

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XXVI.—No 23

SUNDAY, JUNE 10, 1906

PRICE TWOPENCE

*When shall the saner, softer politics  
Whereof we dream, have play in each proud land,  
And patriotism, grown God-like, scorn to stand  
Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and seas?*

—THOMAS HARDY

## “The Future of the Bible.”

F. W. ROBERTSON used to say that when two men are talking politics they are generally wrangling about some mere party question. At the present time political wrangling is embittered by religious prejudices. On the question of what place, if any, religion should occupy in the education provided by the State, the political world is split up into three or four irreconcilable factions, and we are face to face with the prospect of a continuation of the wretched conflict over many long and weary years. The undeniable truth is that religion has always been an excessively controversial subject. In Christendom men have ever been fighting about the Bible. There has never been agreement as to the truth and meaning of the Word of God. It is this lack of agreement that lies at the root of the bitter controversy now raging over the Education Bill, and it is the same lack that accounts for the existence of the well-nigh innumerable religious sects. All Christians profess to believe in the Bible, and they all insist upon some form of religious instruction in day schools. Yet how vastly they differ among themselves as to what religion really is, and as to how it ought to be taught. The Non-conformists advocate what they term “simple Bible teaching,” or “unsectarian religious instruction”; the Church of England argues that religion cannot be properly taught except by means of her own catechisms and confessions; and the Catholic Church is equally convinced that Christianity is imperilled if her version of it is not drilled into the minds of the children. There are two main forms or types of the Christian religion—the Catholic and the Protestant. It would be a mistake to imagine that even the Catholic representation of it is characterised by a complete and harmonious unanimity, while it is well known that the countless Protestant versions of it, at least many of them, are as far apart as the poles. Bearing this in mind, we can readily see that the educational problem can never be satisfactorily solved as long as the religious element is included in it.

Setting the problem of education aside, we are still confronted by the fact that the Bible is a book respecting which those who believe in it cannot be of one mind. Some believe that every word between its two covers is absolutely true. Others reject large portions of it as of no religious value whatever, and regard the remainder as only relatively or approximately reliable. Others look upon it as a purely human document, of inestimable interest and value as such, but possessing no final authority on the matters with which it deals. Even within the Churches themselves we meet with this diversity of views. The Rev. T. C. Fry, D.D., Head Master of Berkhamstead School, has published a book entitled *Old Testament History for Schools*, in which

he “effectually strips the narrative of its supernatural element.” Dr. Fry, though in Holy Orders, is courageous enough to eliminate the miraculous from early Jewish history, and to characterise some Biblical ideas as “very primitive.” Canon Hensley Henson boldly states that “it cannot for one moment be questioned that many causes have conduced to work something like a revolution in educated Christian thought with respect to the sacred writings of Christianity.” He speaks of “the incredible, puerile, or demoralising narratives which the Old Testament contains,” and then admits that the masses of the people “have no other course open to them, when the difficulty is brought home, either by their own intelligence or by the action of others, than the violent, unhappy course of repudiating the Bible altogether. The transition is prompt and obvious in untutored minds from a sacred volume, too sacred for discussion, to a pack of lies too gross for toleration.” This is wonderfully plain speaking on the part of a clergyman. The Canon maintains that there are many passages in the Bible which cannot be read in public, and that there ought to be an expurgated edition of the volume.

For this outspoken utterance Canon Henson has been severely blamed by various theologians, including the Bishop of London, who ridicule the suggestion as to an expurgated edition of the Holy Bible. Even Mr. Birrell, from his place in Parliament, asserted the other day that “any such notion as the use in our schools of expurgated editions, so that the children might not be offended by any reference to Divine Providence, would be received with a yell of derision and disgust from one end of the country to the other,” and that “no Government could survive for a single hour such an absurd, fantastic, and babyish proposal as that.” The Minister of Education, in that part of his speech, was clearly speaking to the gallery—the gallery of the Liberal majority; but an honest, straightforward appeal to the country would quickly disillusionise him. The masses of the people are totally indifferent as regards the point at issue. But the fact remains, in any case, that literary criticism has successfully discredited the historical portions of the Old Testament, and created serious doubts as to the historicity of most of the events recorded in the New. Mr. Birrell may not be aware of this, and the Bishop of London may refuse to believe it, but all Biblical scholars know it quite well.

In view of what literary criticism has already accomplished Canon Henson asks, “What will be the place of the Bible in the future?” This question he discusses in No. 20 of *Essays for the Times*. As a critic Canon Henson is heroically loyal to the truth; but as a theologian he is still in bondage to tradition. In the latter capacity, he firmly upholds traditional notions, and refuses to admit the light thrown upon the subject by Science. According to him the Bible will always hold a paramount place in the life of the Christian Society. He advances three broad considerations which seem to justify such an opinion. The first is that “the Bible remains, after all the educational discussions of our time, the best manual of fundamental morality of which experience has knowledge.” The Canon does not think there are any people who will resent this statement. As a matter of fact there are thousands who will vehem-

ently resent it, because of a deep-seated conviction that it is untrue. We hold, in the first place, that the morality of the Bible is vitiated by its union with religion, or by its subordination to the supernatural. In the second place, the morality of the Bible is extremely unfortunate in its historical illustrations. Are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, if they ever lived, such characters as can be held up as models to the present generation? Can we honestly invite our children to imitate David and Solomon? Are those "the famous examples" by which, according to the Canon, Bible "morality is constantly illustrated?" "Principles," he adds, "must be embodied in examples if they are to bite into the youthful memory and become an abiding influence on subsequent life," but there are very few such examples in the Bible. In the third place, we deny that the moral precepts contained in the Bible are superior to all others. Nay more, we are prepared to affirm that there exist non-Biblical moral codes which are superior to the Biblical one. What about the Precepts of Ptah-hotep and the Negative Confession? What about the Babylonian cuneiform texts which come to us from the library of Assurbanipal, and the ethical ideas which they embody? Surely Canon Henson cannot be ignorant of the fact that the Egyptians and Babylonians occupied a higher moral level than the children of Israel, and that consequently embodied in the literature of the former are to be found systems of morality superior to the one preserved in the Bible. It may be too much to expect a dignitary of the Church to admit such a fact; but is it not too late in the day to assert the opposite? It is historically false to state that "the familiar histories of the Old Testament do serve the purpose of moral teaching with quite unequalled success," because nothing is more indisputable than that Christian nations are not ethically better and nobler than all the other nations of the world.

The other two considerations advanced by Canon Henson as proofs of the supremacy of the Bible are not so important. He claims that "the Bible is still, what it has always been throughout Christian history, the best corrective of ecclesiastical corruption;" and yet history stands up to testify that it has not corrected ecclesiastical corruptions, for they abound at this hour, and have abounded in all ages. He also avers that "the Bible, and herein, of course, specially, though not exclusively, the New Testament is perhaps the most effectual cheque we have on the materialistic tendencies of modern life." In dealing with this consideration the worthy Canon waxes exceedingly angry, and tilts against anarchy and anarchists with all the force of his being. His fury knows no bounds. But, as is the custom with angry men, he runs into absurd extremes, and makes exaggerated and regrettable statements. I am not an anarchist; but it is simply untrue to describe the creed of anarchy as a "creed of hell." Anarchy, as I understand it, is a protest against the tyranny and injustice of existing governments, and the fundamental article in its creed is that mankind would be much happier and more prosperous in every way were all centralised governments abolished. But the point of importance is that the social conditions which make anarchy possible exist and flourish under distinctly Christian governments. In Russia you have nominally the most Christian government in Europe; and yet the social conditions which obtain in that country are unspeakably bad. These conditions obtain, not because of the disappearance of the religious bases of morality, but because the bases of morality are religious instead of secular. It is because morality is rooted in the heavens, far enough out of sight, that it is so grossly disregarded in every day life. Give morality a human basis, and a human motive, and a human end, and you will strengthen and glorify it. Canon Henson is perfectly right in saying that "morality must be learned, and that myriads of our people have never learned it, and are adrift in society without principles or convictions, helpless to withstand the bad passions of their own natures or the evil suggestions of other men"; but he does

not inform us why it is that in Christian countries morality is not effectively taught. Morality is not effectually taught because it is based on supernatural belief, and not on natural knowledge, in consequence of which the disappearance of supernatural belief is very apt to be followed by a distinct weakening of morality.

"Our conclusion, then, is fairly evident. In the future the Bible will be otherwise regarded, and otherwise used than in the past." In the future the Bible will be employed, not as a religious and moral text-book, but as an interesting document in the scientific study of mythologies and religious rituals, and of the growth and development of ethics among the Jews. The criticism to which the New Testament is now being subjected is seriously shaking men's faith in the teachings of the Church, and causing them to turn to Science for the guidance they require. I now close with the following admission made by Canon Henson:—

"If it were indeed the case that an honest application of sound, critical principles to the Christian documents were to result in such drastic changes in the established Christian belief, with reference to the Founder of Christianity, as to strip him of his moral uniqueness and of his spiritual primacy, it seems to the present writer inevitable that any effective belief in his Divinity would certainly and properly, after a longer or shorter interval, perish out of Christendom."

J. T. LLOYD.

### A New History of Freethought.—I.

*The History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century.*  
By A. W. Benn. 2 vols. Longmans & Co.

It may be taken as a healthful sign of the times that a work like Mr. Benn's *History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century* should be issued by a well-established publishing firm like Messrs. Longmans and Co. For publishers do not usually put forth expensive works unless there is likely to be found a public ready to purchase; and therefore the issue of an expensive work of this character may be taken as a new proof of the growth of Freethought among the more thoughtful section of the community. Nor does Mr. Benn write as a critic of "Rationalism," nor even as a mere chronicler. He writes as a friend; his history is the work of an advocate, one who chronicles with pleasure the advance made, and finds in his record the promise of more decisive victories to be won in the future. And for this very reason criticism will occupy a larger space in this notice than it would otherwise have done. Written by an enemy or a non-sympathetic person, one would have been content to lay stress on the good points in the book, and merely indicate its deficiencies. But Mr. Benn's book is, on the whole, so good that one cannot subdue the feeling of disappointment at its not being better. His generalisations are usually sound, his delineations of periods helpful, his criticisms of various writers such as Spencer and Huxley keen and incisive. And so one rises from the reading of the work with the feeling that while written by some it would have deserved nothing but praise, yet written by Mr. Benn it ought to have been a great deal more complete and satisfying than it is.

And first of all, why a history of "Rationalism"? Historically "Rationalism" has not meant what Mr. Benn means by the word, but has been associated with a phase of religious—Christian—thought. None of the people—so far as my memory serves—whose opinions are chronicled ever called themselves Rationalists. The vast majority of them called themselves Freethinkers, and both by them and their opponents the movement they were associated with was called the Freethought Movement. Mr. Benn's book is really a history of Freethought, and one would have preferred this name on the title page. The author's justification of the use of "Rationalism" is that it is less purely negative in

its implications; but the soundness of the defence may well be doubted when it is observed that Mr. Benn has to defend "Rationalism" against all the misunderstandings to which "Freethought" is exposed. Of course the enemies of Freethought speak of it as being purely negative, but Freethinkers generally are not in the habit of going to Christians for a trustworthy account either of their party names or modes of thinking; and if they were, a study of the instances of religious untruth and unfairness to opponents given by Mr. Benn would be well calculated to effect a prompt cure.

