

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE

*O ye loud Waves! and O ye Forests high!  
And O ye Clouds that far above me soared!  
Thou rising Sun! thou blue rejoicing sky!  
Yea everything that is and will be free!  
Bear witness for me, whereso'er ye be,  
With what deep worship I have still adored  
The spirit of divinest Liberty.*

—COLERIDGE.

## The Westminster Play.

MAN is the wisest animal on this planet. He is also the biggest fool. No other animal builds houses and ships, or paints pictures, or carves statues, or writes poems. And no other animal gets drunk or keeps a priest. Yes, man is the wonder and the scandal, the glory and the disgrace, of the world. "In action how like an angel," said Hamlet; but had he been censuring instead of praising he might have said "how like a beast."

Man is a bundle of contradictions. He will fight like a hero for what he wants; he will also pray for it like a silly child. He will stand up and defy death; he will also grovel on the ground to avoid it. He will dare the most powerful enemy—and he will be afraid of his own shadow. That scapegrace, the Earl of Rochester, who wrote the biting epigram on his boon companion and fellow profligate, Charles the Second, gave a clever expression to this contradictory character in the Merry Monarch:—

"Here lies our mutton-eating King  
Whose word no man relies on:  
He never said a foolish thing—  
He never did a wise one."

This brings us to another monarch, King Edward. We do not mean that he resembles Charles the Second in anything else; but he is still supposed to rule by the grace of God, as the very coinage declares—and he is Defender of the Faith—and he was anointed with holy oil by the Archbishop of Canterbury at his coronation, a process which was intended to consecrate him for the rest of his natural life. With all these supernatural advantages he ought to be able to govern this country "on his own," as the saying 'is. Yet it is a constitutional maxim with us that the King reigns but does not govern. There is a Government that carries on the business of the country, and in the name of that Government the King has just opened Parliament—the assembly in which the Government has to submit what it wants to do for the welfare of the people.

Neither the anointed King nor what some people regard as the more anointed Government is allowed to regulate the affairs of this nation without the assistance and ultimate control of Parliament. Neither does Parliament trust its own wisdom—which some think a mark of good sense. It pays a man to procure all the help he can from Almighty God. This man is called the chaplain; he receives a

salary of several hundred pounds a year; and his function is to open the proceedings every day by imploring the divine blessing on its labors and the divine guidance in its deliberations. Generally speaking, the House of Commons is nearly empty when the chaplain communicates with the Deity. No doubt the members think that the divine blessing and the divine guidance will keep until they find it convenient to attend.

They have a similar man of God to bring down heavenly assistance at Washington. Ingersoll once said that people prayed for all sorts of things, some of them ridiculous, and some plainly impossible. "For instance," he said, "I heard the chaplain the other day asking God to give Congress wisdom."

When the chaplain has requested the Almighty to fill the House of Commons with his ineffable presence, so that wise and beneficent laws may be carried for the benefit of the present inhabitants of this country, and of generations yet unborn, the members (those who are present) open their eyes and resume the old scrimmage. What one side of the House says is sure to be wrong to the other side of the House. They made up their minds about that before they went in to prayers, and they do not change it afterwards. Their business is to fight each other; they conduct the contest under Queensberry rules, with an umpire in the chair; but they give no quarter, and they take none; and they pay no more attention to God until the prayers come round again the next day.

Opening the House of Commons with prayer seems to us a farce—and it really does not seem otherwise to the members themselves, for they practically treat it as such. And such a farce is bound to infect the whole performance. It is really a part of what we venture to call the Westminster play.

Of course the Westminster play, like other plays, may be very interesting, and very amusing, and even very tragic. It seems to have great fascination for the actors, and a vast number of people like reading about it. But there is one thing about it which thinking people wonder at. All the time spent on debating appears to be a poor investment. Speeches rarely, if ever, alter votes; the whips know how the division will go if they can get their men into the lobbies; indeed, if it were not for the look of the thing, the vote might as well be taken first, and the debate carried on afterwards.

This element of unreality in the great Westminster play is directly related to the absurdity of the chaplain's performance at prayer-time. A legislature which tolerates that nonsense will tolerate any other nonsense; for no nonsense could possibly be greater.

