but what it immediately sees and feels. People would instantly care for others as well as themselves if only they could IMAGINE others as well as themselves.—RUSKIN.

The Victory of "Birrelligion."

WE have held all along that the Labor Party, and the rest of the friends of Secular Education in the House of Commons, missed their opportunity when they decided not to challenge a division on the second reading of the Education Bill. By waiting until the Bill got into committee they gave their opposition a character of faint-heartedness, and we all know how fatal that is in warfare. We admit that there was *something* to be said for the course pursued. All the reasons of the weaker sort of prudence were in its favor. There was less *risk* in waiting for the committee stage; for a vote at that point of the Bill's fortunes could be represented as not unfriendly, if Nonconformist constituents should make a bother. And perhaps this kind of calculation is necessary in the regulation game of politics. But was any great cause ever really promoted, much less carried, by such timid tactics? Great leaders of men have always known how to wait, and wait, and wait; but they have always known how to strike hard when the psychological moment of attack arrived. But waiting, and waiting, and waiting, and then striking tentatively at the wrong moment, never won a battle yet.

The main engagement, as far as there is real fighting over this Bill inside the House, took place on Monday evening. The voting was on Mr. Chamberlain's amendment and on strictly party lines; which is a fact that throws a flood of light on the actual value of parliamentary discussion. Mr. Maddison's amendment in favor of Secular Education pure and simple found 63 supporters, and 477 opponents. This is regarded as decisive by the Ministerial organs. They affect to treat the whole question as permanently settled. They point out that the vote on Secular Education in 1870 was 421 to 60; which shows the *Tribune* says, that the secular solution has made no progress in thirty-six years. But partisan papers will say anything, and this is sheer foolishness. Those who voted for Secular Education in 1870 were mostly orthodox Nonconformists, and they voted as Nonconformists who were true to the old tradition of

State neutrality in matters of religion. It was not pretended that Secular Education, as such, had a large, reasoned, and convinced support in the country. But those who voted for Secular Education on Monday night did *not* vote as Nonconformists, and they were able to claim a vast body of sympathisers out of doors. Mr. Keir Hardie went to the length of saying—and we have said the same thing in the *Freethinker*—that a referendum might easily give a national majority in favor of Secular Education. At any rate, the Trade Union vote, representing more than a million of organised workers, is overwhelmingly in favor of it; and nothing like this could be pointed to in 1870. It is not true, therefore, that progress has not been made; and we dare say the *Tribune* knows it just as well as we do.

Monday's division certainly disposes of Secular Education for the present, but it is not given to the Ministerial organs to determine how long "the present" will be. Political life is fruitful in surprises. Sometimes a thing never looks further off than when it is swiftly approaching. Great reforms have a way of coming in a rush. The intellectual and moral preparation has been slow and gradual, but the final practical movement has come with startling rapidity. This was particularly true of the great French Revolution. It seemed impossible when Voltaire died in 1778. Eleven years later it had begun, and it swept along with the velocity of a whirlwind. Catholic Emancipation came with a rush, the Abolition of the Corn Laws came with a rush, the Disestablishment of the Irish Church came with a rush, Gladstone's conversion to Irish Nationalism and the first Home Rule Bill came with a rush, Bradlaugh's measure for making affirmation optional instead of the oath went through with a rush, and the vote expunging from the House of Commons records the unconstitutional resolution which kept him from his seat was a surprise to everybody. Let not the Ministerialists, then, make too much of Monday's division. Let them remember that many things may happen in the next twelve months. Let them recollect that the Ministerial majority in the House of Commons is not backed up by a similar majority in the constituencies. Let them reflect that the Nonconformist triumph may be very short-lived. Reaction has set in against it already. And if the Catholic and Church of England parties only adopt the policy of Passive Resistance, and give all the trouble they can, statesmen may be driven into accepting Secular Education as the only system that is compatible with the public peace.

For the moment, however, we see the triumph of "Birrelligion." The Nonconformist party has found a Nonconformist lawyer to carry through a Nonconformist policy. This is the whole meaning of the Education Bill—which does not contain a single word about education from beginning to end. "Simple Bible Teaching" is Nonconformist religion

in the sense that it is the religion which *suits* the Nonconformists in their ecclesiastical struggle with the Church of England and their bitter religious feud with the Church of Rome. A new religion has been definitely established by law in the schools of England and Wales; and, like other religions, it has its own unquestionable dogmas. The Catholic Church believes in the infallibility of the Pope; this, as Mr. Tim Healy said, may appear to other religionists to be a startling proposition; but in the Education Bill there is a still more startling proposition—the infallibility of Mr. Birrell.

This spectacled Nonconformist lawyer, with all the wiles of his trade, spreading out what he calls the fundamental truth of Christianity for public inspection, is a new and a portentous phenomenon. All the unction, all the glamor, all the majesty has gone. We listen to a public official explaining the "survival value" of religion from the point of view of the pedant and the policeman. Jesus Christ, Saint Paul, Saint Francis, Saint Bernard, Dante, Thomas à Kempis, Hildebrand, Wesley, and Newman take back seats; and there stalks to the footlights the new Saint Augustine Birrell.

We wonder what Mr. John Morley really thinks of it all. He gives his moral support to "Birrelligion," but we are glad that he has had grace enough to refrain from defending it in the debates.

Mr. Birrell himself seems quite ready to take charge of the "spiritual" interests of the nation. His dusty fingers and packet of red-tape are ready for the job. But even this does not suffice his genius and his ambition. Like the great Maximilien Robespierre, who was also a lawyer, Mr. Birrell will look after our religion and our morals too. He has arranged to have "fundamental" Christianity taught in our schools; but, as he playfully reminded his fellow legislators, "Thou shalt not cheat at cards" is not exactly a Christian maxim—as though it would be if the "not" were removed; and accordingly he is going to get up a text-book (or something) of up-to-date morals for the children. Indeed he looks forward to it with all the liveliness displayed by Robespierre in contemplating the abolition of capital punishment. But this is really too much. There is a Conscience Clause against Mr. Birrell's religion. His morals will be "all over the shop." As he is strong, therefore, let him be merciful, and spare us that infliction, and we will take the chance of our children cheating at cards.

Our new State-established religion is "Simple Bible Teaching" or "Fundamental Christianity." This is the jargon of the Nonconformist champions. When they are asked to explain it they have something else to do. Why not simply call it "Birrelligion"? A single word is always best on a label—and "Birrelligion" would go well with "Sapolio."

Will somebody have the goodness to tell us what "Fundamental Christianity" is? Does it include the deity of Christ? That doctrine is denied by Unitarians. Does it include the plenary inspiration of Scripture? That doctrine is denied by the Higher Critics. Does it include the Virgin Birth of Christ? That doctrine is pooh-poohed by Sir Oliver Lodge and many other professed Christians. Does it include the authority of the Sermon on the Mount? That discourse is despised, every day but Sunday, by nearly every Christian in England.

What is "Fundamental Christianity"? Does it mean what all Christians are agreed upon? Then it is nothing. For there is nothing that all Christians are agreed upon. If there is let them produce it.

The truth is that "Fundamental Christianity" will be settled as they go along by local authorities, Education committees, and school teachers. Mr. Birrell is its prophet, and Dr. Macnamara will be its pope.

Christianity has had trials and misfortunes before, but this is positive humiliation. "All is lost but honor," said King Francis in his captivity. "All is saved but honor," is the cannier cry of our "Fundamental" Christians.

G. W. FOOTE.

A Simple Test.

IT is often assumed that when speaking of certain Christian beliefs as foolish, or when referring to certain Christians as taking a stupid view of particular questions, the Freethinker implies that Christians are less intelligent than their fellows. This by no means necessarily follows. In relation to Christian beliefs the Christian does unquestionably take up a less intelligent position than those who are not swayed by a deeply seated prejudice. But in those cases where his religion does not enter the Christian may act as sensibly as anyone else. Nothing, in fact, is commoner than to find intelligence in one direction and stupidity in another co-existent in the same individual. In the religious world John Wesley is a striking example of how much shrewdness in dealing with life may be combined with the most belated of beliefs on religion. And in the scientific world there is the classic example of Faraday, who, by ruling out reason in one department, combined great scientific sagacity with a crudeness of religious belief that astonished Christians themselves. The essence of the Freethought complaint is that Christians do not, or will not, apply the same methods of criticism to their own religious beliefs that they apply to the beliefs of other people, or in dealing with other aspects of life.

An example of this is to hand from a recent speech of Mr. Lloyd George. Speaking at Liverpool the other day, Mr. Lloyd George partly based his objection to denominational teaching in schools on the grounds that "It had taught our rulers for hundreds of years, and there were millions of people on the verge of hunger in this rich land"—the assumption being that either positively or negatively denominationalism had contributed to this evil. Now it must be remembered that Mr. Lloyd George has himself repudiated the idea that Nonconformists are without dogmas as definite and as sacred as those of the Anglican or Catholic Church. His objection is, therefore, only to denominationalism being taught at the public expense. (I am putting the statement as he would put it, without in the least believing that he has any such objection.) In this case, then, there is no injustice in substituting Christianity for "denominationalism," and making the sentence read, "Christianity has taught our rulers for hundreds of years, and there are millions of people on the verge of hunger in this rich land." Of course, Mr. Lloyd George would repudiate the sentence in this form, yet whatever force there is in the charge when brought against denominationalism must tell with equal force against Christianity. Our rulers have been Christians; Christians have had the chief voice in the control of public affairs, the vast majority of people have professed adherence to Christianity, and if denominationalism, which rests on and appeals for support to the general body of Christian belief, is to be held responsible for current evils, how can Christianity itself escape scot-free? Mr. Lloyd George is not lacking in intelligence in many directions; it is his stupidity—real or apparent—in others that is surprising.

Another instance of the same kind is furnished by Archdeacon Sinclair. This gentleman had occasion to criticise that peculiar form of religious folly known as "Christian Science," and in the course of what the *Christian World* describes as a "sensible and cogent speech," he advised the audience to put a "very simple test" to such of the Christian Scientists as assert there is no such thing as pain. This was, "Let me first put a pinch of cayenne pepper in your right eye." The audience applauded, and the *Christian World* thinks it a very good reply to these deluded people. It does not, by the way, quite meet the plea of the Christian Scientist, but it may pass. But suppose one were to meet Archdeacon Sinclair, as a Christian, with a substantially similar series of tests that should cover all fundamental Christian beliefs, what then? One can imagine the air of offended dignity that would be at once assumed, the cry of

blasphemy or ribaldry that would go up. Yet it is obviously as just to judge Christianity by its possible conformity with practice as it is to apply the same test to Christian Science.