Although Mr. Benn's work is a history of nineteenth century Rationalism, not by any means the least interesting portion is the preliminary section dealing with the Deistic movement of the eighteenth century. Here full justice is done to the principal Deistic writers, although the statement that the "chief intellectual force of England was arrayed on the side of traditional Christianity" needs some qualification. Mr. Benn's own list, in fact, proves as much. With writers like Hobbes, Shaftesbury, Tindal, Collins, Mandeville, Morgan, Middleton, Hume, Bolingbroke, and Gibben, to go no farther afield, and with the amount of scepticism that one may detect in numerous other writers, anti-traditional Christian forces make a tolerable show. Nor can I quite agree with Mr. Benn as to "the extraordinary freedom of thought enjoyed by Englishmen during the first half of the eighteenth century." To begin with, doubt was expressed principally under a religious guise—Deism. Next, the fact that one can gather so many indications of unbelief among writers who obviously lack the boldness for direct expression would indicate strong religious pressure, legal or social. The number of attacks on Christianity, published anonymously, is a further proof to the same end, authors not usually being wishful to forego credit for work done where no punishment is to be feared. As it is, without mentioning punishments inflicted for heresy at the end of the seventeenth century, we find that Anthony Collins only avoided arrest by a timely retirement to Holland; Woolston, for publishing his *Six Discourses on Miracles*, was sentenced to a year's imprisonment, and fined £100, dying in prison four years later owing to inability to pay the money. Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious* was "Presented" by the Grand Jury of Middlesex, as was also Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* in 1723 and 1728. And a little later Peter Annet, for attacking the authenticity of the Pentateuch, was sentenced to one month's imprisonment in Newgate, a year's hard labor in Bridewell, and to stand twice in the pillory. Tindall only escaped persecution by writing anonymously. More might be added, but these instances, together with the expressed opinion of a writer like Bishop Berkely that blasphemy should be punished as high treason, are sufficient to show that Mr. Benn's statement needs qualifying somewhat.

Still, it would be unfair to Mr. Benn not to state explicitly that full justice is done to the Deistic movement in England, and there is a welcome absence of the patronising air affected by some writers on the subject, notably Mr. Leslie Stephen in his *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. Mr. Benn is also on sound lines in declining to treat the Deistic movement as a failure. That it did not perpetuate itself in that explicit form was involved in the nature of the controversy itself. For it was in its very nature a transient form of thought. On the one side, thinkers who began as Deists were logically bound to end with a frame of mind more decisively non-Christian or anti-Christian. And as a matter of fact it is easy to trace the development of Freethought from the Deistic to the Atheistic stage. And on the other hand, much of the Deistic position was later taken up and incorporated in Christian teaching. Many of the Deists would find little to cavil at in many of the presentations of "Advanced" Christianity, save certain expressions, and on the other hand a great many modern Christians would easily concede much of that for which the Deists were contending. What the

Deists had succeeded in doing was in spreading abroad a general, if somewhat vague sense of the untrustworthiness of Christianity, making scepticism much more a common property of the people than it had ever been before, and so preparing the way for the more cultured and scholarly attack on the one side, and for the more popular work of Thomas Paine and his successors.

Mr. Benn's account of the influence and writings of German and French writers of the latter half of the eighteenth century is both lucid and adequate, but as I have said, I am laying stress on points of difference rather than of agreement, and so pass on to other matters. One feels at this point that more justice might have been done to the influence of the French Revolution on the constructive side than is actually set forth. That this influence was indefinite rather than definite does not make it the less important, and does make it the more necessary for careful study by any historian of modern thought. Not that there is any particular lack of even definite data for the historian. The number of "Corresponding Societies" and similar bodies formed both in England and Scotland, the extent to which the French Revolution figures in orthodox attacks on Freethought, are sufficiently numerous for the purpose. Paine, it is true, wrote in the main for a popular audience, but the immense success of Paine's writings among the democracy certainly argues that he was working on ground tolerably well prepared. Mr. Benn, by the way, refers to the language of Paine concerning the Bible as "notoriously violent." One may be excused the belief that the violence is far more "notorious" than actual; and Mr. Benn's tacit endorsement of the charge is somewhat discountenanced by the immediately following remark that it was not more so than "Cardinal Newman's attacks on the Roman Church before his conversion, or on Protestantism after his conversion." And certainly Paine's tone was not nearly so violent as a great many of the replies to the *Age of Reason* that received sanction in high places.

This brings me, however, to what I conceive to be the central weakness of Mr. Benn's work, which is the comparative, and sometimes the total, ignoring of the more popular side of the history of Freethought. The volumes bear all the marks of a writer who has lived in a too academic atmosphere, and so misses the significance of those broad popular movements that are often as powerful in moulding thought as the works of authoritative writers. In a work covering the period dealt with one would certainly have looked for some detailed account of the work and influence of Robert Owen; yet he escapes with but the barest mention. The wide circulation of his writings, his association with many leading men (English and foreign), his generous help to the cause of education, the universal attention aroused by his schools and workshops, his attacks on religion as an obstacle to social reform, with his drastic expression that all the religions of the world were but so many forms of geographical insanity, all contribute to making him a most interesting figure, an exact appreciation of whose labor would have been most helpful. One regrets such lacuna all the more from the feeling that Mr. Benn could have given us what we need, and because, as Mr. Benn says, the subject of his work has been "systematically ignored by nearly every historian of modern English life and thought." Added to which these deficiencies detract both from the symmetry and usefulness of the history. It is almost as though a work giving us a history of the political thought of the nineteenth century concerned itself only with the writings of political philosophy and left unnoticed the popular agitations and the like that have reacted upon and influenced the writers themselves. Philosophy is a useful thing, but even philosophy is not completely insulated from the broad current of general life and feeling.

C. COHEN.

(To be continued.)

## From Fiction to Fact;

OR,

### HOW I CEASED TO BE A CATHOLIC.—VI.

BY FRED. BONTE

(Late a Prison Minister.)

(Concluded from p. 348.)

IN the *rule of life* we are admonished, in the words of Christ, "to take up our cross daily"—words which Christ never uttered, seeing that they would have been meaningless, as the cross had not then been carried. These words, like so many others in the Gospel, were put into the mouth of Christ, many generations later, by admiring disciples. We are also urged "to imitate his virtues." This advice is an outrage on consistency and logic. If Christ is God, he can have neither virtues nor vices. If a virtuous god is an absurdity, it is absurd to speak of the virtues of Christ, who is God, or to ask us to imitate them unless we admit a human personality in him, which were a damnable heresy. This statement of the catechism shows how confused are the notions even of learned Catholics on the personality of Christ.

These quotations from the catechism give us some idea of theology, whereof the catechism is an abstract. Theology has been called the Queen of Sciences. Is it entitled to be called a science at all? A science rests on data that are certain, and proved by experience. Theology is purely speculative, and is fittingly called divinity. To divine is to guess, to conjecture. a Doctor of Divinity is simply an adept at guessing; divination is his employment. Consequently there is no-unity of doctrine among the theologians who run the multifarious religions, except on one point—the collection. Even on fundamental dogmas they are all at loggerheads, and excommunicate each other. With science the case is just the opposite. Scientists are all agreed on their main positions; geology, astronomy, biology are not divided into sects or parties like religions. And the reason is obvious. Scientists walk on the earth and deal with facts and experience; divines soar on the shifting clouds among castles in the air. Catholics aim at establishing universal unity of belief—a pure utopia—which, if it could be realised, would be the greatest calamity, for it would indubitably be the death of all investigation, and lead to intolerance and persecution. From the first, uniformity was a failure, though Christ earnestly prayed for it. Peter, Paul, and James held widely different views, though Paul has eventually given the lasting form to Christianity. It is held among Catholics that Peter was the acknowledged head of the Church in early times, though the existence of numerous sects in the East show to this day that no central authority existed. And many other prominent Catholic doctrines were unknown, such as the worship of Mary and other saints, the existence of purgatory, the practice of auricular confession. Who could imagine that Paul ever sat to hear confessions as priests do now?

During my gropings after truth I read several Catholic apologists, and observed that they rarely read or understand the case of their adversaries. Those who rage against Evolution, Materialism, and Atheism have not grasped the position or arguments of these. Atheists are invariably supposed to deny the existence of God. How could they logically deny that of which they can form no conception? Rationalists deem it dishonest to give their assent to what cannot be demonstrated, and are reviled for thinking so; yet in the last resort Catholics must fall back on reason: if they ask themselves why they hold their system, they must answer, My reason convinces me of its truth. In neglecting to grasp the case of their opponents, or rather in concealing it, they set up men of straw and overthrow them easily and triumphantly. How eloquently they prove that the universe did not make itself; that it is not the result of hazard, of a fortuitous concurrence of

atoms; that it is not eternal! They ignore the fact that Rationalists make no such foolish assertions. They do not profess to know the whence and the why of the universe. They are content not to know the unknowable, and modestly abstain from divining. But they spare no pains in endeavoring to unravel the secrets of nature. They recognise that nature has her mysteries, which are real, such as gravitation, life, electricity; while the mysteries of religion—the Trinity, heaven, hell, purgatory—are sheer fictions.

Much stress is laid by religious apologists on the spirit of prophecy as a support of their cause. But it is a striking fact that the Messianic prophecies all look forward to a glorious Messiah who would restore the kingdom of Israel. The apostles were full of these expectations, and deep was their disappointment when he whom they welcomed with "Hosannah to the Son of David!" came to a shameful end. The Jews, who knew their prophetic books and the spirit of the nation, asserted, and assert to this day, that the prophecies were not fulfilled in the Nazarene, and they still await their restored kingdom of Israel. Again have the prophecies miscarried in foretelling to the patriarchs a glorious future for their seed. The history of their descendants is one of disaster, captivity, and servitude. In the same manner has Christianity completely misjudged the future—no heavenly Jerusalem, no taking up into the clouds, no millennium. Christ did not foresee or foretell the crowning fact that one dominant character was to arise from Tarsus and, with fanatic zeal, give a new trend to his Gospel by carrying it to the Gentiles in opposition to his own word and the will of the apostles. He did not foresee or foretell that other dominant fact the political conversion of Constantine or the real conversion of Augustine, or the discovery of America, though he could foretell the discovery of a coin in the mouth of a fish. The prophetic stream all through the Bible is a dismal failure, where it is not a farce.