We suggest that the nation should make up its mind whether it will trust to its own wisdom or not. At present it is satisfied with a plentiful lack of sense, and leaves all the rest to Providence; and that is why we have still to admire with how little wisdom the world is governed. G. W. FOOTE.

## The New Dogmatism.

THE *Message* is a bright, ably-conducted theological magazine, edited by the Rev. Hugh C. Wallace and the Rev. J. Warschauer, M.A., D.Lit., ministers of Anerley Congregational Church. Many will remember that this Church has had advanced views taught in its pulpit for at least twenty years; and the present ministers are enthusiastic advocates of what is now known as the New Theology. The object of the *Message* is to promote the interests of what some venture to characterise as a reformed or re-stated Christianity. Now to outsiders, nothing is more evident than that the protagonists of the New Theology are more intolerable and intolerant dogmatists than orthodox divines have ever been. For examples I refer the reader to the *Message* for the current month. We are editorially assured therein that the occupation of militant Freethinkers is practically gone. It is frankly admitted that in the far away past they did much creditable work. But now there is no need for their iconoclastic propaganda. This, however, they are too ignorant or too reckless to perceive:—

"We have so often observed in the writings of 'rationalists' a certain touching inability to realise that we are not living in some bygone age, but in the present. .... Writers of this school seem always to regret and to marvel that Christianity should have moved along with all other institutions; they feel that it is not fair to them that Christianity should have done so; in comparison with this living, and therefore changing, thing, they even prefer the fixity of the old confessions."

That charge against Rationalists, as a class, is wholly without foundation. But what about the editors of the *Message*? Are they not living in a Fool's Paradise? Are they not aware that orthodoxy is still alive, and that an overwhelming majority of professing Christians still adhere to it? Do they not know that the bulk even of Congregational ministers are staunch defenders of "the faith once delivered to the saints"? Mr. Wallace and Dr. Warschauer cannot be ignorant of the fact that to thousands upon thousands of the preachers of to-day the Bible is "the inspired and infallible Word of God." Did not Mr. Campbell himself confess the other day that he is the most unpopular man in Nonconformity? As a matter of fact, the friends of the New Theology are as yet but few and far between. How unutterably absurd it therefore is to assert that Freethinkers are flogging a dead horse whenever they assail the old orthodoxy! Why, the new theologians are doing precisely the same thing themselves. Are they, too, unable to "realise that we are not living in some bygone age, but in the present"? Are they, too, fighting men of straw?

The truth is that these advanced religious teachers are doing for to-day exactly the same work, on the negative side, as Voltaire and Paine did for theirs. That is to say, up to a certain point they are co-laborers with the Secularists, as the following extract from the *Message* shows:—

"Orthodoxy the 'rationalist' not only comprehends, but can overthrow and celebrate easy triumphs over—the Fall, hell-fire, and Biblical infallibility, provide him with his favorite material; against a Christianity which defends a virgin birth and the physical resurrection with angry tenacity he has a not over-difficult case."

That is self-evident, and Secularists are of the same opinion. Then the *Message* continues:—

"But with the New Theology he finds himself on far less favorable ground; for this latter placidly surrenders the infallibilities and crudities which the 'rationalist' delighted to 'show up,' while retaining the essence of Christianity against which his weapons are somehow less effective. Hence he looks upon the New Theology and its progress with undisguised suspicion; for if this movement permeates the Churches, as it bids fair to do, 'then is Othello's occupation gone.'"

Here, however, the *Message* is quite wrong. Freethinkers heartily welcome the present movement in the theological world, because they look upon it as a distinct step towards Naturalism. To eliminate the

"miraculous" from the life of Jesus—to grant that he was born and died like any ordinary man—is to weaken the whole case for Supernaturalism. Mr. Campbell is quite right in claiming that a birth of two persons is equally as wonderful as a virgin birth would be, only there is absolutely no evidence that virgin births have ever happened in the human race. Things fully as marvellous as a resurrection would be are constantly occurring in Nature, only no indubitably attested instance of the dead coming back to life is on record. Such is the ground on which the New Theology rejects the two miracles which orthodoxy pronounces essential to Christianity; and it is for precisely the same reason that Freethought rejects them.