How easy it would be for the believer in Christian Science, or anyone else, to turn on the Archdeacon and hoist him with his own petard. He might point out that the New Testament, if it does not say all pain is a delusion, does say that earthly medicine is of no use in the curing of disease. The New Testament teaches this as clearly as it teaches anything, and more clearly than it teaches most things. Nay, Archdeacon Sinclair himself, as an ordained minister of the Church of England has a special commission for curing disease by the laying on of hands. And surely one might, in a "sensible and cogent" speech ask the Archdeacon whether he practices this or no? Does he, when he is unwell ask for the "prayer of faith" and leave the rest in the hands of God? Does he advise other people to do the same? Or does he ever say a word in defence of those "Peculiar" Christians who are sent to prison for practising Christianity in a Christian country? And if he does none of these things how easily might his questioner turn round and denounce him as either a fool or a fraud.

The attack might be carried further still, although not by a Christian Scientist, but still by some one using the Archdeacon's own test of genuineness. It might be pointed out that the power of faith is exalted above all else in the Christian scriptures. It can move mountains, destroy the venom of serpents or the evil consequence of deadly drinks. Might one not say, "I will believe your gospel when you have really bidden a mountain move and it has moved; or when you have been stung by a poisonous snake or drank prussic acid without suffering any ill consequences." Of course, Archdeacon Sinclair would say it is absurd to expect him to do these things; but they are part of the gospel he is paid to preach, and to ask him to put that gospel into practice is quite as reasonable as asking a Christian Scientist to have some cayenne pepper in his right eye. It is really not wise for the followers of kindred follies to quarrel in public; outsiders are apt to draw a conclusion that is not flattering to either.

Again, all Christians used to believe in miracles, and all of them, if they were only honest, would believe in them still. Now Freethinkers pointed out that it was a characteristic of miracles to occur in out of the way places, in earlier and less enlightened ages, to uneducated people, or under other conditions that were far from satisfactory. This they said was a sad waste of material, and in addition did away with the prime function of miracles which was to command belief. They pointed out that one miracle to a person of the character of Charles Darwin or Herbert Spencer would have commanded more attention and secured more belief than any number performed for the benefit of ignorant peasantry or mentally overwrought fanatics. But what said the clergy to this eminently reasonable suggestion? It was blasphemous, it laid down the conditions under which God Almighty should work, it was indecently irreverent. Yet it was not a bit more unreasonable than the Archdeacon's cayenne pepper test. It was really only asking Christians to apply the same standard of judgment to all beliefs alike.

Yet again, all Christians profess to believe in the overruling providence of God. The Freethinker, still applying the "simple test" the *Christian World* says is "worth noting," points out that judged by facts this profession of belief is a mere farce. No one trusts to it. No Christian believes in trusting to the Providence of God so long as a desired end can be attained by his own or other people's endeavors. A Christian about to embark on a dangerous voyage start in business, or engage in any enterprise, acts precisely as any Atheist would under similar circumstances. And if he does not take those precautions that are dictated by non-religious common sense and fails, the verdict of his fellow Christians is "serve him right." If he does really trust in Providence and meets with disaster he is called a fool for his

pains. If he does not trust in Providence and is honest enough to say so, he is denounced as a bad man and a danger to society. It is honesty in either direction that a Christian community can tolerate with the least grace.

There is in existence a Wesleyan Methodist Insurance Society. It does a big life insurance business, and also, I believe, issues fire policies. It may be noted in passing that protests against insurance, as casting a slur upon Providence, were actually raised in the early years of the nineteenth century; but, in spite of these, this Society and others have flourished. Now suppose an advocate of the cayenne pepper policy were to visit the offices of the Society named, and inquire concerning premiums. He would find the actuarial figures, the premiums, etc., identical with other societies that have not a Wesleyan Methodist label. If he inquired as to insuring a church, one where the teaching and preaching would commend itself to Wesleyan Methodists, he would find the premiums asked to be the same as at other offices. If the church happened to be built of wood, the premium would be higher. If without a lightning-conductor, probably higher still. These Atheistic Wesleyan Methodists would evince just as much trust in Providence as the Atheists who are not Wesleyan Methodists. They would as readily submit to back their belief by taking low premiums on a risky building as a Christian Scientist would submit to having his eye plugged with cayenne pepper by Archdeacon Sinclair. In short, judged by conduct instead of by profession, Christians do not believe that God cures the sick; they do not believe that he will shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, protect the widow or fatherless. They are mere professions, not a bit more real than the Christian Science profession that there is no such thing as pain.

Finally, one might take an instance that goes deeper still. Christianity, in common with other religions, teaches the existence of a future life. For generations Christians said, and sang, that they were in this world only as wayfarers travelling to another land where happiness should be complete and unending. Thousands of preachers have asserted that it is only the next life that makes this one worth the living, and have pictured those who have left this world as beings to be envied. So much for the theory. What are the facts? Do Christians act as though they believed all this? Not a bit of it. A Christian who knows that he is going to die may have the manliness to face the fact as calmly as non-Christians, but he will exert every effort to stave off the end. He will, if he can, seek expert advice, travel abroad to a more salubrious climate, or try a change of residence in his native land. He will not treat death as a joyful liberation from the cares of the world, but as an irreparable disaster. If he dies, his friends will not say they are glad of it, and they would be denounced as brutal if they did. They believe the next world is infinitely better than this one, but they treat a summons thither as a disaster. They profess to despise this world in comparison with the one beyond the grave, but in practice they prefer it to all others. No Atheist clings to this world more tenaciously than a Christian, and many leave it with less regret and with greater courage. All the preaching and teaching of centuries has not succeeded in squaring fact with theory. It has succeeded only in multiplying hypocrites and encouraging cowardice in the face of the inevitable.

The Christian Scientist would not, of course, submit to having cayenne pepper put in his eye as a guarantee of good faith. But neither would Archdeacon Sinclair drink poison or hob-nob with snakes, or submit to any corresponding test of his faith. The Archdeacon can see that the other man's faith is humbug. The other man is doubtless quite as convinced of the character of the Archdeacon's professions. And unprejudiced outsiders quite fail to detect any substantial difference between the two.

C. COHEN.

Disillusionment.

DR. EDWIN A. ABBOTT has devoted himself to singing the praises of illusion as "a discipline for our truth-seeking faculties, and as a stepping-stone towards truth itself." We contend, on the contrary, that illusion in religion has no praises to be sung, but is characterised by many dispraises to be deplored. Religious illusion is a distinct evil, and has wrought incalculable evil in history. We go further, and maintain that religion itself is an illusion to be got rid of as speedily as possible. And it is encouraging to find that the illusion of religion is gradually passing away, making room for the reality of natural knowledge. Mankind are being slowly, but surely, disillusioned.

We should bear in mind, however, that the process of disillusionment cannot be rapid. To many people superstition is still inexpressibly sweet and dear, and they will not part with it at any price. They have been in chains so long that the very idea of freedom is obnoxious to them. Such people are not amenable to argument: argument would be utterly wasted upon them. Yesterday, during the interval at an afternoon concert, two beautiful young ladies amused themselves and me by talking about a Secularist meeting recently held in a North London park. The speaker was described as a blasphemous Atheist; but, fortunately, he was challenged by a clergyman, who was prepared to meet him on his own ground. I was not able to catch the complete story, but the conclusion of the whole matter was this: "Isn't it a wonder such men are not struck down dead on the spot?" "Yes, indeed; it is a wonder." These charming young ladies would pronounce such a journal as the *Freethinker* low and vulgar, and its editor an awful blasphemer; while they would hail Marie Corelli as a consummate genius. Well, after all, the sparkling young girls were perfectly right in being amazed at the fact that Atheists are not struck down dead when they publicly disown God. *Were the Bible true, there would be no Atheists.* The God of the Holy Scriptures is an infinitely jealous being, and cannot tolerate those who renounce him. But Atheists, in large numbers, do exist, and many of them avow their Atheism on public platforms, and they are not struck down dead. Had these Atheists lived in Bible times they would have been represented as having miserably perished by the visitation of heaven. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were not Atheists, but simply opponents of the official priesthood; and yet we are told that the ground opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and that they went down alive into the pit (Numbers xvi. 29-33). Not only did the three offenders perish, but also their households, and all the men that appertained unto them, and all their goods. What were Korah, Dathan, and Abiram supposed to be guilty of? Revolt against Moses and the priestly tribe; and yet even for that offence both they and the two hundred and fifty men who had joined them were annihilated from upon the face of the earth. How would Atheists have fared in those days? There were none; there could have been none. But there are Atheists to-day, and they do express their unbelief openly, and yet no fire comes from the Lord and devours them.

That is the undeniable fact, and the question suggested by it is, Is God less jealous to-day than He used to be in ancient times? Why are Atheists not struck down dead to-day? The correct answer to that question is not difficult to discover, but when once brought to light it proves most damaging to the cause of religion. If an Atheist, while breathing forth his unbelief, were to be struck down dead by any other means than some form of bodily disease, it would clearly be an instance of supernatural intervention, and a startling proof of the existence of a God of vengeance. But has an Atheist ever perished in that manner? It is well known that the Church has slain hundreds of thousands of heretics in God's name, but that is no proof whatever of the truth of religion. Has God ever intervened for the punish-

ment of impiety and unbelief without employing human agency? The cases of Nabad and Abihu, and Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, may be quoted as furnishing an affirmative answer. The record says: "And there came forth fire from before the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord" (Leviticus x. 2). But is the record historically reliable? Take the destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and you will find that the story bristles with anachronisms, contradictions, and confusions. Three different causes of the revolt are given, and these are not combined, but appear independently in different parts of the narrative; and as Professor Addis, of Oxford, says, "the confusion reaches its highest point when we are told that the company of rebels who had already been swallowed up by the open earth were devoured by fire from Jehovah." If we consider the case of Nadab and Abihu, we shall find that here, also, we are dealing with a pure legend. The story was invented for the purpose of bolstering up the priesthood, but there is not a scrap of historical evidence that the priesthood was in existence at the time Aaron and his sons are supposed to have lived.