The efforts made to gain credit for Christianity out of our advanced civilisation are equally vain. The ignorance, mental slavery, and barbarism of the long Dark Ages are there to tell us of the fruits of Christianity when it was all-powerful. At the time of the French Revolution the country had been for centuries under the tutelage and government of the Catholic Church. All education was in the hands of the clergy, several prime ministers were cardinals, the Albigenses, the Waldenses, and the Huguenots had all been exterminated or forcibly converted. Here then, if ever, must be the Golden Age. How different are the facts! If we wish to know the deplorable state of ignorance, poverty, mental and physical oppression in which the French people grovelled we shall find a faithful and appalling picture of it in Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*. Our civilisation is in no way traceable to Christianity. Science has been our great civiliser. No progress was made till the period of the mechanical inventions: the printing press, the steam engine, the cotton mill, the telegraph, together with the advancement of knowledge in the physical sciences, in geology, in astronomy, in electricity. Franklin's lightning rod has stripped the thunder of its terrors. Of old fear made gods, but that time is past.

Thus year after year did reading, reflection, and discussion weaken the hold of the Catholic faith on me; day by day I became more impatient of its illusions, its shams, and its concealment. To unravel perplexities became a pleasure and a passion. Knowledge and truth were the objects of all my search. To continue to profess a religion which a long and conscientious study of its theory and practice had proved to be untenable was an impossibility, and I saw with pleasure the number of men, who seek the truth and follow it at all costs, increasing daily. Professor Goldwin Smith wrote as follows in the *Nineteenth Century*, October, 1891: "Apparently no small portion of the educated world in England has come to the conclusion that the evidences of supernatural religion have failed. In that case religion

must go, and we must look out for some other account of the universe and some other rule of life. We have no chance of moving in unison with the counsels of the Power, whatever it be, which rules the world, or of prospering accordingly except in keeping in the allegiance of truth."

I have heard of persons who experienced regret and pain as they found their religious convictions giving way. No such feelings have troubled me. My sensation has been one of relief and gratification as the darkness lifted and I saw at last clearly.

Some consider it injudicious to break through the social conventions and speak without reserve, thereby, perhaps, hurting somebody's feelings or disturbing his conscience. Others prefer the principle of the ancient axiom, "Fiat justitia ruat cælum"—"Let truth be spoken though the heavens should fall." These hold that the pursuit of truth, regardless of consequences, is the first and noblest duty of a rational being. If we are to live in an atmosphere of shams and make-beliefs let us give up all claims to morality, and say with Huxley, "In order that we may be strictly moral, before all things let us lie." Better things may be expected from men of an enlightened age and country. It behoves them to speak out the truth without stammering, even if it shake or uproot old convictions. The Hindoos and Chinese also have their convictions and consciences, but the missionaries make no scruple about disturbing these with their fictions and legends; neither should we be silent out of a false regard for the sensibilities of those who are still living in a world of phantoms. Without Christianity, the teeming ancient races of Eastern Asia have attained a state of social morality quite equal, if not superior, to that of Europe; and when we have discarded our effete traditions and fables we shall march on in perfect safety under the guidance of reason and common sense. Not that we should look forward to a speedy disappearance of ancient superstitions. "In my early days," says Spencer, "I constantly made the foolish supposition that conclusive proofs would change beliefs; but experience has long since dissipated my faith in men's rationality." The old saying holds good: "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." Reason has but a poor chance in a conflict with prejudice. When we read that the Bishop of Catania holds up the veil of St. Agatha to arrest an eruption of Mount Etna, or that the people of Naples, in this twentieth century, light candles and place an image of San Genaro in face of Mount Vesuvius to stop the eruption, and address it with outstretched hands: "Thou alone canst save Naples, blessed San Genaro," it must be confessed that in some places Christianity has not advanced beyond the prayer-wheels of Thibet or the joss-sticks of China; and when Father Coupe comes to the rescue of the old superstitions with the assumption that the universe was made out of nothing, though "ex nihilo nihil fit," and that it was created by Mind, whatever that is, and he calls leading scientists asses, apes, ignoramuses, and fools, even when we read these and similar inanities we need not be surprised. Faiths die hard. Vast progress has been made, especially since the memorable period of the French Revolution, and though the triumphs of science have not penetrated everywhere to the lower strata of society, enlightenment continues to advance, and truth will eventually prevail.

### Faith and Credulity.

THE terms Faith and Credulity, as applied to religion, are so frequently confused that some attempt to define the exact province of each may not be without value. The former word is so often called in to bolster up deception that one feels tempted to paraphrase Madame Roland, and exclaim: "Oh, Faith! Faith! How many crimes are committed in thy name!" The average Christian, if called upon for a definition of the two expressions, would probably

reply that his own belief was based upon faith, and that of other religions upon credulity; but, obviously, this merely amounts to saying: "I am right, and everybody else is wrong"—which is the attitude necessarily taken up by every believer in supernatural religion. So many elaborate and at first sight convincing arguments in favor of Christianity are built up on the foundation of faith—or, rather, with faith as their alleged foundation—that one can almost excuse a man for being misled who does not trouble to think for himself. It ought not to be necessary, however, to point out that if the basis of an argument is wrong, then, however logical may be the conclusions drawn, the whole fabric totters to the ground the moment the falsity of the original premiss is demonstrated; but experience shows that this simple and elementary precaution is frequently disregarded by the religionist.

In the first place, then, a man may legitimately be said to have faith in the existence of a Supreme Being, since, although this cannot be demonstrated, neither can it be disproved, lying as it does beyond the scope of the human intellect. Faith, therefore, may be defined as belief in something above the faculty of reason. Credulity, on the other hand, consists in believing in something either on insufficient evidence or, in its grosser form, in face of demonstration of its falsity. It follows that it is a glaring misuse of terms to speak of having faith in the Bible, since the greater part of the latter rests on extremely insufficient and untrustworthy testimony, and much of it may be plainly shown to be untrue to anyone who takes reason instead of superstition as his guide. God is not to be conceived by the human mind. The Bible, however, is to be read with our eyes, heard with our ears, judged by our reason, and criticised as any other book would be. It is still urged by the extreme bigots, of course, that as the Bible is the Word of God it must not be criticised, but this is too flagrant a case of begging the question to call for any reply. The usual defence of the Christian when asked to explain the palpable falsehoods contained in the Scriptures is to assert that, although we cannot understand these, nor reconcile them with our reason, we must have faith in them, and not presume to pit our puny minds against the Almighty. This advice is, of course, gladly followed by the credulous; but the man who gives a moment's intelligent consideration to the matter will perceive that the word "faith" as applied to anything that the reason can confute is absolutely meaningless. It is hard to conceive the mental haziness of a person who can be duped by such advice, but there are many thousands who still find therein a refuge from doubt and from the intellectual strain that would be entailed by thinking for themselves. The story of the curate who asserted that if it said in the Bible that Jonah had swallowed the whale he would believe it is not so very far-fetched. The average Christian would not only believe it, too—or persuade himself that he believed it, which is near enough for a Christian—but would experience a positive thrill of satisfaction in doing so, feeling that he had thereby demonstrated the impregnability of his faith. It is hardly to be wondered at, either. Once hypnotise a man into thinking that the greater the absurdity of the thing believed in the greater will be his faith, and it is plain that nothing will be too outrageous for him to swallow. The Rationalist says: "I hold such and such views, but if you can show me they are wrong I will alter them." The Christian who has been mesmerised by early training into accepting the infallibility of the Bible asserts: "I believe so-and-so, and no matter what proofs you offer me of its falsity I will still believe it." Which is the more reasonable attitude?

It is hardly possible, studying this phenomenon, to avoid the conclusion that Christians do not desire to prove the truth of Christianity, but rather to believe in it whether it be true or false. It would be interesting to know how many Christians, if they possessed absolute proof of the falsity of their religion, would publish it to the world. I imagine that for every one

who would do so ninety-nine would conceal it. The truth is they do not *want* to be convinced. Their creed is a very comfortable and convenient one, and it would be exceedingly unpalatable to confess that they had been wrong after all.

A short time ago a religious friend of mine read an account of an exposure of a medium at a spiritualistic seance, who was caught redhanded in the act of impersonating a spirit, and expressed his surprise that people could be deceived by such exhibitions. "Poor deluded creatures!" he exclaimed, solemnly shaking his head. "Why don't they read their Bibles and learn the truth?" If, however, I had told him that the credulity of the people who read their Bibles and believed them was infinitely greater than that of the dupes of the spiritualist he would have been deeply offended. Yet it is certain that there is no creed that makes such demands upon the credulity of its adherents as Christianity. Things which would be contemptuously rejected if found in other religions as too outrageously absurd and immoral for belief are swallowed holus bolus by the Christian, when contained in the Bible, without the smallest difficulty. If a Christian who was ignorant of some of the grosser absurdities in the Old Testament had them introduced one day to his notice with the assertion that they were contained in, say, the Koran, it would be easy to imagine the patronising pity with which he would deplore the gullibility of the poor Mohammedan who could believe such stuff. Enlighten him, however, as to their real origin, and he would immediately accept them unquestioningly. We are all familiar with the story of the Chicago sausage machine where a live porker walks in at one end and emerges at the other in the form of the finished article, but it is surpassed in rapidity and completeness by the mental process of the Christian which transforms fables into facts.

So long, however, as the damnable lie is propagated that there is sin in disbelief so long will this confusion in ideas exist. In this connection I came across an old number, the other day, of a publication entitled *The Christian Miscellany*, and opening it at random encountered the following paragraph. It is so delicious an example of the flim-flam that is still popular in the pulpit that I make no apology for quoting it:—

"TRIUMPH OF CHRISTIANITY AND THE BIBLE.

Hell's deepest ire has been leagued, the most violent machinations of earth, devils damned and devils incarnate have ceaselessly vented their direst rage and united with infernal malice to subvert the Bible and Bible-Christianity; but so frequently as they have made the attack, so frequently have they been repulsed. Error may accept the proffered hand of enmity to combat their progress and annihilate their power; but their march is onward. Unerring prophecy—that can point to a thousand instances of fulfilment, in the confused heaps of ruined cities, the convulsion of empires, the subversions of dynasties, the issue of battling hosts, and the fate of nations—has declared them victorious. The taunts of the infidel press, the mimic thunder of Atheism, the groans extorted by the torture of the inquisitional rack, and the lurid glare of the martyr's pile, have only tended to accelerate their progress, and advance their interests; and in them the Christian has heard his God cry, *Onward!* and by them has been led to ascend some Pisgah, some mount of vision; and while gazing upon the dim shadows and faint outlines of futurity, he has been wafted in imagination along the stream of prophetic truth, and the dense mists have been chased away, the dark clouds dispersed, the rayless gloom illuminated, and in the cloudless light and undying radiance of Divine revelation he has witnessed their reverses and triumphs; and drawing back still further the curtains that conceal their progress he has beheld their followers crowned with the wreath and presented with the palm of victory, robed in the vestments of immortality, smiled upon and welcomed by their triumphant risen Lord."