Let it be clearly understood, then, that as a movement, the New Theology is not "cordially disliked" by Secularists. We understand now that the New Theology rejects all the dogmas insisted upon by the orthodox Church. So do we, and so has our system of thought always done. All through its history Freethought has expressed its opposition to all such dogmas; and to-day it is obliged to assail the doctrines of the New Theology with equal determination and zeal. Of course, in the estimation of the editors of the *Message*, not to accept the New Theology is a proof of intellectual stupidity and moral blindness. "Rationalism," they say, "besides very cordially disliking, does not really understand, the forward movement in theology." But who does really understand it? Who can tell us what Christianity is? Sneeringly these editors say: "How curious and almost middle-Victorian is the attitude of 'rationalism' in accepting orthodoxy's word as to its own identity with Christianity." But, pray, would it not be even more curious and altogether middle-Victorian if Rationalism accepted the New Theology's word "as to its own identity with Christianity"? In other words, why should Dr. Warschauer's word be taken rather than Dr. Robertson Nicoll's, or Mr. Campbell's rather than Principal Fairbairn's? To say the very least, it is as reasonable to adopt orthodoxy's definition of Christianity as that paraded by heterodoxy. The attitude taken up by Rationalism is that paraded by Christianity, according to any definition, is essentially unbelievable.

Take the dogma of Incarnation. Can the editors of the *Message* tell us clearly what it means? It is quite true that many believe in it who reject the Virgin Birth and even the Resurrection; but that is neither here nor there, the all-important question being, What does Incarnation signify? These editors write as if they knew. They declare "the entire independence of the fact which that term denotes, and the alleged process by which the fact is, in one particular case, said to have come about." But will they inform us what the fact of incarnation is, and how they know it to be a fact apart from the process by which it has come about? It is easy enough to say that the universe is a manifestation of God, or that it represents God's attempt at self-expression, and that the attempt comes nearest success in man; but what does the statement mean? *What is the God said to be thus manifested in the universe?* Mr. Campbell admits that in himself God is absolutely unknowable; but without knowing what God is how can anybody affirm that the universe reveals him? We know the universe only as it presents itself to our senses; but we do not know of anything beyond and above it. Therefore, the fact of incarnation, so confidently spoken of by these latter-day divines, is seen to be at best but a hypothesis, a blind guess, or a vain dream.

These preachers of "the new and better Evangel" laugh the charge of "Pantheism" to scorn. They glory in being more than Pantheists. They say: "Pantheism is that system of thought which affirms the immanence, but denies the transcendence of God." When the New Theology insists upon the Divine immanence, it does not deny the Divine transcendence; the term Pantheism is therefore a misnomer. We will not quarrel about the definition of Pantheism; nor will we quarrel about the meaning of Christian

Theism as interpreted by the New Theology. All we wish to point out is that all the *isms* concerning God are purely the creations of the human brain, and that all who profess to speak in God's name are only airing their own opinions. In this region one man's opinions are neither better nor worse than another's, for they are all alike based on ignorance. "But," these theologians exclaim, "God is revealing himself to men to-day." Indeed! But how do you make that out? If your claim is true, how do you account for the conflicting messages that come from him? At the City Temple he says one thing; at Westminster Chapel another, almost the very opposite; and in Little Portland-street, something different still; and each of his representatives at these three centres of Divine illumination, charge the other two with woefully and disastrously misrepresenting him. Is it not much more reasonable to conclude that all who claim to speak for God are laboring under a terrible delusion?

The inconsistencies of the New Theology are amazing. If Paul is quoted against it, the retort is that Paul only expressed his own opinion, which is by no means binding. It necessarily follows that when these theologians speak they too are only expressing their own opinions. And yet both in the Pulpit and in the Press they utter themselves as if they were infallible exponents of the will of God. Orthodoxy they denounce in the most violent terms, while they visit unbelief with cheap sarcasm and contempt and deliberate misrepresentation. To all their opponents alike they say: "We have come; let the whole earth keep silence; we have the new and better Evangel; in this twentieth century all who differ from us find themselves dismoded, obsolescent, out of date—both the orthodoxy and the Rationalism of yesterday become the anachronisms of to-day."

Such is the new theological dogmatism, and it stands utterly condemned by its own presumptuous, arrogant, contemptuous, and self-sufficient spirit and tone.

J. T. LLOYD.

## Bruno.—II.

(Continued from p. 82.)