This brings us to the most important point. Divine penalties, immediately administered, for purely religious offences, are not historically verifiable. Under the Old Testament Jehovah was supposed habitually to employ temporal rewards and punishments. There was undoubtedly a time when the common people believed that if they presumed to exercise the priestly functions, or violated the sacredness of a particular sanctuary, they would certainly be struck dead on the spot, or smitten suddenly with a mortal disease; and as long as they cherished that belief they would naturally take care not to transgress. But such a belief lacked the conditions of permanence. For one day a daring man did venture near the sacred spot, and he did not die in consequence. From that moment the belief was doomed. It became clear that God did not visit religious offences with temporal penalties, nor reward religious performances with earthly prosperity.

Now, the discovery of that truth brought with it a marvellous disillusionment. This involved the undermining of the power of Religion over men's minds. Realising this fact, the priests imagined a Hereafter—heaven and hell—in which the deferred judgments of earth would take full effect. The doctrine of material rewards and punishments, administered in this world, signally broke down, and in its place came the great dogma of immortality, with its system of spiritual rewards and punishments, which held full sway in Christendom till very recently. But now this dogma also is rapidly falling into desuetude, and ceasing to exert any potent influence on the hearts and consciences of the people. Christian ministers still profess to believe in a future life of rewards and punishments; but they no longer put that belief in the forefront of their teaching. They hold on to it as a belief, but allow it to retire into the background, where it lies practically unused because unusable.

Thus the process of disillusionment is steadily going on even in the Churches themselves. Religion is slowly planting its feet on solid earth, and identifying itself with ethics. God is becoming more and more incomprehensible. Only case-hardened revivalists profess to be in possession of intimate knowledge of him to-day. Such men as Mr. R. J. Campbell teach a kind of vague Pantheism, declaring that "God is all that is," or that "God is yourself," and that Christ is a Principle—the germ of good latent in every human soul. Thus Christianity is passing through a process of theological disintegration—a rationalising and ethicising process. Even Professor Haeckel is not unwilling to be called a Pantheist in Spinoza's sense; and it is often extremely difficult to know wherein Mr. Campbell differs from the Jewish philosopher. Emotionally many clergymen are still enormous believers, and in their preaching they often give the reins to their emotions; but intellectually they are becoming more

and more scientific, and dropping many dogmas once accounted essential.

The difference between theologians and Atheists is now almost infinitesimal. The former say, "We no longer profess to know God, but we still believe in him," and the latter, "Not knowing God we cannot honestly believe in him." And yet there is a sense in which the distance between the divine and the Secularist is immeasurable. It is the distance between consistency and inconsistency. The divine is ignorant but pretends to know, while the Atheist is ignorant and admits it.

The fair ones at the concert imagined they had direct knowledge of God and the spiritual world, and their hearts swelled with pity for the poor Atheist in Finsbury Park. It was simply the fault of their upbringing. They had never looked the facts of life in the face. If they had, they would have known that the Atheist in Finsbury Park was in reality to be envied, not pitied. The Atheist is *minus* God, *minus* eternity, and *minus* immortality, but *plus* this world, and *plus* this life, and *plus* the joy of to-day, while the Christian Theist, *as such*, is *minus* this world, and this life, and present reality, and only *plus* unverified beliefs, unproven dogmas, and flimsily based hypotheses. Mr. Birrell admitted the other day that, properly understood, Christianity concerns itself with man's eternal relationships, and so does not primarily aim at fitting him for his earthly citizenship. Secularism, on the contrary, confines itself to the sphere of the known and real, and aims only at making us good citizens of the present world. Atheists cannot serve God because they do not know him, but they can and should serve humanity, because they know it, by seeking to promote its highest welfare. We are often assured that Science is at last turning religious; but the only sign of such conversion is the fact that Science is claiming ethics as a department of its own. It would be difficult to name one scientist of the first magnitude who is a thorough-going believer in Christianity as taught in the Churches. Science is decidedly on the side of the Atheist. Professor Metchnikoff unhesitatingly declares that no religion has ever fully justified its existence. "The idea of a future life," he says, "is supported by not a single fact, while there is much evidence against it." Science takes no cognizance of anything above and beyond Nature, while it treats everything within Nature as subject to natural laws. It is true that Science cherishes no feeling of hostility towards Religion; but it is also true that, without hostility, without even a conscious effort, Science is dislodging Religion, and educating mankind for a highly ethical but wholly non-religious life.

Let our fascinating friends of the concert ponder these things in their hearts. Even Atheists are not wholly lost in evil thoughts and wicked ways. Some of them are entirely possessed by the enthusiasm of humanity so eloquently described in *Ecce Homo*; and according to them man's highest mission in life is to be and to do good on the largest scale possible to him. While the Churches are quarreling and wrangling and flatly contradicting one another as to the right way to God, the genuine Atheist, calm and undismayed, exclaims:—

"Behold the way to God! Man's heart replies,
Hate is your hell, and love your paradise.
Leave dreams to dreamers, do the best you can;
The only God is in the heart of Man!"

J. T. LLOYD.

Secular Education in Australia.

In the *Daily News* of May 24 there appeared a long and careful interview with the Rev. R. L. Rentoul, a professor of Melbourne University, from which we venture to reproduce the following observations on a matter of great interest to our readers:—

"And what of the education question in Australia?
The system is different in different States. In New South Wales there is the series of Scripture lessons drawn up by an Anglican Archbishop, a Roman Catholic Bishop, and a Presby-

terian minister. The only questions that can be asked are printed, so there is no chance of proselytising. The teacher, in fact, is not giving religious instruction, but merely asking about the meaning of words.

In Victoria down to 1873 there was a purely denominational system. It was admittedly such an abject failure that a radical change had to be made. The then Bishop of Melbourne demanded a dogmatic system supported by the State. The late Mr. George Higginbotham, afterwards Chief Justice of Victoria, a leading Anglican layman, warned him that if they made that demand they would get much less than was offered, which at that time was a secular system plus Scripture reading. Accordingly the present system, which dates from 1873, was brought in, and, mind you, by Anglican laymen, its draughtsman being the late Mr. Francis.

The Victorian system of education is 'Free, Compulsory, and Secular.' The word secular does not mean anti-religious; it means that the whole school curriculum in the school hours is taken up with a practical training of the children to fit them to be citizens in this world's affairs. Afterwards during the *régime* of the late Professor Pearson, of Oxford and Melbourne, another Anglican layman, the name of Christ was struck out of the school books from a mistaken notion of absolute fairplay. It is this that has caused so much outcry, a now unmeaning outcry, against the Victorian system. All that ended years ago. The present system of school books is saturated with theistic and even Christian sentiment and references. Thus, when Christmas comes round, there will be lessons in the reading books embodying the Christmas story and its memories.

The clergy of the various denominations (Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Methodist, Baptist, etc.), or their accredited representatives, have full liberty to enter the schools and give lessons from the Bible or Catechisms, etc., as they please, not only after school hours, but in the middle of the day, by orderly arrangement with the head teacher. The school teachers give them every facility towards this.

A determined effort has been made for years, however, to break down this secular system or to superinduce upon it a distinctly Biblical and religious element of instruction. For years the Churches were content with the demand for Bible reading alone—in fact, for the system existing in New South Wales. Recently, however, in response to their urgent demand, the Government of Victoria appointed a Commission consisting of the then heads or chairmen of the various Churches, the Jews and Roman Catholics standing aloof.

The Commission's series of lessons is a very curious affair. Though the Commissioners included two bishops of the Anglican Church, the series begins by cutting out the Magnificat and all reference to the virgin birth of our Lord. In reading that series of so-called lessons you might suppose that Jesus was the natural-born son of Joseph of Nazareth and of his wife Mary. This throws a curious light on the assertion of the English bishops the other day that they demanded an unmutated Bible.

In the result it was left to the people by a referendum to say whether the system of education should be altered. By an overwhelming majority they voted that the system should remain free, compulsory, and secular. At the same time they voted by a majority that the scheme of Bible readings should be introduced, but they did not say by whom they should be taught.

This vote, in my judgment, means that the people of Victoria are determined that the system of education by which their children can get into the higher schools, into the universities, and into good positions in life, should remain as it has been for more than a quarter of a century—free, secular, and compulsory, but at the same time the people showed their willingness that the nobler passages of Holy Scripture should be part of the reading given to the children, though they had no intention that schoolmasters should be teachers of religion or that dogmatic teaching of any kind whatever should figure in the curriculum."

How bold the flight of passion's wandering wing,
How swift the step of reason's firmer tread,
How calm and sweet the victories of life,
How terrorless the triumph of the grave!
How powerless were the mightiest monarch's arm,
Vain his loud threat, and impotent his frown!
How ludicrous the priest's dogmatic roar!
The weight of his exterminating curse
How light! and his affected charity,
To suit the pressure of the changing times,
What palpable deceit!—but for thy aid,
Religion! but for thee, prolific friend,
Who peopled earth with demons, hell with men,
And heaven with slaves.

—Shelley, "Queen Mab."

Acid Drops.

Rev. C. Silvester Horne wrote a long letter to the *Daily News* lately, asking certain questions as to the meaning of the "secular solution" in education. We would have answered him, but experience has taught us, as it has taught Mr. Robert Blatchford, that to write a letter to the *Daily News* from the Secular point of view, on any question, is to invite discourtesy and misrepresentation—not to use still harsher language. We shall therefore reply to Mr. Horne in our own columns.

Mr. Horne sadly admits that the Church of England opposition to the policy of "simple Bible teaching" is likely to force "the secular solution" upon us. So the time has come, he says, to "ask those who father this particular solution to take us into their confidence and tell us frankly what they mean by it." Then he goes on asking a number of questions which would have been perfectly unnecessary if he had only waited for information. Is the Bible to go? Is Milton to go? Is Longfellow to go? Are the great masters of literature to be edited for school use to suit the Secularists? Such in substance are Mr. Horne's questions. And we will give him (as far as we are concerned) straight and honest replies.

Yes, the Bible *must* go. That is to say, it must go *as* the Bible. An ethical teacher may refer to it as he may refer to any other book; but it is not to be kept in the schools as *the* text-book of moral instruction, and it is not to be dealt with, even incidentally, as the Word of God or as in any way inspired. Milton will *not* go. Whatever opinions are expressed in his poetry are *his* opinions, and are naturally not binding on anyone else. So with Longfellow, so with Tennyson, so with any other famous writer. It is right that children should know what these have written; the wrong would come in if the children were told that they had to believe what these writers believed. The mischief is dogmatism in the place of education.