Although this hysterical bombast is ludicrous enough, it is very mischievous and very dishonest. It conveys the inference that those who attack the Bible are monsters of iniquity, and that all assaults have been successfully repulsed. Both assumptions are ridiculously false, and although the author of the

paragraph may have been fanatical enough to believe the first, he must have known the latter to be untrue. With regard to the former, a man attacks the Bible because he believes it to be untrue, and he is thereby following the dictates of his own conscience in just as great a degree as the man who defends it. He conceives it to be his duty to expose its fallacies, just as the Christian endeavors to expose the fallacies of all religions except his own. Some of the cleverest and most moral men who ever lived have been "infidels," and to assert that their lack of belief is a crime is to appeal to the fanatical passions and prejudices of the ignorant. Why cannot a Christian admit that a man who differs from him in religion may be as wise and honorable and virtuous as himself? Simply because the idea is carefully fostered by the priest and the parson, who know that when people become too enlightened to see any sin in unbelief it will be a case of "Othello's occupation's gone" and that the Black Brigade will have to turn in other directions to earn a living.

The second assertion—that all attacks upon the Bible have been defeated—is still a favorite boast of the religionist; but nobody who faces facts honestly can fail to recognise that the alleged Word of God has almost entirely lost its hold upon the masses, and that even inside the Church itself an enormous revolution has taken place. This is so generally admitted that it savors of wearisome iteration to repeat it. Many of the most learned divines have absolutely abandoned the idea of literal inspiration, and it may safely be asserted that it is only those who are densely ignorant of the Bible who still hold it. Superstition is dying very hard, but it is dying, and the Age of Reason foreshadowed by the great Thomas Paine is dawning. Men and women are learning to think for themselves. The people who still cling tenaciously to the old beliefs are those who not only refuse to think, but who regard inquiry as a positive sin, and who do their best to stifle it. But thought is no more to be stifled than the incoming tide can be arrested; and although the day is yet far distant when the shackles of superstition will fall from mankind, it is steadily approaching. When that day has dawned, and the human race has recognised that all so-called revealed religions are impostures, how the enlightened beings of that time will rub their eyes in astonishment when they delve into the musty records of the past, and wonder how such a gigantic and monstrous delusion could ever have cursed their progenitors, who prided themselves on their wisdom and learning, but who were yet duped by the most colossal fraud in the history of our little planet.

A. GREGORY.

FALSE EDUCATION.

Kings, priests, and statesmen blast the human flower,  
Even in its tender bud; their influence darts  
Like subtle poison through the bloodless veins  
Of desolate society. The child,  
Ere he can lisp his mother's sacred name,  
Swells with the unnatural pride of crime, and lifts  
His baby-sword even in a hero's mood.  
This infant arm becomes the bloodiest scourge  
Of devastated earth; whilst specious names  
Learnt in soft childhood's unsuspecting hour,  
Serve as the sophisms with which manhood dims  
Bright reason's ray, and sanctifies the sword  
Upraised to shed a brother's innocent blood.  
Let priest-led slaves cease to proclaim that man  
Inherits vice and misery, when force  
And falsehood hang even o'er the cradled babe  
Stifling with rudest grasp all natural good.

—Shelley, "Queen Mab."

THE ONLY ONE AWAKE.

The pastor paused in his discourse and looked over his congregation. "Sister Smith," he said, "will you kindly come up close to the pulpit? I can save my voice by repeating the rest of this sermon to you in a conversational tone, and it will not disturb the slumbers of the others."—*Cleveland Leader.*

## Acid Drops.

The escape of the King and Queen of Spain has been called "providential." Then the killing and wounding of all those other persons was "providential" too. Superstitionists must not be allowed to play "Heads we win and tails you lose."

The man who threw that bomb in Madrid killed several soldiers, several police, and several women. Those he intended the bomb for escaped unhurt. Supposing the man's motive was respectable—just for the sake of argument—it is difficult to have much respect for his intelligence. The idea of saving the world in that way is worthy of a madhouse. On the other hand, it must be allowed that spending two millions on one wedding is just the sort of thing to set morbid revolutionists brooding. One folly naturally begets another.

What silly vain creatures men are, to be sure. The man who took his pleasure sadly by throwing that bomb into a Madrid street and killing a lot of people and injuring a lot more, was a wretch, of course; all Spain is agreed upon it, and gladness reigns because the monster killed himself at last and put an end to his wicked career. A few days afterwards the *élite* of Spain—some fifteen thousand of them—with the King and Queen at their head witnessed a sanguinary bull-fight, in which eight of the finest bulls that could be procured in Spain were brutally done to death for their pleasure. What essential difference, after all, is there between the Anarchist assassin and the bull-fight spectators? He and they alike inflicted suffering on other sentient beings for egoistic reasons. We detest both forms of cruelty. Of course the Spaniards are Christians—and we are only Humanists.

"Providence" has been good to the inhabitants of San Francisco who survived the earthquake and the fire that followed it. A hundred thousand homeless people are still sheltered in canvas tents, and on May 28 "the one above" treated them to six hours of phenomenal downpour accompanied by a fierce wind. The tents were blown down and the ground was turned into a quagmire. "For his tender mercies are over all his works."

That battered old cynic, the Rev. Dr. Clifford, has been speaking at a Free Church demonstration on Wimbledon Common in favor of the Education Bill. For the thousandth time—without the slightest reference to hostile criticism—he talked about the Nonconformist desire to see religious tests abolished. "State Education," he said, "should be as open as the Post Office or the India Office to ability and character. As long as they allowed churches, as churches, clergy as clergy, and ministers as ministers to have any control in State education so long would they have controversy and quarrels, and so long would their education be below the standard of the United States and the Colonies." This sounds very nice, but let us see what it is worth.

Dr. Clifford is willing to keep Nonconformist ministers out of the State schools because that is the only way to keep out Church parsons and Catholic priests—to say nothing of Jewish rabbis. But he wants to get Nonconformist ministers in by proxy; that is to say, he wants the school teachers to instruct the children in Nonconformist religion. So much for that point. And now for the tests. Dr. Clifford talks as though the Post Office, the India Office, and other public departments, offered careers to "infidels" as freely as they offer them to Christians. Well, he must be very ignorant or very tricky to suggest anything of the kind. Why the Nonconformists won't give "infidels" justice any more than Churchmen will. Let us look at the facts.

Take, for instance, the case of the Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society. Of course the law is the same in Birmingham for Freethinkers and Christians, but it is worked by the Christians and they know how to make the "infidels" suffer. The Christians use the city schools on Sunday for public meetings at a low rental, but they have passed a resolution—and they stick to it—that the "infidels" shall not have the use of a single one. They positively refused the use of one of these public buildings (supported by "infidels" as well as "fidels") for the business sessions of the N. S. S. Conference. Nor is that all. They are evidently bent on robbing the Branch of the use of the Town Hall once a year. One half the road is already travelled. The Branch is now forbidden to sell literature at its meetings, like other bodies. The rest of the road may be travelled presently.

The attack upon the Birmingham N. S. S. Branch was begun several years ago by the "blackguard" Bishop of Coventry. Of course he carried the bulk of the Church party with him. But he could not have succeeded in his persecuting policy without the help of the Nonconformists. And he got it—without trouble. It was very cheerfully rendered. The Secularists were turned out of the Board schools; they are half turned out of the Town Hall; and while the Churchman rubs his hands the Nonconformist slyly smiles with the water of satisfaction oozing out of the corners of his pious mouth. So that when the "infidels" hear Dr. Clifford talking as he did on Wimbledon Common they recognise him as a hypocritical old humbug.

The Bishop of Ripon, in the June *Fortnightly*, has an article on the Education struggle. The right reverend father in God advocates a compromise; that is to say, he hopes the Christians will all agree to have their religion taught in the public schools at the expense of unbelievers. This is how his lordship perorates:—

"For the sake, therefore, of helping forward the great Kingdom of Christ, for the sake of setting before the world a great and noble example of practical Christian harmony, for the sake of being ready to do in more effective fashion the great work to which Christ in the near future will call our nation, I plead that all those who love the Master should unite to secure at this critical moment not only a just compromise, but a secure recognition of that common Christianity which has been found so vital a bond abroad, and which is loved by Englishmen far more than they love any denomination in the land."

This is the voice of the professional. Underneath all its pious, not to say canting, verbiage there is the same spirit and intention which appears in trade advertisements.

The Metropolitan Free Church Federation has passed a resolution expressing its strong opposition to Clause iv. of the Education Bill. They desire to see "Simple Bible Teaching" carried on in all the nation's schools; in other words, they want Nonconformist religion to be forced upon the children of Churchmen and Catholics. For the Dissenter is an honorable man: So are they all, all honorable men.

We have said all along that Churchmen are prepared to play the game of Passive Resistance as well as the Nonconformists have done—and even to better the instruction. Our opinion is corroborated by what happened at the recent meeting of the House of Laymen of the Convocation of Canterbury. Mr. H. H. Palairt (Bristol) moved a resolution urging Churchmen not to adopt passive resistance in case the Education Bill became law. Lord Halifax moved the previous question, and it was carried. He said that he was not going to lie down like a shorn lamb and bleat. He was quite ready to go to prison. Lord Halifax may be a bigot, but he is known to mean what he says.

While the Rev. W. M. Jones, of Mortlake Congregational Church, was preaching from the text, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal," a thief entered the vestry and stole the preacher's overcoat. If the reverend gentleman really believes in the Sermon on the Mount he will find out that thief and give him his mackintosh.

The Bishop of Stepney has been preaching to five hundred porters from the text "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." If every porter did that the Lord would want some back-ache pills.

Grand Master W. Briston, addressing the annual delegates' assembly of the Imperial Order of Oddfellows, at Nottingham, had something to say against "dividing societies which paid out their funds each year, whether connected with beerhouses or churches." When heavy sickness claims were made, dividing societies often had to be disbanded for lack of funds. "Among the worst offenders in promoting such societies," he said, "were the clergy of all denominations."

Ibsen was buried by the State. They gave him a religious funeral in a church. Knowing what his opinions were they committed an act of sheer hypocrisy. It would have been better to bury him honestly in an "unbeliever's" grave.

Dr. Richter, editor of the *Sueddeutsche Montagszeitung* published in Munich, has been indicted (says the Berlin correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*) for publishing several articles alleged to be insulting to the Catholic Church, and calculated to bring hatred and contempt on this community. His trial has aroused wide attention throughout Germany.

Dr. Richter's articles dealt with the history of Catholicism during the past thousand years and gave prominence to certain deplorable actions in the lives of certain Popes and other leading ecclesiastics. Coming to contemporary history, he cited the instance of the Jesuit, Father de Luca, who lately expressed a desire to see the stake revived for the punishment of recalcitrant heretics. He also quoted a Catholic priest, Father Hebel, a member of the Bavarian Diet, who not long ago declared at a public meeting that it was a public duty to shorten by a head the bodies of those who denied God, even if they were university professors. Dr. Richter's articles besides speak of the relics of the saints as a swindle, and of auricular confession as a danger and a nuisance. He concludes by declaring that the Romish Church is as intolerant and cruel to-day and as dangerous to the commonwealth as in the heyday of the Inquisition. The trial, which is expected to last four days, will be remarkable for the character and number of the witnesses whom Dr. Richter has subpoenaed in his defence. Among these are eminent historians and prominent professors of theology from various universities. Professor Haeckel, of Jena, has also been summoned to give evidence on the side of the defendant.