ALL things considered, the time Bruno spent in England must have been the happiest period of his life. His associates were men such as Sir Philip Sidney, Fulke Greville, Spenser, and perhaps, Bacon. Many were the gatherings of this choice band of thinkers, and if Bruno gained from their conversations, it is extremely probable that they, in turn, gained much from so fertile and ingenious a thinker. Bruno was also presented to Queen Elizabeth, and was favorably impressed by her. Indeed, the high terms in which he spoke of Elizabeth formed afterwards one of the counts brought against him by the Inquisition. To Sidney, Bruno dedicated his *Heroic Enthusiasts*, and also *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, a work that was taken as an attack on the Catholic Church, either the Church or the Pope being designated by the title.

An earlier visitor to England, Erasmus had fallen under the charms of English women. He writes of them to a friend:—

"The English girls are divinely pretty. Soft, pleasant, gentle, and charming as the Muses. They have one custom which cannot be too much admired. When you go anywhere on a visit the girls all kiss you. They kiss you when you arrive, they kiss you when you go away, and they kiss you again when you return. Go where you will, it is all kisses; and, my dear Faustus, if you once tasted how fragrant those lips are, you would wish to spend your life here."

Customs have much changed since the sixteenth century, but Bruno joins his brother monk in praising English women:—

"Gracious and gentle, soft and tender, young, fair, and delicate, blond-haired, white of skin, pink of cheek, of enticing lips, eyes divine, breasts of ivory, and hearts of adamant; how many thoughts do I weave for you in

my mind, how many emotions besiege my spirit, how many passions fill my life, how many tears pour from my eyes, sighs burst from my breast, fires sparkle from my heart."

Of the people in general he had but a poor opinion. He declared that England "could boast of a Plebs which, for want of respect, rudeness, roughness, rusticity, savagery, ill-training, was second to none in the world." There was also, he laments, an unreasoning hatred of foreigners with them, which was apt to vent itself in positive ill-usage. So the enjoyment of "the fair and gracious nymphs of England" had its disadvantages.

While in England, Bruno published no less than seven of his works; and had he not been Bruno, might have lived out his life in the congenial company of the best of English thinkers. But the clash of battle was far more attractive than the soft murmur of philosophic peace, and at a species of intellectual tournament, given at Oxford in honor of a Polish Prince, he once more brought a hornet's-nest about his ears. Besides, Bruno had called himself "the Awakener," and looked to public disunion as one of the means of living up to the character. Oxford was then far behind many of the continental universities in point of learning. There was still, in Bruno's time, a fine of five shillings for every point of departure from the philosophy of Aristotle or the cosmogony of Ptolemy. In his disputations Bruno attacked both. Fifteen times, Bruno says, he closed the mouth of the disputant who had been selected to oppose him, and to maintain that the earth was stationary while the heavens revolved around it. He complains bitterly of the "Pig" selected by the university as a champion; wittily describes Oxford as the "widow of sound learning," and as filled with "a constellation of pedants whose ignorance, presumption and rustic rudeness would have exhausted the patience of Job."

The hostility to Bruno was roused, and once more he shifted his quarters. He returned to Paris, and arriving here, threw away all reserve in placing his teaching before the world. He openly challenged the verdict of accepted philosophy and established authority. In words that are as true of our own time as of his, he says: "If we really seek, it helps us nought that public opinion thinks we are really making for health." And again, "It is a poor mind that will think with the multitude because it is a multitude: truth is not altered by the opinions of the vulgar or the confirmation of the many." "It is more blessed to be wise in truth in face of opinion than to be wise in opinion in face of truth." "From the beginning I was convinced of the vanity of the cry which summons us to close or lower the eyes that were given to us open and upward-looking. Seeing, I do not pretend not to see, nor fear to profess it openly; and as there is continual war between light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance, everywhere have I met with hatred, abuse, clamor, insult (ay, not without risk to my life) from the brute and stupid multitude." As with Bacon, so it was emphasised that to clear the mind from prejudice, was the essential condition of the acquisition of true knowledge. If it was difficult to do this there was all the more reason for the effort; for "difficulty is ordained to check poltroons. Things ordinary and easy are for the vulgar, for ordinary people. But rare, heroic, divine men, pass along the way of difficulty, that necessity may be constrained to yield them the palm of immortality.....It is not only he who arrives at the goal that is praised, but also whoever dies no coward's or poltroon's death; he casts the fault of his loss and of his death upon the back of fate, and shows the world that he has come to such an end by no defect of himself, but by error of fortune."