The rest of Mr. Horne's letter seems to show that he did not write it to obtain information, but to get in an argument of his own in favor of Bible teaching. Take this passage:—

"But, says someone, if a teacher does not believe the Bible, should he be allowed to teach it? The question is puerile. It assumes that the Rationalist disbelieves everything in the Bible. Doubtless there are assumptions in the Bible that he does not agree with; just as there are religious affirmations in Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Bacon, that he does not agree with. His business is to teach the child the contents of the Scriptures. The best of Christians differ in the interpretations they put upon Biblical passages and the value they attach to them. The great thing is that the child should know his Bible. An Agnostic baker may sell me a loaf of bread. If it is good bread, it is no reason why I should not eat it because the baker is an Agnostic. The Bible is good bread, and there is more nourishment in it than in the *obiter dicta* of any teacher."

This is how clericals are trained in logic! Mr. Horne's opening sentences are unworthy of an infant-school. When it is said that a teacher "does not believe the Bible" it naturally does not mean, and cannot mean, that he disbelieves every statement from Genesis to Revelation. Obviously it means, and can only mean, that the teacher does not believe it *as Christians do*. In other words, he does not regard it as inspired and authoritative; he looks upon it as a natural and not a supernatural production; he deals with everything in it as he would deal with the contents of any other book.

Certainly the best of Christians differ as to the interpretation and value of various passages of the Bible. That fact is the foundation of the scores of Christian denominations. But the Secularist differs from all of them in another way than that in which they differ from each other. He differs from them in his general view of the Bible—and this difference is fundamental. It places him in a different category altogether.

When the reverend gentleman exclaims that "The great thing is that the child should know his Bible," he ought to know that he is simply speaking as an Evangelical Christian, and a professional one at that. That the child should "know his Bible" (*his Bible!*) is of course "the great thing" to Mr. Horne; but hasn't he imagination enough to understand that it is by no means the great thing to the Secularist? As for the "loaf of bread" argument, it simply shows that Mr. Horne is unable to put himself in the Secularist's position. He begs the whole question at issue. There may be "good bread" in the Bible; no Secularist denies that; but the proposition that the Bible is good bread is quite another matter. Taken as a whole the Bible is *not* good bread. This, at least,

is the Secularist's view of it. And it is idle for Mr. Horne to base an appeal for the Bible on a ground which is disputed—and which he must know is disputed—by those to whom the appeal is addressed. Altogether, then, the reverend gentleman's letter is a further instance of the extraordinary way in which Nonconformists have steeped themselves in folly and fanaticism. They appear to have completely lost their heads. Indeed, their utter inability to look at the education question from any point of view but their own is becoming quite pathetic.

The *Liverpool Post*, in its centenary notice of John Stuart Mill, was good enough to lament the fact that he was brought up by his father without any "religious training." It represents this as a sad injustice to him, and affects to believe that he "felt" it—which is a grotesque absurdity to any one who has really read the *Autobiography*. "There is a solemn warning in this," our contemporary adds, "of the injustice that may be done to the child in withholding from him a religious training, and also a reminder that the nation may be inflicting upon itself a great loss in subjecting its youth to secular instruction alone." Well now, we beg to remind the *L. P.* that a very big crowd of people in this country *have* had "religious training," but it doesn't seem to have produced the wonderful fruits that it *would* have produced in John Stuart Mill if he had only received it. It has not made them saints or philosophers. A very large number of them are mere hooligans.

"That Mill was naturally a religious man," the *L. P.* says, "is not to be doubted." It proves this by his "spotless purity," his "life-long devotion to truth," and the "transparent simplicity of his life. In other words, he must have been religious because he was moral; just as if all religious people were necessarily moral! Our contemporary ought to see how it is arguing in a circle.

Preaching at Westbourne Park Chapel on Sunday evening, the Rev. Dr. Clifford (who appears not to be a "Dr." at all, although he holds other good degrees) let his Education cat right out of the bag. After pleading for "simple Bible teaching" he said—at least the *Daily News* reports him as saying—that "fundamentally the controversy was one between Romanism and Protestantism." This is precisely what we have said all along. Dr. Clifford, of course, by "Protestantism" means Evangelical Protestantism; by "Romanism" he means everything which is *not* Evangelical Protestantism; and this Evangelical Protestantism he wants the State to establish and endow in the public elementary schools. Exactly.

"The religion of nobody is to be taught at the expense of everybody." This is the Bishop of Asaph's description of the Education Bill—and not a bad one. For the Catholics and Churchmen say it is not their religion which is to be taught, and the Nonconformists retort that it is not theirs either. Whose is it then? But we all know who has to pay for it.

"I am not a Secularist," said Mr. Chamberlain in one of his speeches in committee on the Education Bill. We believe he is a Unitarian. But what is a Unitarian? Can anybody tell us? We have known Unitarians who could hardly be distinguished from Methodists. We have known other Unitarians who could hardly be distinguished from Atheists. We should like to know where Mr. Chamberlain looks in.

Mr. Chamberlain also said that the fine distinction between secular and secularist, although understood by him and other members of the House, was not likely to be fully appreciated by the mass of the country. Well, we differ from him. We believe that "secular education" is fairly understood by this time by the English people. We also believe that a referendum vote might easily be in favor of it. It has many more friends than Mr. Chamberlain and the other House of Commons leaders imagine.

Mr. Runciman, in speaking against secular education, as proposed by Messrs. Maddison and Masterman, said that he did so because he believed the people of this country wished their children to live "godly, sober, and righteous" lives. We are sorry that the Liberal party in the House of Commons cheered this claptrap. Godliness we will leave to Mr. Runciman and his applauders, but when it comes to sobriety and righteousness we beg to observe that Bible worshipers are no better off than Bible critics. The notion that Christians are more moral than "infidels" is one of those partisan assumptions which are so flatly contradicted by public statistics and personal experience.

Mr. C. F. G. Masterman, supporting the Secular Education amendment in committee on the Education Bill, expressed

surprise at members in sympathy with the Passive Resistance movement supporting Mr. Birrell's scheme of religious teaching. Those who did so, he said, showed that they were not concerned so much for freedom of conscience as for freedom of their own consciences. Exactly so. The Passive Resisters have as much real idea of conscience as a shark has who is fighting another shark for a dinner. Mr. Masterman ought to have understood long ago, as we did, the inner nature of the Passive Resistance Comedy.

The Duke of Northumberland has been referring to the possibility of a school teacher being "an Atheist, Agnostic, or any other abomination." The Duke of Northumberland is not even an abomination. He is only an ill-mannered member of the House which Lord Chesterfield (who knew it) called "The Hospital for Incurables."

We regretted that the Labor members did not muster up courage to oppose the Education Bill on the second reading. That was their real opportunity, and they missed it. We were not surprised to read in Mr. Massingham's parliamentary letter in the *Daily News* that—"Some Liberal members, like Sir Charles Dilke and a few Liberal-Labor men, intend to abstain on the secular division at this juncture, feeling that it is inconsistent to support the measure on the second reading and oppose it on an amendment which would destroy Clauses III. and IV." This is exactly what we predicted.

Sir Charles Dilke is one of the survivors of the band who voted for the secular solution in 1870. Another survivor is the Prime Minister, who was then Henry Campbell.

Mr. Bernard Shaw's lecture on "The Religion of the British Empire" was reported in the usual silly sensational way in the newspapers. We are therefore not able to criticise it with any security. It is evident that the lecturer said a number of Shawesque things; but there is always a point of seriousness somewhere in his utterances, and this is what the newspapers all ignored. His statement that Christianity is not the religion of the British Empire is perfectly true, of course, and we have often made it ourselves. We have also stated, as Mr. Shaw did, that children have rights in the matter of religious teaching. "The child," he said, "should not be expected naturally to acquiesce in the religion of the parents: the final responsibility was his own." This is a position we explained and defended in our recent articles on "Mr. Birrell's Bill."

"A man," Mr. Shaw remarked, "who says 'I am the vehicle of divine truth' ought to be executed; he must be either too foolish or too wicked to be allowed to live." There is some truth in this, but expressed in this exaggerated way it is a Shawism. "G. B. S." has contracted quite a habit of declaring that certain people ought to be slaughtered. He often fires off this bombshell at Humanitarian League meetings. Naturally it adds to the hilarity of the proceedings, but it is not illuminating, and in time it must become wearisome.

Mr. Shaw is reported in the *Tribune* as saying that—"He thought the time would come when some sort of truly 'catholic' religion would be evolved and taught throughout an 'Empire' of free democratic commonwealths. It would not be, he imagined, a religion of hundreds of years ago, but a religion of to-day. It would include a belief in inspiration, but not in inspiration that existed no longer. Its inspired books would be books being written at that moment—its inspiration an inspiration reborn in every age." This is Mr. Shaw's prophecy. Well, we venture to prophesy the opposite. The doctrine of inspiration is already on its last legs, and we do not see how it is to have another innings. Moreover, the time has gone by for growing or manufacturing new religions. The existing ones arose in ancient times and are only inherited now. They will last just as long as superstitious-brained people survive who require them. When the time comes for their disappearance there will be no room for successors.

The *Christian Commonwealth* admits the inevitable failure of "engineered revivals" conducted by professional evangelists. What a pity it did not admit this before when so much money and effort was being wasted on the performances of the Torrey-Alexander combination. But we suppose it is better late than never.

Our contemporary proposes the formation of a representative committee of all Christian sects, to arrange for the holding of mid-day services throughout the year in London—which Dr. Torrey came to save but didn't. Addresses

would be delivered by speakers of all Churches. The following is the C. C.'s preliminary list:—

"The Bishop of London, Canons Scott Holland, Wilberforce, Knox Little, and Hensley Henson, Father Adderley, Percy Dearmer, General Booth, Dr. Alexander McLaren, Dr. Stopford Brooke, Principal Fairbairn, Ian Maclaren, Dr. John Clifford, R. J. Campbell, J. H. Jowett, R. F. Horton, Dr. Campbell Morgan, Dr. W. J. Dawson, W. L. Watkinson, F. B. Meyer, J. Scott Lidgett, C. Silvester Horne, Thomas Spurgeon, C. Ensor Walters, Dr. Alexander Whyte, Dr. Marcus Dods, Dr. James Stalker, Dr. John Hunter, Father Ignatius, and Evan Roberts."

This is an interesting list of a very happy family. But if Evan Roberts is included what price Mrs. Jones?