"Dolly" was the recipient of "fondest love" from the Rev. Charles Joseph Johnson, of the Church of England. Mrs. Johnson has just become the recipient of a decree nisi in the Divorce Court.

Amongst the recent wills proved is that of the Rev. Robert Edward Williams, of the Rectory, Braunston, near Rugby, whose estate is sworn at £27,175. Another poor Jesusite. His present address should be fairly certain, though we don't say a letter would reach him.

Two more poor disciples of the "meek and lowly." Rev. Father Bowden, of the Oratory, Brompton, has left estate valued at £11,046. He is a minnow, however, to the following whale. Rev. Charles Francis Wyatt, rector of Broughton, Oxford, left £172,768.

Archdeacon Colley, we believe, is the gentleman who wanted to entertain the Church Congress at Weymouth with his gay and festive experiences as a Spiritualist; but the regulation men of God, whose superstition is old and mellowed, were not having any of his now and doubtful vintage. He has invited the general public to taste his stuff since then, and amongst them, unfortunately, came Mr. J. N. Maskelyne, the honest conjurer, who wages war against false practitioners in that line of business. Mr. Maskelyne, having a good memory, points out that the medium who helped Archdeacon Colley to his amazing experiences was a detected scoundrel, who was "thoroughly exposed twenty-five years ago by Mr. Lodge at Huddersfield." False beards, dresses, and all the usual paraphernalia of "materialisations" were found in Monk's possession, for which he was prosecuted and imprisoned.

Mr. Maskelyne's memory is all right except for the date. It was thirty years ago, in 1876, that Monk's exposure and imprisonment occurred. We were then editing a paper called *The Secularist*, and one of our regular contributors was James Thomson ("B.V.") the poet. Thomson wrote an article on the Monck case. It was Monck then, though it is Monk now. Francis Ward Monck, had been a Christian minister at Bristol, and still styled himself a "reverend." Traffic in "spirits" paid him, however, a good deal better than preaching. He got £20 out of one person, a Mr. Heppleston, at Huddersfield, and there were plenty of other dupes. His *séances* seem to have been performed at the rate of £2 2s. each, and they were frequent. But a certain Mr. Lodge, a woolen merchant and an amateur conjurer, spoiled Monck's little game. Mr. Lodge offered to do all his tricks without any "spirit" aid at all. Monck virtually retired to his bedroom and locked himself in; finally he escaped through the window by the help of a sheet. Meanwhile the profane sceptics were exploring his "effects"—which included, not only the articles mentioned by Mr. Maskelyne, but also "spirit hands" and prepared musical boxes. The Rev. "Doctor" Monck had to do time. And there was a "Doctor" Slade who got into similar trouble the same year, his sentence being three months' hard labor.

Thomson, in the article referred to, did not hesitate to lay some of the disgrace of these frauds at the door of the orthodox faith. "We are compelled," he said, "to accuse the religion which has been so long dominant amongst us, of fostering the state of mind which welcomes these miserable marvels instead of rejecting them with scorn. The Bible, with its witch of Endor, its recognition of witchcraft, its magicians, its angels releasing the Apostles, its doctrines of

the supernatural, its abounding miracles, has saturated the people with superstitiousness, whose evil effects Science can but slowly counteract. And of those who have ceased to submit themselves to the Bible, the larger number are still infected with its non-natural spirit; having renounced one set of irrational marvels, they yearn more or less consciously for another to replace it." This last observation is not only true but extremely important. Many people, even now, who see through Christianity, become the dupes of some other superstition, such as Theosophy, Spiritualism, or "the higher Theism," because partly by nature, and perhaps still more by early training, they have hopelessly superstitious brains, and simply must find something to satisfy their mental dispositions.

Canon Pigot has been explaining the use of the clergy. Addressing a congregation at St. Mary-le-Tower Church, London, he remarked that they "would not venture to draw up the simplest will or trust deed without consulting an experienced solicitor." "Just in the same way," he continued, "it was not for them, as non-practitioners, to deal as they liked with God's Holy Word." It was the function of the clergy to tell them what the Bible means. Of course it is. The clergy must come in somewhere. Their holy Bradshaw's guide to heaven is not too intelligible. Everybody knows that. And no doubt God, in his infinite wisdom, provided that it should be obscure and perplexing. For he understood that the clergy would need to get a living somehow, and this little arrangement of dark texts and clerical candles would keep them going nicely.

Councillor T. Major Thompson, of Birkenhead, having been convicted of drunkenness at the Liverpool Police Court, his friends thought it was a good opportunity for presenting him a testimonial. A purse of gold, value £20, was handed to him at the Tranmere Music Hall in the presence of a number of true-blue Protestants and Christian Evidence men. Several speakers testified to Councillor Thompson's "services to Protestantism." These "services to Protestantism" were also feelingly referred to by Councillor Thompson himself. It was a grand and glorious spectacle.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton, in one of his comic contributions to the *Daily News*, had the following merry flash: "Properly there is no such thing as free thought; for the moment a man has honestly thought anything he is bound." This sentence combines so many fallacies, so much bad reasoning, and so much abuse of language, that we know Mr. Chesterton must be joking. Has he ever thought of trying *Punch*? Or does the Cadbury organ pay better?

The story is going round of a worshiper who slept peacefully in church during the sermon. When the collection was being taken up, and his pew door was opened to obtain his contribution, he muttered, "Season," and went on snoozing.

The following incident recently added to the gaiety of the House of Commons:—

"Mr. Bottomley (South Hackney, L.) asked the Prime Minister, in the House of Commons this afternoon, whether his attention had been called to the small proportion of inmates in his Majesty's prisons returned as of 'no religious opinion,' and whether, in view of this revelation, he would favorably consider amendments to the Education Bill, making all State education of a secular character.

The Prime Minister.—I do not consider that statements made by English prisoners as to their religious opinions furnishes any tests as to the feeling of the country (laughter)."  
Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's reply was characteristic. It was Scotch. We mean it was pawky. Mr. Bottomley's question was a hit, a hit, a palpable hit. But what does he expect his fate will be in the next world if her persecutes our pious Premier in this way?

#### FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

A little girl who was prone to exaggeration came into the house from the garden one day and said: "Mamma, I saw a great big elephant out in our garden."

"You naughty child," said the mother, "go into your room now, kneel down, and ask God to forgive you for that lie."

The child went away as directed, but soon returned with a bright countenance, and her mother asked her if she had done as she was commanded.

"Oh, yes, mamma: I asked God to forgive me and He did, and He said He did not blame me one bit for saying it was an elephant, for when He first saw it He thought it was an elephant, too."



**Mr. Foote's Engagements.**

(Lectures suspended during the Summer.)

**To Correspondents.**

**W. W. MEDLEY.**—Thanks for cutting. See paragraph. Glad to read your statement: "I have read the *Freethinker* for about eighteen months now, and enjoy it better than any other reading I get, especially 'Acid Drops.' I was brought up a Christian and was enabled to get rid of the last vestiges of superstition by reading the *Freethinker*."

**A. S. PRICEMAN.**—Thanks for the cutting, though we don't deal with politics as politics in the *Freethinker*. Of course there is an ethical side to the native question in South Africa, and in respect of it we don't see that one political party is much better than another.

**RIDGWAY FUND.**—J. Partridge, 183 Vauxhall-road, Birmingham, acknowledges: W. Spivey 2s. 6d., Mr. and Mrs. Pegg £1.

**A. J. WILKINS.**—Yes, the wind does seem blowing in the right direction. We quite agree with you that the theologians' view of "God's" special relation to man of all animals on this planet is "amazing presumption."

**F. G. A.**—All right: thanks.

**HAROLD ELLIOT.**—A good letter, but probably wasted on the paper you mention, which suggests Artemus Ward's reply to the man who wanted to know what were his principles. "Principals," said Artemus, "I've nare a one; I'm in the show business."

**L. DARRINGTON.**—The Bible-folding item at the Swecated Industries Exhibition was dealt with in our columns two or three weeks ago.

**ENQUIRER (Salford).**—The Protevangelion is in the collection of Apocryphal Gospels, which can be obtained at our publishing office, price 3s., or 3s. 4d. post free. You probably looked into the Old Testament Apocrypha, which is a part of the Catholic Bible.

**G. BAXTER.**—We note what you say, though it doesn't take us much further. Thanks, however.

**T. WEBSTER.**—Many things have to stand over till next week, there being less space than usual for "Acid Drops"—which we note that you regard as "the feature of the *Freethinker*."

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**LETTERS** for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

**LECTURE NOTICES** must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

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

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**To Freethinkers.**

DEAR FRIENDS,—

I am making my annual appeal on behalf of Mr. G. W. FOOTE, President of the National Secular Society, Chairman of the Secular Society, Limited, and Editor of the *Freethinker*.

During the summer, which is now arriving, Mr. Foote should be recuperating his physical energies as far as possible, with a view to another active and fruitful winter campaign. He cannot escape his literary work, but his platform work should be dropped entirely until September.

During this period of partial rest Mr. Foote should not be harassed by want of means, and I am sorry to say that he has little to trust to except the response to this appeal. He is still unable to draw his salary as Editor of the *Freethinker*. Other payments in connection with the paper are duly maintained, but the chief of the enterprise has to go on

waiting for a happier prospect of affairs. Those who have read the *Freethinker* during the past year will agree with me, I think, that the financial difficulty has not affected either the quality or the quantity of his writing.

There is one point to which I would draw particular attention before I conclude. It is exactly twenty-five years this month since Mr. Foote started the *Freethinker*. During the whole of that time, with the exception of one year, he has edited the paper himself; and during that one year of absence he was a prisoner for Freethought in Holloway Gaol. I think we ought to remember this quarter of a century of effort in determining the amount of our subscriptions this year.

Subscriptions can be sent to me, or direct to Mr. Foote, at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, London, E.C. Every subscription will be acknowledged by Mr. Foote himself. Trusting that there will be a prompt and generous response to my appeal,

Believe me to be,

Yours faithfully and fraternally,

J. W. de CAUX, J.P.

92 St. Peter's-road, Great Yarmouth.

**Sugar Plums.**

Mr. Foote regrets that he was unable to join the N. S. S. Conference excursion to Stratford-on-Avon on Whit-Monday. He was obliged to return in order to attend to business—principally to the *Freethinker*, which has to come out regularly, and, like time and tide, waits for no man—not even for the editor. Seriously, there was a lot to do, and it could not have all been put off till Tuesday; and the "saints" will remember that Mr. Foote has no sub-editor now, but has to do everything himself. Fortunately both Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd were able to join the excursion; Miss Vance was also of the company; and we hear that they all had "a good time." Mr. H. W. Parsons went over to Stratford from Evesham, Mr. Pinder and twelve other friends went over from Leicester, and Messrs. Lye and Shaw and Miss Shaw from Coventry. No doubt the President's prayers had something to do with the fine weather.

Mr. J. H. Ridgway occupied a seat next to the President at the Conference dinner at Birmingham on Sunday. The veteran still carries himself upright, although his great age is telling upon him in other ways. He was deeply grateful for our efforts to procure him a little financial support for his last days, but we told him that the Freethought party would still be much in debt to him. Mrs. Ridgway was brought to the Town Hall meeting. She is some three years older than her husband and very feeble.