The *Weekly Scotsman*, a leading paper in the composite land of John Knox and Robert Burns, has been going on with the publication of letters from all sorts and conditions of men as to why they have left off going to church. The following editorial introduction to one week's budget is worth reproducing:—

"The letters printed this week are selected from a very large number written by men. The reasons which most of them give for ceasing to attend church are more generally of a philosophical character. Their main contention is that the doctrines of the churches are worn out, and can no longer command the credence of educated men. They also complain bitterly of the alleged insincerity, faithlessness, and neglectfulness of ministers; of the inconsistencies, hypocrisy, bigotry, and snobbery of church members, of the prevalence of mammon-worship; of the burdensome and increasing monetary exactions of the churches; and working men express with strong feeling their conviction that they are despised and neglected because of their inability to contribute freely to the funds of the churches.

What impressed us most in reading the letters in this section was their extraordinary number, and the proof they gave of the spread of 'rationalism' among all classes of the community, but especially among working men."

The truth is leaking out at last.

At a recent meeting of the United Methodist Free Churches (Manchester District) the Rev. F. W. Sparkes declared that many churches were simply marking time, and had been doing so for a quarter of a century. He also said that the decrease in the Sunday Schools gave room for wholesale discontent. Councillor Willet, of Salford, thought that Sunday music in the parks was proving a strong counter-attraction to Sunday Schools; while the Rev. J. H. Sarvent denounced dancing and theatre-going. We judge that the Methodist business in that district is more or less in the staggers.

Away in godly Scotland the clergy are still loudly lamenting. At the meeting of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, at Edinburgh, one man of God, hailing from Oban, stated why the late Tory government fell. It was because Mr. Balfour played golf on Sunday. We know now.

According to the Rev. T. Rippon, a Bristol servant girl produced £5 as a gift towards missionary work, saying, "I cannot afford it, but I can sacrifice it." The man of God admires her spirit. Naturally. It would be a wonder if he didn't.

A correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle* tells a "chestnut" as a recent experience of his in South Midlothian. Calling at a cottage, he obtained some milk, but the woman refused to "tak siller on a Sawbath." As he turned away, thanking her, she whispered that he could "drap the bawbees" in the wash-tub, and she would "get them oot the morn."

The second-sight people are at their old tricks over the Wakley murder. One lady professional at the business states that she felt something was happening that night—and this drivel is seriously published by newspapers which are conducted by men who have doubtless all had the regular religious training. A Spiritualist called Dr. Wallace has also been upon the job, apparently with several assistants. He is reported to have "smelt out" all the details of the murder, and we daresay he will disclose them when the police have run down the murderer. Dr. Wallace, it is said, rendered great assistance to the police in the Morstham Tunnel mystery. Indeed! We thought that mystery was a mystery still.

America is a Christian country. They boast of the fact over there. Yet the white Christian won't eat, drink, travel, or even worship with the black Christian. Moreover, the white Christian has a strong taste for lynching the black Christian; for they are "one in Christ" but not in anything else. At the town of Blanchard, in Louisiana, on May 22, a

negro was taken out of prison by the white Christians and lynched, his body being riddled with bullets. He had only committed the crime of stealing a dollar—but it was from a white boy. How these Christians love one another! Especially when their colors differ.

Talking about the love between Christian whites and Christian blacks, is not the following story a rich one? It is taken from the *London Tribune* (May 15):—

"The story told in *The Tribune* yesterday concerning the refusal of New York Americans to worship with negroes—and repeated in a large number of the evening papers—recalls an incident which happened in connection with the Baptist World Congress last summer. Late one evening an American delegate arrived at the house of his host in the North of London. He was welcomed hospitably, and in the midst of the introductory remarks was innocently informed that probably he would be glad to know that another delegate was also staying in the house—a colored representative from —. To the immense surprise of his host and hostess, who did not appreciate race distinctions in the States, the newcomer immediately stated that he could not stay in the same house as the colored man. Neither did he, but, though the hour was advanced, forthwith collected his bags and made for the nearest hotel."

Good white Christian!

Nothing flourishes in this world, as Ingersoll said, like a good, sound, healthy, religious lie. Refuting it does not kill it. It lives as long as it pays. We are not surprised, therefore, to see that the vicar of All Saints' Church, Ipswich, has been treating his "monthly men's service" to the fraudulent statistics concerning the results of Secular Education in Australia which were printed in the *Daily Mail*, and afterwards in the *People*. The man of God is discreetly silent about the official contradiction of those figures. The lie is all for the glory of God.

Jabez Balfour, the ex-convict, who is relating his prison experiences in the *Weekly Dispatch*, has the following paragraph on clerical offenders:—

"One of the least unsuccessful escapes that I ever knew was curiously enough that of a clergyman. He was a tall, thin, be-spectacled, and red-nosed divine, certainly not the kind of man one would expect to embark on so desperate a plan. I had often watched him in prison with a good deal of interest. Clergymen and ministers of all denominations are, I regret to state, far from being unknown in our penal establishments. I have been associated on intimate terms, in the course of my imprisonment, with a dissenting minister and a clergyman of the Church of England, both being in prison for the same offence, and both adhering very zealously to the distinctive differences of Church and Chapel. Their offence was bigamy, and as I have met other clerical bigamists I fear that it must be regarded as a somewhat popular offence with the 'cloth.'"

It is an old story—"The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair."

Kindness to animals is an excellent thing, and we are glad to see the clergy taking it up, even at the eleventh hour. But why should they mix it up with very questionable foreign matter? The Dean of Bristol, for instance, preaching a special sermon on the subject lately at the Cathedral, remarked that "great thinkers had held that man had no monopoly of immortality," and said that "it must not be forgotten that animals were with our first parents in Paradise, and did not escape the consequences of the fall." Setting aside the absurdity of an educated man standing up at this time of day for the historical character of so legendary a story as that of Adam and Eve, we wish to ask the Dean of Bristol whether he really believes that the "immortality" of either men or animals has anything to do with their claim to kindness? We should have thought that their capacity to feel pain and pleasure was quite sufficient.

How much the Russian people are ahead of the Russian government in religious matters may be seen by the demand of the Duma for "liberty of conscience" and the expropriation of church lands for the benefit of the people.

There was a curious act of "Providence" lately at the village of Koniakan, near Teschen, in Silesia. A crowd of people were assembled in the Protestant church on the occasion of a funeral. Lightning struck the church while the service was proceeding; thirteen persons were killed, and twenty-two injured, including the clergyman. "He doeth all things well."

John Retchless, of Wisbech, was a hundred years old on May 11. Living in a Christian country, where old age is so tenderly respected, he received his first summons to the police-court for non-payment of rates, shortly before his

centenary. He did not live to answer it. They found him dead by his bedside in the attitude of prayer. Another case of "Providence."

According to the port chaplain of London, the books sent to his sailors' mission included one called "How to dress on £15 a year" and Bradshaw's railway guide! Perhaps the donor thought the sailors would take it for a guide to heaven.

Here is an extract from the *London Letter* of a well-known Liberal daily: "The great majority of the House favor the secular solution, but the great majority of the House will vote against it." In other words, the great majority of the members of the House of Commons would vote contrary to their intelligence and convictions. Such is politics!

Plague has broken out at Hong Kong, and the Chinese have been firing crackers to scare off the plague devils. Silly, no doubt. But no sillier than the Christians were when they rang the church bells to frighten away comets; and no sillier than they are now when they pray for changes in the weather.

Rev. F. J. Walkley, of the Baptist Church, High-road, Leytonstone, assures his congregation that all the sermons he preaches to them are the products of his own brain "inspired by the Living God." This leaves it doubtful, after all, whether the reverend gentleman's brain or the divine inspiration is to be credited with the result—or whether it is a case of half and half. Anyhow, there is one inspired minister in Leytonstone. He tells us so himself—and he ought to know. "The Living God" always keeps an obstinate silence in these matters.

Franciscan Friars and Greek Monks have had a battle royal on the Mount of Olives. The quarrel was over the right of celebrating divine service on the holy hill. How they love one another!

More poor Christians! And these are only samples. Rev. Thomas Hassall Mynors, Weathercock Hall, King's Norton, left estate valued at £161,826. Rev. Thomas Street Milington, Clarendon-place, Leamington, left £56,859. Rev. Henry Bedford, Whitstable-road, Canterbury, left £31,301. Rev. Frederick Thomas Penhey, Market-place, Kingston, left £20,238. All of them believed in "blessed be ye poor" and "woe unto you rich." They preached it—and grew fat on it. And fools helped them.

"God is Love."

"With tearful eyes I look around,
Life seems a dark and gloomy scene,
No help comes from the vast profound,
No answer from the great unseen.

With faith destroyed, with lack of trust,
No comfort comes from realms above;
And still the falsehood eats like rust
In human lives that "God is love."

The zealot holds it as his creed,
The crafty sing it out above,
Yet nothing shows it, naught indeed,
For naught reveals that "God is love."

Calamities, misfortunes dire,
And all the strokes of adverse fate,
These indicate malignant ire,
And signify not love but hate.

The Unknown God—if such there be—
We shall not find, we need not teach;
'Tis sailing on an endless sea
Whose distant shores we cannot reach.

Your God is known effect and cause,
And truth is what Experience tells;
In Nature seek life's wisest laws,
Nor yearn for heavens, nor fear for hells!

Grasp now in earthly hours your joy,
Seek not for bliss in realms above;
Waste not your worship, but destroy
The baseless fiction—"God is love."

GERALD GREY.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

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

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—June 3, Birmingham.

J. BLACKHALL.—See paragraph. Thanks.

J. J. HANKS.—There is a pamphlet of ours entitled *Salvation Syrup*, price twopence, that might help you in the matter. You may depend upon it that all these religious philanthropies are founded to a large extent on "sweating." They help a man by finding him labor and paying him as little as possible for it. Rough shelter, rough food, and sixpence a week spending money, are a poor return for a hard week's work. Even the "bloated capitalist" can't do business like that.

G. BAXTER.—Thanks for your kind letter. We can quite believe all you say about Mr. Shakespeare Hirst as a man and a Free-thinker, and we are glad to hear that you owe him your own introduction to Freethought. But we do not understand what this has to do with the genuineness of his alleged portrait of Shakespeare by a contemporary artist—unless you mean that we ought to accept it as genuine out of compliment to the owner—which would be a curious form of logic for one Free-thinker to recommend to another. What we asked for was evidence. Surely this is a natural and modest request. We await a practical answer, and shall be pleased to receive it.

M. J.—No wonder your reference to those beastly texts in the Bible put the reverend gentleman into a fury. But his calling you "dirty" is rich. You merely asked him to defend or repudiate the dirt of his "inspired" book. Others put the dirt there—and keep it there; you only pointed to it and suggested the use of a shovel.

R. J. HENDERSON.—Glad to hear that our Mill article threw an explanatory light for you on the faulty essay on Theism. We agree with what you say about Haeckel. Sir Oliver Lodge, in our judgment, often twaddles. Thanks for the cuttings.

J. C.—A good letter, which should be serviceable. Of course we wish our readers would make use of matter they find in the *Freethinker* more frequently through the medium of letters to the local newspapers.

H. COWELL.—Thanks for the cutting. No doubt the writer means well, but the suggestion is fantastic. It would not affect the total rate of annual interest.

GERALD GREY.—Your good wishes are conveyed to Messrs. Cohen and Lloyd, on account of their articles which you find "such a source of pleasure." Your kind invitation sounds very tempting, but we fear we cannot get so far this summer. Thanks all the same.

G. ROLEFFS.—Thanks for cuttings.

W. EMBLEY.—Are we indebted to you for the printed leaflets? We have looked through them carefully, but, amidst much that is interesting, we don't find a grain of evidence on the main issue.

A. R. WAUGH.—Our composing room is a Trade Union one and our shop is conducted on lines of justice to employees. It is closed on Sunday, and open five days in the week from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; on Saturdays it is open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.—like all decent establishments in the same line of business. We thought this was generally known, and are sorry you suffered inconvenience.

W. P. BALL.—Your useful cuttings are ever welcome.

J. G. FAULKNER.—In our next. Meanwhile we wish the new Wigan Branch all success.

E. H.—"Simple Bible Teaching" will be paid for by the State. It will be given in State buildings by State-paid teachers, and by them exclusively. We will deal with what Huxley said shortly.

A. DAVIS has read our six specimen numbers with "high approval" and is now a regular subscriber. This should encourage our friends to keep on sending us likely addresses.

J. CHEALE.—Will be dealt with in an early number.

E. GWINNELL.—Full particulars will be announced at the Conference. They are not in our hands at the moment.

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

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Sugar Plums.

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference takes place to-day (Whit-Sunday) at Birmingham. The business sittings, morning and afternoon, will be held in the small theatre of the Midland Institute, Paradise-street. The evening public meeting will be held in the Town Hall. Mr. G. W. Foote will preside, and Messrs. C. Cohen, J. T. Lloyd, and F. A. Davies will be on the list of speakers.

Delegates and visitors to the Conference, desiring hotel or other accommodation, should have communicated before this to Mr. J. Partridge, 183 Vauxhall-road, Birmingham. Those who have omitted to do so will, of course, have to be content with what accommodation is now obtainable. The local committee, wearing rosettes of the old Bradlaugh colors, will do their best to meet all trains by which delegates and visitors arrive. Those who are missed should go straight to the Conference reception room at the Market Hotel in Station-street, close to the London and North Western and Midland stations, and about half a mile from the Great Western station.

Between the morning and afternoon sittings of the Conference there will be a dinner (at 1 o'clock) for the delegates and visitors at the Market Hotel—tickets 2s. each, covering an excellent bill of fare. On Whit-Monday there will be an excursion to Stratford-on-Avon, and special arrangements have been made for visiting spots of special interest, including the Memorial Theatre. Tickets for this excursion are 5s. 3d. each, covering train fare, a substantial dinner, and an hour's trip by steam launch on the river. Train fare alone is 2s. 3d.

Friends coming into Birmingham for the Town Hall meeting, who may require tea, can have a ticket for same (9d.) by applying to Mr. Partridge, 183 Vauxhall-road.

The Glasgow Branch has just finished a most successful winter's work. There have been overflowing and enthusiastic meetings at the hall, and a large number of "missionary" meetings have been held in surrounding towns, while literature has been largely sold and the Branch funds are considerably augmented. To-day (Whit-Sunday) the members and friends have their Annual Excursion to Auchmountain Glen, leaving St. Enoch's Station at 9.15. Excursionists must bring all their own provisions, excepting tea and milk.

The new North London Branch has held its first "social." The treasurer and his wife (also a member of the N. S. S.) entertained the members and representatives of other London Branches. A most enjoyable evening was spent. We should add that this Branch is still holding fine meetings on Parliament Hill.

The pious gentlemen who wax eloquent on the terrible results of Secular Education say a lot (and all lies) about Australia and America, but they leave Japan severely alone. Yet the case of Japan is by far the most important of all. As pointed out by Mr. Robert Young, editor of the *Japan Chronicle*, in a *Tribune* article, she has had thorough-going Secular Education in her schools. Shintoism and Buddhism have both been kept outside; and, to do them justice, they have never tried to intrude themselves. Ever since 1868 religion has been excluded from the schools of Japan, but morality has been taught, social discipline has been inculcated, and the results have astonished the whole civilised world. Mr. Young states from personal experience that "the evils which clerics in this country anticipate from secular education are non-existent" in Japan. And in spite of the "godless" education the Japanese student, according to Professor Chamberlain, "belongs to that class of youth who are the schoolmaster's delight—quiet, intelligent, deferential, studious almost to excess." As for the teachers, they stand towards their pupils as elder brothers; they never scold, hardly ever punish, and to strike a pupil would cost them their posts at once. Yes, they are civilised over there; and the best importation England could make would be a boatload of Japanese missionaries—to teach us morality.

The London Progressive Educational Council met on Wednesday, May 23. Mr. Marshall Jackman moved a resolution that the ordinary staff of any elementary school should not be allowed to give denominational religious instruction. Rev. Stewart D. Headlam moved an amendment to make this apply to any form of religious instruction—in effect, to make education purely secular. This amendment was seconded by Canon Jephson. After a sharp discussion it was rejected by 12 votes to 11. Such a defeat was really a victory. It shows that the days of religious education in

public schools, by public teachers, at the public expense, are numbered.

Another defeat very much like a victory occurred at the London County Council meeting to consider the urgency report of the Education Committee on Mr. Birrell's Bill. Mr. Bray moved, and Mr. Sidney Webb seconded, an amendment to the effect that "it is inequitable to provide at the expense of public funds for the giving of one particular form of religious instruction." The vote against this amendment was 52 to 42. Another sign of the beginning of the end.

We are glad to see the religious controversy initiated by Mr. J. W. de Caux still continuing in the *Yarmouth Mercury*. Last week's issue contained further letters on the Free-thought side by Mr. de Caux, Mr. A. H. Smith, and Mary Panchen. The orthodox side is very feebly supported.

Mr. Henry S. Salt, honorary secretary of the Humanitarian League, and its principal founder, has just issued through the League (53 Chancery-lane, London) an excellent and well-printed pamphlet on *The Ethics of Corporal Punishment*. We do not suppose there are many Freethinkers who believe in beating either women or children or any other defenceless persons. But a good many other people do believe in caning and flogging as just and wise inflictions, and Mr. Salt's pamphlet is just the thing to put into their hands if they are at all amenable to the principles of reason and the sentiments of humanity. It is admirably written, with an uncommon mixture of firmness and courtesy, and it ought to be widely circulated. The price is only one penny, and the postage would only be another halfpenny.

"We have been Atheists," a correspondent writes of himself and wife, "and readers of the *Freethinker*, both of us, ever since we were in our teens. As a boy I read Moncure Conway's *Lessons for the Day*, then Paine's *Age of Reason*, then Ingersoll's lectures and your own pamphlets, and always the *National Reformer*. I went to a church college—to get my living, and it may amuse you to know that I entered first on the college list for religious knowledge. I am now head teacher of a voluntary school (undenominational?), and am of the same opinions as I always held, but can't say much. Your articles on the Education question contain a splendid armory of facts and logic on behalf of secular education. Although the teachers as a whole are not educated up to this solution, there are a goodly few who are with you..... Your latest issue is a very important one, as foreshadowing the policy of the N. S. S. in view of recent developments. I have long thought that something ought to be done to get at the children themselves for Free-thought. The intelligent lads of fourteen or thereabouts are more hopeful subjects for brain work than the same youths at eighteen, when football, billiards, cards, cigarettes and other attractions occupy their minds."

Gerald Massey was seventy-nine on Tuesday. His great works on *Natural Genesis* and the *Book of Beginnings* are devoted to a mythical and symbolic explanation of Christianity. Earlier in life Mr. Massey was a Chartist and a people's poet.

"The Anti-Puritan League" is being formed for "the defence of the people's pleasures." The preliminary circular is signed by G. K. Chesterton, Hubert Bland, Walter Crane, James Douglas, Rev. Stewart D. Headlam, Conrad Noel, G. S. Street, and others. Cecil Chesterton is the honorary secretary. It is declared that Puritans have captured the London County Council, and will soon be trying to capture the House of Commons. The new League seeks to enroll "those who resent Puritan domination." While recognising the necessity of one day's rest in seven, the League "will resist all attempts to force a narrow and bitter Sabbatarianism upon the democracy." "The refusal of the London County Council," it says, "to allow even the quietest game to be played in the parks and open spaces on a Sunday is an example of such attempts. The movement for the Sunday closing of public-houses is another." Sympathisers are invited to communicate with Mr. Cecil Chesterton, 11 Warwick-gardens, Kensington.

THE CLERGY AND THE BIBLE.

Even the clergy have no vital belief in the inspiration of the Bible. It is merely the charter under which they trade. It is a source of oracular texts for their ambiguous sermons. It is lauded and adored, and neglected and defied. To bring it into disbelief and contempt by argument and ridicule is a misdemeanor; to bring it into disbelief and contempt by acting upon it (as the Peculiar People do) is a felony. The only safe course is that adopted by the clergy, who neither believe it nor disbelieve it, but use it as it serves their occasions; and as long as it answers their ends it will remain the Book of God.—G. W. Foote. "The Book of God."

From Fiction to Fact; OR, HOW I CEASED TO BE A CATHOLIC.—V.

BY FRED. BONTE
(Late a Prison Minister.)

(Continued from p. 332.)

AT college we were instructed to read the New Testament kneeling, and this reverence remained with me for many years. What first dispelled the delusion of its divine character was the contradictions that abound in it, its absurd stories and interpolations. In the narrative of Paul's conversion occurs a clear contradiction; in one place it is distinctly stated that the men who accompanied him heard the words of the vision, in another they heard them not. Judas brings back the thirty pieces of silver in Matthew, casts them down in the temple, and hangs himself; and the priests buy with them a burying place which was called Haceldama, as being the price of the blood of Jesus. The story in Acts is quite different. Judas keeps the money to himself, buys with it a field, dies in it by a fall, and the field is called Haceldama in relation to his blood shed in it. In one gospel the apostles are repeatedly directed to return to Galilee after the master's death, in another they are distinctly commanded to stay in Jerusalem. The ascension is four times referred to, but in each case he ascends from a widely different spot. These samples suffice to show how little credit can be given to documents disfigured by such glaring contradictions.