Freethought literature not being allowed to be sold in the Birmingham Town Hall on Sunday, at the evening public meeting in connection with the N. S. S. Annual Conference, a thousand copies of the current number were given away outside. This is not exactly what the Christians want, but they really asked for it—and they got it.

The official biography of Charles Bradlaugh—written by his daughter, Mrs. Bradlaugh-Bonner, with special assistance from Mr. J. M. Robertson—was first published in 1894. A new edition is now issued by Mr. T. Fisher Unwin in two volumes at the low price of seven shillings. This edition contains something fresh—a long and interesting "Note on the Motion to Expunge the Resolutions of Exclusion from the Journals of the House" by Mrs. Bonner. We hope this very valuable book in its new form will gain access to a wider circle of readers. Everybody should know something about Bradlaugh. He was one of the really great Englishmen of the nineteenth century.

The correspondence initiated by Mr. J. W. de Caux in the *Yarmouth Mercury* wound up by editorial decision last week. That number contained a strong, pointed letter by the veteran Freethinker himself, and an excellent letter by Mr. A. H. Smith. There were several Christian letters, all abusive and all anonymous. This is a fact which will doubtless have its due weight in the minds of our contemporary's more intelligent readers. One insolent pietist,

signing himself "Bored," suggests that "all Mr. de Caux wants is a cheap advertisement." One would imagine that Mr. de Caux had something to gain by proclaiming himself a Freethinker. But the truth is that he has everything to lose. His friends know that his bold attachment to Freethought has meant serious loss in many ways—financially, socially, and politically. If "martyrs" are wanted at Yarmouth it is not amongst Christians that they should be sought.

Mr. J. W. de Caux's circular letter which appears in this week's *Freethinker* deals with a matter which cannot, of course, be allowed to drag through several numbers of this journal. Those whom it concerns will please note that it will not be a standing dish. Many reminders ought not to be necessary in such a case.

Mr. Cohen lectures in Victoria Park both afternoon and evening to-day (June 10) and will doubtless have large meetings. East London "saints" should try to bring their Christian acquaintances along. There is no gate-money. There is no gate.

*Secular Schools* is the title of a new pamphlet by the Rev. Stewart D. Headlam, published by the Guild of St. Matthew, 376 Strand, London, W.C., price twopence. It contains the full text of a lecture given to the Guild at Sion College on April 5, with additions bringing it up to date since the introduction of the Education Bill. Mr. Headlam is a straight and thorough-going defender of Secular Education—which he knows, as well as we do, is not Secularism. He welcomes the Bill as far as it abolishes dual control, but finds fault with it on other grounds, particularly for its mistaken effort to transfer religious teaching from the Churches to the State. Mr. Headlam does not even attach as much value as we do to the extended Conscience Clause for children. He thinks they will be induced to attend the religious instruction by all sorts of unwritten pressure, including the distribution of prizes. Nor does he believe, any more than we do, that the new Conscience Clause for teachers will work. "It is significant," he says, "that the phrase in the Bill is 'subscribe to any religious creed'; this seems craftily worded, for the thing is not done in that way, and by forbidding 'subscription' to be required as a condition of appointment you are not abolishing tests: neither are you doing so by forbidding the authority to require attendance or non-attendance at church or chapel. The Government have really not redeemed their pledge of 'no tests for teachers': if any teacher supposes that under this Bill there will be a free current promotion from all the various kinds of schools under the authority, I fear he is doomed to disappointment." Mr. Headlam's view is that "religious tests will continue in the State schools, as they must continue while the State continues to take any cognisance of religious instruction at all." We have expressed this view constantly.

Like a good priest of the Church of England, which he holds is not Protestant but Catholic (though not *Roman Catholic*), Mr. Headlam advocates Secular Education on religious grounds as well as on grounds of just citizenship. Secular Education, he argues, is sacred in its way, and the time allotted to it should not be filched for other purposes; but also "religious education is so sacred and vital from the Church point of view that the Church has a right to demand that a travesty of it shall not be given in the State's name. For the State to pretend to teach the principles of the Christian religion—or of any other religion—is nothing less than an impertinent presumption."

Mr. Headlam finally pleads that the Bible should not be turned out of the State schools. He does not see why "a good edition" of it should not be "placed in the school library," and elegant extracts from it be used "in the ordinary course of secular instruction." But why the Bible only? Is not Mr. Headlam unconsciously prejudiced here? And what is a "good edition" of the Bible? Does he mean the Catholic Bible, the Protestant Bible, or the Jewish Bible?—for they are all different. Really the question is not as simple as Mr. Headlam seems to think it. And he also quite overlooks the fact that the teachers, being mostly Christians and Bible-worshippers, would hardly deal with the Bible as "great literature," but would necessarily tend to deal with it from a religious standpoint. How could they help themselves? The more honest they were the worse would be the trouble.

This point of criticism, however, does not detract from the value of Mr. Headlam's pamphlet, which we heartily welcome, and hope to see extensively circulated.

## National Secular Society's Annual Conference.

THE National Secular Society's Annual Conference was held on Sunday (Whit-Sunday) at Birmingham in the small Lecture Theatre of the Midland Institute. The weather was suddenly fine, which is always a very welcome fact in the capital of the Midlands.

The following Branches were represented by the following delegates:—*Bradford*, W. Kay; *Bethnal Green*, C. Cohen; *Birmingham*, R. G. Fathers, C. J. Whitwell; *Coventry*, A. G. Lye, J. Shaw; *Camberwell*, F. A. Davies, F. Cottrell; *Finsbury*, T. Thurlow; *Hetton-le-Hole*, R. Chapman; *Huddersfield*, T. Ollerenshaw; *Kingsland*, W. Davey; *Liverpool*, J. Müller, G. Roleffs; *Manchester*, Charles Pegg, Mrs. Pegg; *North London*, S. Samuels; *Newcastle-on-Tyne*, J. Fothergill; *South Shields*, J. T. Horsman; *Stockton-on-Tees*, G. Thwaites; *Mountain Ash*, G. Garrett, T. Bennett; *West Stanley*, Hall Nicholson; *West Ham*, Dr. Nichols, Henry Spence; *Wigan*, E. Eastham, W. Maloney.

General regret was expressed that there was no delegate from any part of Scotland. The presence of Mr. G. Scott, of Glasgow, for instance, would have been very welcome, and might have given an added touch of variety to the evening public meeting.

In addition to the Branch delegates there were several visitors from distant parts; including Mr. Richard Johnson (Manchester), Mr. and Mrs. Bonvoni (Letterson), Mr. A. Clarke (King's Norton), Mr. J. H. Ridgway, Mr. A. de Garma (London), Mr. N. Levy (Edinburgh), Mr. G. F. H. McCluskey (Plymouth), Mr. John T. Lloyd (London), Mr. C. Cohen (London), Miss E. M. Vance (General Secretary), and Mr. G. W. Foote (President).

The chair was taken punctually at 10.30, the President tapping the table with the historic hammer that had been wielded before him by Carlile, Watson, and Bradlaugh. In a few introductory words he hoped that profound harmony would reign at the Conference in spite of inevitable differences of opinion.

After the delegates' roll had been called and the minutes of the previous Conference taken as read, the President proceeded to read the Annual Report, which we are able to print in full. It will probably be of great interest to many of our readers, and of some interest to all.

### ANNUAL REPORT.

The past year has not been one of great and striking events, but the Society's work has been carried on with a reasonable measure of success.

New Branches have been formed at Woolwich, West Stanley, Merthyr Vale, Warrington, Hetton-le-Hole, Porth, Nelson, Falkirk, Paisley, and North London.

Two of these new Branches were formed in connection with propagandist efforts by the South Shields Branch, with some financial assistance from the Secular Society, Limited. Two were formed in connection with district propaganda carried out by the Glasgow Branch. The last of all was formed in connection with a special course of lectures, financed by the Secular Society, Limited, at Stanley Hall; and it cannot be doubted that similar efforts would result in establishing new Branches in many other parts of the huge area of London.

Grants have been made to some Branches, as per balance-sheet, which will also show that the Executive has not been able to act very generously in this direction.

Much propagandist work has been done in London by the Society's officers under the financial auspices of the Secular Society, Limited. Many lectures have been organised at Queen's Hall and Stanley Hall. Similar lectures were organised in the fine Town Hall at Stratford, which was filled with large and enthusiastic audiences. As usual the press boycott was exercised against nearly all these meetings. From one point of view this is to be regretted; from another point of view it has a certain element of consolation; for if the press does not make our meetings the press cannot unmake them—and a cause which boasts of large audiences, in spite of a systematic press boycott, must have an independent force and be vitally connected with the natural movement of evolution.

This fact should be borne in mind in looking at the Society's balance-sheet. Money was never the real measure of our work. Whether the year's income is relatively large or small the work goes on all the same; for this is a "voluntary" Society in the fullest and best sense of the words. And it should be remembered, too, that the Executive's balance-sheet only covers the cost of certain collective efforts. All the Branches throughout the country are perfectly autonomous, doing their own work and having their own balance-sheets. When they act in common the Central

Executive is there to undertake what is requisite on their behalf. And it should further be remembered that the financial side of the movement of which the N. S. S. Central Executive is one manifestation is very largely represented at present by the Secular Society, Limited, which appeals to the same public and taps (in a more effective way) the same stratum of resources.

Perhaps the Glasgow Branch is the most flourishing of all. This is largely owing to the energy and ability of its conductors, and partly to a very exceptional good-fortune in the matter of financial support, such as no other Branch has ever enjoyed. During the past year the Glasgow Branch has had overflowing meetings, with a great sale of literature, and has also carried the torch of Freethought into the surrounding district with considerable success. In connection with the South Shields and Newcastle Branches there has been a gratifying propaganda of Freethought on the Tyne-side; a propaganda which could be vastly and profitably extended if the sinews of war were more abundant. In connection with the Manchester Branch, which it is to be wished could have a more efficient organisation—although the highest praise must be given to those who are carrying on the work—it may be mentioned that your President has twice lectured in the Secular Hall this winter to the largest and most enthusiastic audiences that have assembled there for many years. The Birmingham Branch has held its own with great gallantry in the face of tremendous difficulties. Having for years been excluded (first by the School Board, and afterwards by the Council's Education Committee) from the use of any public schoolroom—an exclusion which applies to no other society in the city, and is inflicted in this case on grounds of pure and perfect bigotry; having suffered in this way for many years, and still lifting its head in defiance of the enemies who calculated on its early decease, the Branch is now subjected to the insulting condition that it must not sell literature at its annual meeting in the Town Hall; which is, once more, a condition that applies to no other society in Birmingham—so that it is the Secularists, and the Secularists alone, who are attacked in this manner, and as far as possible deprived of the common rights of citizenship. It must be admitted, of course, that the prohibition of the sale of literature is not in terms absolute. But this is one of the hypocrisies of the situation. The prohibition is in effect absolute. A number of publications are catalogued, and "such" publications are ordered not to be sold; and the "such" is so comprehensive that no room is left for any freedom of movement, even if it were advisable in these circumstances. The Prohibited Index of Birmingham—which may vie with that of Rome—includes Paine's *Age of Reason*, Ingersoll's *Lectures*, Mr. Foote's *Bible Romances*, the *Freethinker* (of course!), and even Mr. Robert Blatchford's *God and My Neighbor*. And this Prohibited Index, with the accompanying instruction that "such" publications must not be sold, really makes a clean sweep of all Secular literature—as it was no doubt intended to do. "Such," to use the official word, is the way in which liberty is understood in the city which used to be called the Mecca of Liberalism, and was once a living centre of English freedom. With this city there are connected Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, Sir Oliver Lodge, and Bishop Gore. These distinguished persons may think that the liberty of a handful of unpopular citizens is beneath their attention—and we will not argue the matter with them. But what of the Rev. Dr. Jowett and the other shining lights of Nonconformity? What of the Labor Church? What of other bodies that are so fond of the last lines of the refrain of "Rule Britannia"? Will none of them say a word for freedom when it is attacked? Must they wait until it is attacked through them before they understand that it is in peril? Cannot they see that freedom only needs defence when it is assailed, that the point of attack is always chosen by its enemies, and that the only choice its friends have is that of standing by it, or not standing by it, in the hour of its extremity?