Numerous interpolations testify to the way in which the gospels have grown by gradual accretions. One of the most important passages in the gospels is the last charge of Christ to his apostles, sometimes called the *Magna Charta* of the church: "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them," etc. No words are more frequently quoted or more impressively emphasised; they are the foundation and boast of all missionary enterprise. Yet the whole of this solemn and imposing passage is most certainly a late addition belonging to the time when the doctrine of the Trinity and the present form of baptism had come into use. Chapters X. and XI. of Acts prove to demonstration that the disciples had no knowledge of this charge, always acted contrary to it, and never baptized in the name of the Trinity. I was not a little surprised when I first recognised this barefaced forgery. A similar forgery closes the second gospel, with this staggering addendum: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe, in my name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." These preposterous declarations are their own condemnation. They that believe are many, but not one is followed by those signs; not one dare drink poison or take up serpents. The verse on the three witnesses in First of John is so patent a fraud that the revised version has left it out. Yet this passage is read every year in every church as the word of God. It is so useful in upholding the fiction of the Trinity that it will not readily be given up.

Among the legendary passages may be mentioned: the temptations of Christ by the Devil, the transfiguration, sending a legion of devils into thousands of pigs, cursing the fig-tree for having no fruit in winter; many details of the passion such as the trial by night, the prisoner struck in open court, Pilate washing his hands, acknowledging the innocence of a prisoner he condemns to death, the darkness over the whole earth, the rending of the veil of the temple, the earthquake, and the dead coming out of their graves.

But of all the puzzles in the New Testament nothing has affected me more deeply than two dis-

inct prophecies of the end of the world. One is in the Gospel:—

"And immediately after the tribulation of those days [of the destruction of Jerusalem] the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be moved; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty; and he shall send his angels with a trumpet and a great voice, and they shall gather his elect [only his elect?] from the four winds from the farthest part of heaven to the utmost bounds of them. Amen I say to you that this generation shall not pass away till all these things be done; heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knoweth, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father."

The other is in 1 Thess.:—

"This we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we be ever with the Lord."

No prophecies could be more explicit or more emphatic. It is impossible to mistake their meaning. Within that generation the world was to come to an end, the human race to disappear. Christ was to return to earth and take the elect with him into the clouds. These weird prophecies have proved to be pure delusions; that generation has long passed away and the Son of man has not come; the prophecies are glaringly false, heaven and earth have not passed away but his words have! Paul boasts that he had received a special revelation and had been raised up to the third heaven; but these exalted favors did not save him from blundering lamentably in his solemn prophecy, just as he had blundered in asserting that the grain of wheat must die ere it be quickened. When I reflect on these strange aberrations of the human mind my feeling is one of extreme surprise how for so many years I could publicly read in the church these prophecies of the consummation of the world and the second advent without seeing their falsity. This is a proof of the extreme difficulty of erasing from the mind impressions made in childhood, and it accounts for the acute struggle the priests are waging for definite religious education. They know perfectly well that they have no chance with the adults; that their only hope of keeping Christianity going is to instil it into the minds of the young before the development of their reasoning powers.

The shipwreck of my confidence in the Bible necessarily carried with it all trust in the Catechism, the doctrines of which are mainly derived from it. The first chapter deals with faith, and lays down in most peremptory fashion a long array of propositions which are pure assumptions. Not one of them can a reflective and independent mind assent to. The first statement is "God made me." Many years ago I asked myself: Does he also make the blind, the cripples, the deaf mutes, the idiots, the monsters? If so, they are no credit to their Maker; and if we blame the mother of a contraband child she might reply: Don't blame me; God made it. The reasons given why God made us are purely gratuitous. And we are made "to the image of God," who is said to be a spirit, though he walked and talked in the garden and breathed into the nostrils of a clay figure. This figure then became a living "soul," a single, not a duplicate, being; Dust thou art and into dust thou (not thy body) shalt return.

From the time of the Machabees, who sought in another world the justice they failed to obtain in this, the "life" of man has become a separable entity, the "soul," and lies at the root of the entire

Christian system. Science knows of living things, but not of life or soul as a distinct entity; science knows only nature and the inscrutable energy inherent in it, but knows nothing above nature, nothing supernatural; in its eyes a personal God, a separable soul or spirit, are figments of the mind. God is said to be "the supreme Spirit who exists of himself"—fine words without meaning. If we examine the God of theology we find but a magnified man. "We cannot transcend our own nature even in imagination, nor can we endow our God with any other attributes than we ourselves possess. When we seek to penetrate the mystery of the infinite we see nothing but our own shadow and hear nothing but the echo of our own voice. As we are so are our gods, and what man worships is what he himself would be. Man created God in his own image, in the image of man created he him, and then became the worshiper and slave of his own creation." As is God in theology so is the soul; it is but an idle dream, a mirage, springing from a love of this life and a desire to see again deceased friends. Immortality is a figment. All analogy is against it. All dies in nature, and there is no resurrection, only transformation. After death how could we see without eyes, hear without ears, think without a brain? The brain is the instrument of thought and consciousness, and when the brain is dead and in dissolution thought and consciousness are impossible. We have no knowledge of thought existing apart from a brain or organism. All assertions to the contrary are pure assumptions. Mind by itself has no existence. Is, then, our personality to be destroyed? Why not? Is it painful for a man to go to sleep? The fear of losing one's personality springs from excessive self-love. When everything dies and goes into dissolution, is it not presumptuous in man to deem himself too great to be lost, as Mr. Blatchford puts it, and claim to be an exception in the vast universe of beings?

The Providence of God and the survival of the soul are the two pillars sustaining the edifice of Christianity, and it is often thought that when they collapse all religion must fall. This is an error. Religion, in its proper sense, the feeling of brotherhood, is imperishable; the regard for mercy, justice, truth can never fail. Supernaturalism may come to an end and it could not do so too soon. It has been the bane of man from the first. If we believe the records, the first murder was the fruit of religion and throughout its long career it has been the great divider of men, causing jealousy, hatred, and war throughout the world. That supernaturalism is unnecessary to man's well-being is proved by the marvellous progress of Japan, which, thanks to its agnosticism and its forty years of secular education, has attained a degree of civilisation which no Christian country has ever reached.

It is impossible to advert to all the curious or unreasonable statements in the Catechism; a few must suffice. Faith is said to be "*a gift of God*."—A patent fallacy; faith is a gift of the parents and the result of schooling. God never gives the Catholic faith to Protestant or Moslem children. It is admitted that God is a person. Then the father is a person, and the son and the spirit, making four persons together.

"*Jesus Christ is truly man*." This has always puzzled me seeing he has not a human personality. Can there be a man who is not a human person? When Jesus said he did not know the day of judgment, we are told by the reconcilers that he spoke as a man. How can he speak as a man if he is not a human person? And if at one time he speaks as man, at another as God, how shall we know when his words are divine?

"*His precious blood is the price by which we were ransomed*." Mankind having become slaves of the Devil by Adam's sin, Jesus has come forward and procured our emancipation by paying the price of our ransom, his own blood, into the hands as it were, of the fiend—a singular commercial transaction, to say the least!

"He descended into hell," after saying to one of the thieves: "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

"He sitteth at the right hand of God the father," which is explained thus: not that God the father has hands, for he is a pure spirit; but that Christ as God is equal to the father and *as man is in the highest place in heaven*. Who will explain the explanation? Words, words, words!

"From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead." The famous judgment was to take place within the generation of his hearers. It is now many centuries overdue and may be booked for the Greek Kalends. Those very sweet words of the judgment: "Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire," need not terrify us.

"The Holy Ghost proceeds from the father and the son." That is the celebrated decision of the *filioque*, evidently a question of important practical bearing! It is enough however to sunder to this day the Greek Church from the Latin in two bitterly hostile camps.

"The Church is Catholic or universal because she subsists in all ages, teaches all nations and is the one ark of salvation for all." These are three distinctly false statements. The Church of Rome is not really Catholic. She obtained that title at the time the Roman empire was supposed to comprise the whole earth. The earth was then small; the existence of America and Australia were unsuspected, and the teeming populations of Asia and Africa were unknown. A church to be Catholic should be importantly present in all parts of the world. Asia and Africa hold two thirds of the world's population, one thousand millions, among whom Rome does not count one per cent. The so-called Catholic Church would be a correct title. Buddhism has a better title to be called Catholic, counting more years and more members. The Church of Rome is the ark of salvation for all, not like Noah's ark for eight only.

Of the existence of purgatory three proofs are given, neither of which is in the least convincing. The souls in purgatory are usually called "the poor souls." They are indeed the poor; the rich are not there, at least not for long. Their money or that of their friends pays for many masses which act as a bribe on the judge and obtain their speedy release. The poor, unable to bribe the judge, must serve their time. Such is heavenly justice!

"They that die in mortal sin shall go to hell for all eternity," to a hell of physical fire, be it understood. Even after the last judgment, when no useful purpose could be further served, the fire of hell shall continue for ever—which is pure vindictiveness. Such is the awful doctrine to which men, otherwise sane and humane, can subscribe, and the moloch who inflicts such tortures is not a fiend, he is called a loving father! To such a degree will early education prejudice and darken the human mind.

"On the day of the judgment we shall all rise with the same bodies," even those who have been devoured by sharks or eaten by cannibals. The angels will probably provide them with garments and carry them by the hair of their heads, like Habacuc, to the imaginary valley of Jehosaphat.

"The scripture says of the happiness of heaven, that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him." This statement is simply a lie. The words occur in the Old Testament and in the New, and in both cases they refer to the gospel and not to heaven. Yet these words never fail to fill a large place in every book and sermon on the supposed rewards of the saved.

"It is a mortal sin to neglect to hear mass on Sundays." This accounts for the high figure of church attendance Catholics are able to show. It is Mass or hell.

"Baptism makes us children of God." But if a child has been privately baptized, thereby becoming a child of God, he is nevertheless to be exorcised. Just think of casting the Devil out of a child of God!