Be the answer to these questions what it may, the warm sympathy of the whole of the National Secular Society goes out to the Birmingham Branch in its time of trial; and with it goes the hope that by energy and courage and patience—for that too is necessary—the Birmingham Branch will yet triumph over its cowardly enemies, who are only dangerous through the accident of their numerical superiority.

Turning to Liverpool we are confronted by a sadder spectacle. The Branch there was in a very flourishing condition twelve months ago, the Society's last Annual Conference was held there, and at the evening public meeting in the Picton Hall hundreds of people had to be turned away from the doors. The Branch should have gone on prospering and to prosper. But, alas, the elements of disruption already existed, and in a few months contemptible personalities were allowed to blight the splendid prospect. There is, indeed, a certain sinister element in the trouble which

strongly inclines your President to believe that a well-devised plan to break up the Liverpool Branch was really engineered from outside. The enemies of Freethought are many and unscrupulous, and this would not be the first time that Jesuitical tactics had triumphed through the weakness of unsuspecting victims.

Every effort was made by your President to avert a catastrophe. He pleaded privately with those who were bent on action that could only result in miserable mischief, whether they recognised it or not. They had called a members' meeting, with a view to bringing matters to a climax; and your President knew that if the meeting were held, at least as intended, it would be impossible to restore peace and harmony. He was himself due to lecture at Liverpool a week later; accordingly he begged those who were moving precipitately to wait for that week until he could come and see all the members face to face, and talk over their difficulties with them, and endeavor to find an honorable solution. In particular he appealed to Mr. H. Percy Ward, the Branch's resident lecturer and organising secretary, whose very office should have prevented him from being drawn into a partisan quarrel. He appealed also to Mr. Ross, who was actually the Branch president, and to Mr. Hammond, who had been president, and was Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Hall Company, which had been formed to secure the use of the Alexandra Hall to the Branch. These gentlemen professed great readiness to comply with the President's wishes, but the one thing he asked them to do—namely, to wait seven days—they left undone. They held the fatal meeting. Probably they thought they could carry it with them. In this, however, they were deceived. They were very badly beaten; the voting being three to one against them. Once more your President tried to bring about a better understanding. During his visit to Liverpool he had an interview with both sides of the quarrel. He could not help seeing that on both sides there were faults of temper and policy. He therefore made a proposal that both sides should leave all the matters in dispute to the adjudication of himself as President, or to that of the Central Executive. The Branch side—for so the great majority must be called—accepted this proposal; the other side declined it. Subsequent events showed that their policy of disruption was cut and dried, and that they were not treating the President sincerely in their correspondence with him.

Had the malcontents gone out of the Branch, and carried on Freethought work separately, and without hostility, their conduct would have been regrettable, but it would not have been dishonorable. The course they took was different. Behind the Branch's back they secured the tenancy of the Alexandra Hall. A new agreement for a fresh tenancy had been signed by Dr. Niven, as treasurer, on behalf of the Branch. This new agreement contained an innocent clause, which was explained to be only formal, making the tenancy terminable on either side by a month's notice. Almost before the ink of Dr. Niven's signature was dry the Branch was served with a month's notice to quit. Mr. Ross, Mr. Hammond, and Mr. Ward had already secured (through the agency of Mr. Hammond himself as Chairman of the Hall Company) a lease of the Alexandra Hall for 1906. They got out handbills of their prospective meetings there in January, and distributed them to the Branch audiences during December. And all the time Mr. Ross was technically the Branch president, and Mr. Ward was technically the resident lecturer and organising secretary. And both Mr. Ross and Mr. Hammond were vice-presidents of the National Secular Society.

There is no need to characterise such tactics. Every sensible person may be left to form his own judgment of them. And this report must pass on to the rest of the story.

Your President, acting, of course, in concurrence with the Executive, had no alternative but to stand by a Branch of the Society when it was thus attacked. He promised the Branch his utmost support. With this assurance another hall was taken—the Milton Hall, in Daulby-street—and arrangements made for regular Sunday meetings. Largely owing to the generous financial assistance of Mr. F. Bonte, an almost continuous supply of special lecturers was provided. Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd each occupied the platform for four Sundays, with steadily increasing audiences. Finally, the winter season was wound up with a Sunday evening lecture by your President in the big Picton Hall. This meeting was a crowded one, besides being very enthusiastic; and the lecture attracted attention in the local press.

Unfortunately, this is not quite the end of the story. What follows is not very important in one sense; in another sense it is of importance to every Branch of the Society.

The Liverpool Branch had a small banking account. Cheques had to be signed by Messrs. Schweizer, Ross, and Hammond. In order to pay the rent due to the Hall Company a cheque was drawn for the balance at the bank—

between four and five pounds. Messrs. Ross and Hammond refused to sign it. The Hall Company (Mr. Hammond being chairman) then sued Dr. Niven for the rent. Dr. Niven was a comparatively new member of the Branch, and the very men who were suing him had induced him to accept the treasurership. Naturally he resented such treatment. He defended the case in the County Court. The judge heard him sympathetically. He took the view that Dr. Niven's signature to the tenancy agreement was an accidental technicality. The persons really responsible for the rent were all the members of the Committee who were present when he signed it. They would have to become co-defendants in the action. Accordingly the case was adjourned for their attendance. The final hearing was on May 8. Messrs. Hammond and Ross, with a friend of theirs who shall be nameless in this report, had then to stand as co-defendants beside Dr. Niven, and judgment was given against all of them. Which is one of those bits of comedy that nature so often mixes up with her tragedies.

The moral of this is that money should never be so locked up in a bank; or, if it must be locked up, that precautions should be taken against the obstinacy of persons who contract a belief that such a merely technical trusteeship endows them with separate and independent rights, entirely apart from the rights of those for whom they are acting.

To conclude this matter, while it is certain that the Liverpool trouble has done, and for some time will do, injury to the Freethought cause in that city, there is reasonable hope that the Branch will yet triumph over all its difficulties. What support the President and Executive can give it will be forthcoming, and it is to be hoped that Liverpool may have some very different paragraphs in your Society's next Annual Report.

A more pleasant matter inviting attention is the International Freethought Congress which was held in September at Paris. Although inferior in numbers, and necessarily in historic glamor, to the ever-memorable Congress at Rome, it was nevertheless a very striking demonstration of the forces of International Freethought; and the great attention given to it by the Paris press was in marked contrast to the attention that would be given to such a gathering in London. Perhaps the most important feature of the Congress was the reception at the Hotel de Ville. The Municipality of Paris, through the mouth of its President, welcomed the International Freethought Congress, not simply as a body of visitors to their fascinating city, but definitely and decisively as representing the Freethought which is the radical condition of all human progress. The President spoke as a Freethinker to Freethinkers, and in the name of Freethinkers. It was this fact which gave the reception its profound significance; and this fact alone was worth all the trouble and expense of the Congress; for it was a demonstration to the world of the power of Freethought in the central city of modern democracy.

On the purely practical side the Paris Congress was no improvement on that of Rome. Business arrangements, at any rate from the English point of view, were seriously lacking. For reasons fully and carefully given at the time, and unnecessary to be repeated now, your Society's delegates lodged a written protest with the General Secretary, and withdrew from responsible co-operation in the business. They were strongly desired to reconsider this decision, but they felt that they could not do so without robbing their protest of all effect; and the object of it was not to ventilate a personal grievance, but to secure better arrangements at future Congresses. This will certainly be the result, for it was soon apparent that German, Dutch, and other representatives, sympathised with the "practical protest" of the British delegates when they knew it was made. M. Furnémont, the General Secretary, has promised to give his personal attention to the matter, and to see that the next Congress held in Europe shall be, as far as possible, of a more business-like character.

In connection with the Paris Congress there is an item in the balance-sheet which may require a word of explanation. The debit and credit amounts are precisely the same because your President had to send out a private circular to obtain the balance of funds necessary to cover the expenses, and what remained over went, with the knowledge and consent of the subscribers, to another Fund.

In September next another International Freethought Congress is to be held in South America. Your Society cannot send delegates so far, but it may be officially, if indirectly, represented by an able and distinguished South American Freethinker; and this will only involve a moderate contribution to the Congress expenses.

During the late general election several Freethinkers were returned to the House of Commons; some of them known to be such openly, and others only privately. One of the former class was connected with this Society in Bradlaugh's time and for some time afterwards. This Conference has nothing to do with politics, but since so many members of

parliament have been making a parade of their religious opinions it may not be out of place to express satisfaction that the member for the Tyneside division of Northumberland sits amongst them—if he is not precisely of them. Without being in the least concerned with Mr. J. M. Robertson as a politician, your Executive could not help feeling that his presence in parliament raised a fresh hope that steps might be taken once more for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. Mr. Robertson himself admits, in the valuable new edition of his *History of Freethought* that the President of the National Secular Society devised a successful plan for defeating the financial evils of the Blasphemy Laws. But prosecution and imprisonment are still possible under them, and it would perfect our safety if they were absolutely abolished. Accordingly your Executive wrote to Mr. Robertson, hoping that he would be able to see his way to take up Bradlaugh's old Bill for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. His reply was entirely satisfactory. Mr. Robertson said that he would do whatever he could, either by the Bill or by resolution, as appeared to be feasible. It is known that the opportunity of private members is now very limited, but if anything can be done Mr. Robertson may be trusted to do it; and in this respect his presence in the House of Commons is a distinct advantage to Freethought.

While a certain legal outlawry exists against Freethought there will always arise difficulties. During the past year your Society was threatened with the loss of £45, representing a legacy of £50 to the Benevolent Fund from the will of the late Miss Elizabeth Warley, of Weston-Super-Mare. The executor's solicitors advised, for certain alleged reasons, that the legacy should not be paid; but a careful letter dictated by your President produced a change of view, and in due course the legacy was paid over, as may be seen in the balance-sheet.

Another item in the balance-sheet is the Annual Dinner held in London under the Executive's auspices, and frequently attended by provincial members who happen to be in London on business or pleasure. This was a highly successful gathering in every respect.

Your Executive was prepared to raise funds for a great demonstration in London in favor of Secular Education, but the Labor Party would not join in a general demonstration, although the Social Democratic Federation and the London Trades Council was prepared to co-operate. In the circumstances, therefore, the project was dropped. Your Executive also resolved to issue a fresh manifesto in favor of Secular Education. But the practical bearings of the principle changed so from day to day that it was next to impossible to strike in with much effect. The manifesto, however, will be servicable when the Education Bill is disposed of; for the war of the sects will continue, and the principle of Secular Education may be presented with better results when the public are more sick than they are even now at the spectacle of the "happy family" of faith.

While referring to the Education Bill your Executive desires to record its protest against the absurd idea that the vote on Mr. Maddison's amendment proves that the policy of Secular Education has no more friends now than it had in 1870. Behind the Labor Party there is the overwhelming support on this question of more than a million Trade Unionists against five thousand, as recorded at the Leicester Congress. Mr. Keir Hardie told the House of Commons that a referendum on the question would show a large national majority in favor of Secular Education. Owing to the interested action of the various Churches, this question has never had a proper chance in the constituencies. But in spite of that fact, Mr. Philip Snowden declares from personal knowledge that some two hundred members would have supported Secular Education if they could have voted by ballot. All but the faithful sixty-three sacrificed their convictions on the altar of party loyalty. In other words, they were afraid to offend the Government, which consists so largely of professed Nonconformists. There are, indeed, two known Agnostics in the Government—Mr. John Morley and Mr. John Burns—both of whom are often called "Honest John"; but it is a noteworthy fact that neither of them has opened his lips during the debate on the Education Bill. The Nonconformist victory must not be spoiled. That is the price exacted from every member of the Liberal Government.

During the past year your Society has lost two of its vice-presidents by death. Mr. William Pratt, of Christchurch, New Zealand, a remarkable man in many ways, had been on the vice-presidents' list for more than twenty years. Mr. W. C. Middleton, of North Shields, was a recent accession. Mr. Middleton was a modest but very earnest Freethinker. His memory went back to the old fighting days when Freethought advocacy was more dangerous than it is now; and in those days his hospitable house was always open to Freethought lecturers.

The death of Mr. George Jacob Holyoake and Mr. Charles Watts occurred early in 1906. They were not then connected

with this Society, but each had been connected with it more than once in former years, and the younger for many years together. Mr. Holyoake was a veteran of very great age. His vital work in the world had long been done. His death is a personal bereavement to his relatives and friends, but in the circumstances a special loss to Freethought. Your Executive placed on record its recognition of Mr. Holyoake's great service to the movement when he dared and suffered imprisonment for it. Mr. Charles Watts was one who had popular platform gifts, which enabled him to advocate Freethought successfully in America as well as in Great Britain.

It is with unqualified pleasure that we may turn to the final stages of a matter that was dealt with at length in last year's report. The exposure and refutation of the Rev. Dr. Torrey's libels on Thomas Paine and Colonel Ingersoll was treated with the usual conspiracy of silence on the part of the general press. The religious newspapers never uttered a word of protest against Dr. Torrey's policy of defamation. But one honest Christian appeared in the person of Mr. W. T. Stead. Dr. Torrey was invited by that gentleman to substantiate his charges against those two great Freethinkers. He hesitated, shuffled, and prevaricated. The spectacle was disgusting. Dr. Torrey left England discredited, and his return is extremely doubtful. Silence was still maintained by the religious press, but the facts could not be concealed, and it is the facts that always tell in the long run. But the point is not Dr. Torrey's scoundrelism; it is Mr. Stead's noble courage and generosity. It is not to be supposed that he wants any other reward than the consciousness of having done his duty when others neglected theirs; this, however, should not prevent Freethinkers from tendering him their warmest thanks, not in the name of partisanship, but in the name of truth and humanity.

It is customary to close this report with a glance at the outer world. Perhaps at this moment Mr. Joseph Symes, who for so many years has fought such a gallant battle at Melbourne, is on his way back to his native land, which he left in 1883. When he arrives he will meet the heartiest welcome from his old friends, and from many new ones who have heard of his struggles. In America the Freethought cause makes considerable headway by the policy of permeation, but it does not acquire a stronger organisation. Mr. Mangasarian, the author of the admirable *New Catechism*, delivers Freethought lectures at Chicago to some 2,500 people every Sunday during the winter. Now papers are cropping up in various directions. The veteran *Truthseeker* still flies its flag proudly at New York. *Secular Thought* still holds its own at Toronto. Coming back to Europe, it is good to see the great Haeckel laughing at the silly stories of his conversion to Christianity, with which Jesuitism has sought to deceive the world, and which were naturally taken up by the unspeakable Dr. Torrey. But it is to France that we must turn to behold the most inspiring scenes. The Separation Law, divorcing Church and State, has been carried, and has been strongly ratified in the recent general election, which has simply crushed the opponents of the secular Republic. And the good understanding which now happily exists between France and Great Britain will certainly not hinder, and may possibly help, the progress of Freethought in this country. For if Freethinkers in France can be wise statesmen, good citizens, friends of freedom and peace, and warriors only against the evils of human society, the pretensions of Christianity must tend to become discredited in other countries, and especially in the country which seems destined to stand by her side in the war of the liberation of humanity.

Some questions being asked and answered, the Annual Report was adopted, and also the Financial Report introduced by the Secretary (Miss Vance).

The next business was the election of President. Mr. G. W. Foote was the only nomination. While the matter was under discussion he vacated the chair in favor of Mr. C. Cohen. Several delegates having supported the nomination, and the chairman having added some graceful words of his own, Mr. Foote was unanimously re-elected, and resumed his occupancy of the chair amidst warm applause. In acknowledging the honor he ventured to say that he had at least served the cause with an undivided love. He had declined outside work, however profitable; he had sought no outside honors, however tempting; he had given his life absolutely to Freethought. He had lived for it, he hoped to die in it, and to live in it for a little when he was dead. In the past he had tried to do his duty; he would try to do the same in the future that remained to him; whenever the movement wanted and found another President he would retire from his arduous post with perhaps a sense of relief; and the new President would have no more loyal friend and supporter than himself.

The President's remarks being cheered by the Conference, the discussion of the Agenda was proceeded with, and a report of the proceedings will appear in our next issue.

We must, however, pay attention this week to the evening public meeting in the grand old Town Hall. From 6 to 7 o'clock the Town Organist discoursed beautiful music from the noble organ. When the President and his principal colleagues appeared on the platform there was a great outburst of cheering from the large audience, which was sympathetic and enthusiastic from beginning to end. After a few introductory words as chairman the President introduced Mr. Cohen, who spoke with power and eloquence for twenty minutes. Then came the pious part of the proceedings—the collection. The next speaker was Mr. F. A. Davies, whose delightful little speech was highly relished and provocative of much laughter. Mr. John Lloyd followed. He was in his best vein, and stirred the meeting up finely, resuming his seat amidst a storm of cheers. Mr. Foote then took the meeting in hand and wound up what the audience evidently regarded as a feast of oratory. Altogether the Town Hall meeting was a splendid crown to the day's work. Some of the bigots who persecute Secularism in Birmingham should have seen it. They would have felt annoyed, perhaps, but it would have done them good in the end.

Mr. Philip Snowden, M.P., writing in the *Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury*, under the heading of "The Curse of Party," gives an interesting account of the last night's discussion and division on the Secular Education amendment to Mr. Birrell's Bill. He says that members were amazed at Mr. Birrell's speech. The right honorable gentleman not only defended the teaching of religion in the schools, but declared that "he was in favor personally of making the teaching of 'fundamental Christianity' compulsory for all children." But a more important statement—which bears out what we said last week in our leading article—is contained in the following passage:—

"I knew before I came to this House how strong is the power of the party Whip. But I never dreamt that every principle and every opinion, and every idea of right and wrong were to be so completely surrendered to party interests as is actually the case. If a vote by ballot could have been taken on this question, the supporters of the secular amendment would have been four times as numerous. There is no secret about all this. Members freely and openly confess and deplore that they are voting against their convictions because the Government insist upon their doing so. Some less courageous and honest make excuses to justify the inconsistency of their votes and their former declarations."

The vote against Secular Education was a fraudulent vote. Some hundred and fifty members voted against their convictions. This is consolatory in one sense. It proves that the Secular Education policy has made progress. In another sense it is humiliating—and vote by ballot seems almost necessary in the House of Commons.

Philosophy can add to our happiness in no other manner but by diminishing our misery.—*Goldsmith*.

No power of genius has ever yet had the smallest success in explaining existence. The perfect enigma remains.—*Emerson*.

"Mors" means death, and delaying; and "vita" means life, and growing: and try always, not to mortify yourselves, but to vivify yourselves.—*Ruskin*.

### Obituary.

ANOTHER veteran of the Freethought ranks has passed over to "the majority." Mr. E. J. Birch died on May 21, after a protracted illness. He was a constant attendant at Milton Hall in the old days, and also at the Hall of Science. Always a staunch advocate for his principles, he was greatly respected by all in the neighborhood of Kentish Town, where he lived. He was buried at Highgate on Tuesday, May 29, the funeral address being given by Mr. W. J. Ramsay to a very large assembly of friends and relatives.—J.

It is with the most sincere regret that I have to intimate the death of Mrs. James Wilson, second daughter of Mrs. Turnbull, who died in the Western Infirmary after undergoing an operation. Mrs. Wilson was a woman of gentle and beautiful character, unobtrusive yet constantly useful, mild in speech yet inflexible in her loyalty to Freethought; although weakened by illness she bore suffering with fortitude and faced death with absolute fearlessness. Her familiar and gentle presence will long be missed by the members of the Glasgow Secular Society, whose whole-hearted sympathies go out to her husband and child and also to her mother, Mrs. Turnbull, a woman of sterling worth on whom affliction has lately laid a heavy hand.—T.R.

**SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.**

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

**LONDON.**

**OUTDOOR.**

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

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Rushcroft-road, Brixton, 11.30, F. A. Davies; Brockwell Park, 3.15 and 6, F. A. Davies.

CLAPHAM COMMON: 3, A. D. Howell-Smith, B.A., "The Bible: Its Origin and Nature."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill, Hampstead): 3.30, J. Rowney, "The Sermon on the Mount."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (The Grove, Stratford): 7, J. W. Marshall, a Lecture.

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

**COUNTRY.**

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Milton Hall, Daulby-street): 7, C. R. Niven, M.B., C.M., "Physical Degeneration and the Slums: the Neo-Darwinian Mighty Promise."

**OUTDOOR.**

WIGAN BRANCH N. S. S. (Market Square): Tuesday, June 12, at 7.45, H. Percy Ward, "Christianity and Slavery."

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