The presence of Christ in the Eucharist is explained by the term transubstantiation, the substance of bread being changed into the body of Christ. For

many years did I try to unravel this puzzle. The crux of the difficulty is the existence of a substance. Is there such a thing as the substance of bread, or the substance of a body? Sound philosophy does not admit it, but Catholics have need of it and teach it. They take the words, "This is my body" literally, though the term often imports analogy and not identity, as in "The rock was Christ." And on this gratuitous assumption, that the substance of bread is separable from its accidents which fall under the senses, they build this formidable doctrine and theatrical pageantry of the Eucharist. Reflecting on the sacrifice of the Eucharist I used to say to myself: Why should sacrifice be offered to God at all? The All-Perfect cannot be wroth, nor can he be bribed by presents. A sacrifice is an offering made to a judge or king to avert his anger or obtain a favor; it is an attempt to corrupt, and seems essentially immoral. The practice of sacrifices carries us back to the barbarous times of fetiches and witch-doctors. The rationale of the Christian sacrifice baffles all attempts at explanation. God offers himself to himself to placate himself! How the father can send his son, thereby treating him as a subordinate while he is his equal, or how a human sacrifice can be acceptable to him, defies all comprehension. And this utterly incomprehensible, yea unreasonable ceremony, is the chief rite of the Catholic Church. To reason, it seems odious; to faith, it is admirable.

The effects of anointing the sick are thus described in the words of St. James: "The prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he be in sins they shall be forgiven him." If anointing the sick forgives sin, then the confession and priestly absolution are unnecessary; and, if the Lord shall raise him up, the Peculiar People are justified in declining the services of a doctor. As the forgiveness of sins is an invisible fact, it cannot be challenged; but when we are told that the Lord will raise up the sick we can test the truth of the assertion. The Catholic priests always anoint the sick. Does the Lord raise them up? If so, the longevity among the Catholics must be much higher than among other religions; in fact, they should never die; but this is not the case.

(To be concluded.)

Correspondence.

THE STATE AND EDUCATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Will you allow me as an anti-supernaturalist, as a believer that my reason is no more supernatural than the bubbling of the fountain, to say that I do not agree with your condemnation of Mr. Birrell's Bill? I have the greatest possible contempt for the system of education it will establish, but nevertheless I think it is the only possible State system, because it corresponds with the chaos of beliefs and disbeliefs that prevails throughout the country. For the purpose of argument I will accept the statement that is often made, that a majority of the people of England would, if priestly influence (including Nonconformist priestcraft) were eliminated, accept what is called the secular solution, although this assumption implies that we have a right to expect that this priestly influence will be removed. But would the secular system thus established by a majority be fair and good? Again, I will leave out of account the wishes of the minority, or supposed minority, who desire that their children should be taught that God did this, that, and the other thing. Assuming it is right that their children should not hear about their God in the public school, is the expurgated neutral system a desirable one? Remember, it must not be positively Secularist. All histories may be revised so as to leave out statements about the ancient Britons not knowing "the true God"; all references in literature to supernaturalism may be either deleted or passed over without explanation; but to adopt the historical or naturalistic method of treating the evolution of ideas and society would be contrary to justice, for that really involves positive dogmatic anti-supernaturalism. Anthropology, cosmology, biology must be reduced to the recapitulation of unco-ordinated facts, for to establish a system of teaching that would destroy the Church's belief in the Fall and the

Atonement would be to do for Secularism what the Churches want the State to do for Christianity.

What does all this come to? To this: that under a State system of education there can only be a jumble of discordant teaching—there can only be that beautiful thing we English call compromise, which consists in shutting our eyes to all contradictions, saying one thing to-day and un-saying it to-morrow. More than this, the State system, by establishing the rule of the priest-led majority, involves that the least possible freedom will be given to those that are against the priests. Personally I do not believe in a neutral, so-called Secularism. I would as soon send my child to a Church school as to a school where no explanation of life and its meaning can be attempted. The whole spirit of education is dependent on the acceptance or rejection of supernaturalism. Only where the true spirit of naturalism prevails will a child learn to think rightly. That can never be expected under any fair State system controlled by the majority. Therefore until we put down State education and obtain real Free Trade in education we shall never get true progress. Not one argument for State education but what is equally applicable to State religion. If we have the one we shall have the other. The State, as a State, is as unfitted to establish a philosophy of education as to formulate a philosophy of religion; and unless we know what it signifies there can be no true education. What is given at present in the public schools is not worthy of the name of education. It is simply parrot-drilling. There is no thinking.

TRUE PROGRESS.

[The writer of this letter is an able journalist who wishes to remain anonymous. There is a good deal of truth, we believe, in what he says. There are some things, however, open to objection. For instance, he overlooks the fact that the non-inclusion of religious teaching in schools paid for by all citizens, and used by all children, does not involve its exclusion from the world. There are other places and other opportunities for it, if parents and religious teachers really desire to see it imparted. Nor do we see why secular education should involve a drastic revision of all historical and other literature. But this is a point which we have dealt with elsewhere this week. For the rest, we would observe that the question of the justice and value of any system of education carried on by the State is outside the proper limits of the present controversy. Mr. Birrell's Bill, its friends, and its opponents, take State education for granted; and discussion is futile except on that understanding. But of course the question raised by "True Progress," as it was raised by Herbert Spencer, remains when the present controversy is settled.—EDITOR.]

GIRARD COLLEGE, PHILADELPHIA.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR.—As your footnote to my letter in the last issue of the *Freethinker* contains statements which, I think, are not justified by facts, perhaps you will kindly allow space in your next to enable me to point them out.

That "the abuse of the Stephen Girard Trust is often denounced in the American Freethought papers" does not, of course, in the absence of *proof*, amount to anything. "Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good," is excellent advice, and applies just as much to this case as it did when the libelling of dead Freethinkers by Torrey was examined into, and exposed, by you.

That the Trustees of the College are true to their Trust there is not the slightest shadow of a doubt, and their actions prove it.

When Girard drew up his will he gave most particular instructions indeed as to how the College was to be managed, but he had the good sense to perceive that it was not possible to enumerate everything in connection therewith, so he therefore had these words inserted to cover all such omissions: "In relation to the organisation of the College and its appendages (the chapel built in 1877 is one of the latter), I leave, necessarily, many details to the Mayor, Aldermen, and Citizens of Philadelphia and their successors"; which undoubtedly conferred upon them the authority to introduce, if they thought fit, religious instruction. This they have done, as we have seen; and there is certainly nothing in the Will prohibiting them from doing it.

It is a curious fact that the idea somehow got abroad and became very prevalent indeed among Freethinkers on both sides of the Atlantic, that Stephen Girard was himself also a Freethinker; but this is an assumption entirely without evidence in support of it.

Only meagre details of his life have been made known, and nothing whatever to show that, during manhood at least, he was ever a member of any religious sect. He probably preferred to remain outside of them all, as he was indifferent to all of the warring sects; but it is on record that the people whom he liked best were the Quakers.

And now as to Stephen Girard's intention. Had he been as much opposed to all forms of religious teaching as he was to the admission of ministers to his College, would he not

have made an equally emphatic pronouncement against that as he did in the other case? I think so.

As a Freethinker myself, I have examined dispassionately the (to me) unjustifiable charge made against the College, and I am of opinion that, up to the present at any rate, it has not been proved.

F. S.

[Stephen Girard was always publicly represented as a Freethinker by Colonel Ingersoll and the leaders of American Freethought, and we are not aware that the Christians have ever claimed him. His fondness for the Quakers proves nothing. Thomas Paine was fond of the Quakers, and desired to be interred in the Quaker burial-ground; and he was a Freethinker, anyway. Stephen Girard surely did not exclude ministers of religion from the College out of mere personal spite. His object must have been to ensure the carrying out of the intention of his will, which was (see the extract printed in the *Freethinker*, May 13, pp. 297, 298) to keep the tender minds of the children free from religious controversy, so that they might be trained in "the purest principles of morality" and left to adopt whatever religious tenets "their mature reason may enable them to prefer." This appears to us to mean that the education of the children was to be secular—not irreligious, but non-religious. Certainly "details" had to be left to the trustees, but not details in contravention of the founder's intention. And the erection of a chapel, the carrying on of religious exercises, and even the introduction of paid religious teaching, does seem to us such a contravention. At the same time, we recognise the full right of others to differ from us, and by inserting this correspondent's letters we have at least proved that.—EDITOR.]

MIRACLES.

We do not say that a miracle is impossible, we say only that no miracle has ever yet been proved. Let a worker of miracles come forward to-morrow with pretensions serious enough to deserve examination. Let us suppose him to announce that he is able to raise a dead man to life. What would be done? A committee would be appointed, composed of physiologists, physicians, chemists, and persons accustomed to exact investigation; a body would then be selected which the committee would assure itself was really dead; and a place would be chosen where the experiment was to take place. Every precaution would be taken to leave no opening for uncertainty; and if, under these conditions, the restoration to life was effected, a probability would be arrived at which would be almost equal to certainty. An experiment, however, should always admit of being repeated. What a man has done once he should be able to do again, and in miracles there can be no question of ease or difficulty. The performer would be requested to repeat the operation under other circumstances upon other bodies; and if he succeeded on every occasion, two points would be established: first, that there may be in this world such things as supernatural operations; and, secondly, that the power to perform them is delegated to, or belongs to, particular persons.—But who does not perceive that no miracle was ever performed under such conditions as these?—*Renan*.

TO AGE.

Welcome, old friend! These many years
Have we lived door by door:
The Fates have laid aside their shears
Perhaps for some few more.

I was indocile at an age
When better boys were taught,
But thou at length hast made me sage,
If I am sage in aught.

Little I know from other men,
Too little they from me,
But thou hast pointed well the pen
That writes these lines to thee.

Thanks for expelling Fear and Hope,
One vile, the other vain;
One's scourge, the other's telescope,
I shall not see again.

Rather what lies before my feet
My notice shall engage.
He who hath braved Youth's dizzy heat
Dreads not the frost of Age. —*Landor*.

Among those who attempt to exist without human sympathy, the pure and tender-hearted perish through the intensity and passion of their search after its communities, when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt. All else, selfish, blind, and torpid, are those unforeseeing multitudes who constitute, together with their own, the lasting misery and loneliness of the world. Those who love not their fellow-beings, live unfruitful lives, and prepare for their old age a miserable grave.—*Shelley*.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

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

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OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 3.15 and 6.15, J. Rowney.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Rushcroft-road, Brixton, 11.30, Ernest Edwin; Brockwell Park, 3.15 and 6, Ernest Edwin.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road, Dalston): 11.30, Mr. Keen, "Conversions Made Easy."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill, Hampstead): 3.30, W. J. Ramsey, "Is there a God?" 6.30, a Meeting.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (The Grove, Stratford): 7, W. J. Ramsey, "The Gospel of Freethought."

WOOLWICH BRANCH N. S. S. (Beresford-square): 11.30, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.

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