Bruno says he left Paris "because of the tumults," but it is probable that in this instance it was the troubled state of the city rather than personal hostility that was the cause. The lapse of three years, spent in visiting various cities in Germany,

found him at Frankfort, where he was destined to make an acquaintance that was to lead him into the hands of the Inquisition. It was while at Frankfort that he received a letter of invitation from a young Venetian nobleman, Giovanni Mocenigo, to come to Venice and instruct in certain branches of philosophy for which Bruno was famed. Why Bruno should have accepted the invitation is something of a puzzle, unless we ascribe it to his strong desire to visit his native country. Mocenigo, Mr. McIntyre points out, was shallow, mean, superstitious, weak-minded and vain. On his part there may have been the desire to pose as a philosopher, or as the patron of a thinker who had gained a European fame. Or, if we remember that Mocenigo was one of the appointed accessors to Inquisition in Venice, there may have been another and a darker reason for the invitation. Or yet, again, there is reason for believing that Bruno still regarded himself as a member of the Church, although liable to correction for his conduct as a priest. At any rate, Bruno walked blindly into the trap and came to Venice. There he lived for a time by himself, visiting Padua and other places to lecture or teach. Bruno's unconsciousness of the danger he was in is shown by his giving up his own rooms and coming to live with Mocenigo, thus making the task of the spy easier. His work was then to "draw" Bruno as much as possible, a by no means hard task with one of his impetuous character. Something, what is not known, aroused Bruno's suspicions, and he announced that he intended visiting Frankfort to get some books printed. Not to be robbed of his prey, Mocenigo came the following night with a party of gondoliers and confined Bruno in an upper room of the house, from which he was taken the following night by the officers of the Inquisition. The arrest was made on May 23, 1592; henceforth there was nothing for the prisoner but eight weary years of imprisonment—probably including torture as well as imprisonment—ending with a fiery death in the Place of Flowers in the Capital of Christendom.

Now let us glance for awhile at what it was that made Bruno so obnoxious to his enemies. There was, in the first place, the attack upon authority, both philosophic and theologic. One could, indeed, scarce attack one without the other. The authority of Aristotle—Aristotle, that is, as the Church had permitted him to be interpreted—was supreme, and others before Bruno had felt how necessary it was to break down the pseudo Aristotelianism that reigned in the schools. But to attack Aristotle was to run counter to the authority of the Church, and thus Bruno found himself at war with both philosophy and theology. Of his hostility to the former he was wholly conscious, but there is reason to believe that he never, until near the end, recognised how hostile was his attitude to the other also. But his intellectual attitude in relation to the established powers is best shown by his description of "Holy Asinity," a work of the same nature as Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*. "Oh, holy asinity," he says, "oh, holy ignorance, holy folly and pious devotion, which alone maketh souls so good that human wit and zeal can no further go; strenuous watchfulness, in whatsoever art, or invention, or contemplation of the wise, arrives not to the heaven wherein thou buildest thy mansion. Of what avail is your study, ye curious ones, your desire to know whether the stars are earth, or fire, or sea? Holy assinity for that cares not, but with folded hands and bended knees awaits from God its fate." The ass, he says, is installed everywhere; in courts, tribunals, churches, and schools. It controls every career and dominates all thinking. There are more asses among men than men among asses, and most people are willing members of the Universal State of Asinity. Unfortunately, in his case, the asses proved themselves too powerful for the thinker, if not for his thought. That they could not kill; and if the responsibility for a thinker's failure to reach his goal rests with fortune, so long as "he dies no coward's or poltroon's death," then Bruno's long single-handed fight against Church and school

"constrained" necessity to yield "the palm of immortality" to one whose daring thought and glorious courage helped to break down one of the most intolerable tyrannies under which the world has ever groaned.

C. COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

### Blasphemy in the Bible.

It would not be a difficult task to show that nine-tenths of the Bible, at least, are blasphemous—that is, if it is blasphemy to speak evil of "God"; but that task I am not undertaking. My present object is to select a few Bible texts and to show how full of blasphemy they really are. The first verse in the Bible is as blasphemous as any language to be found. It looks innocent enough in English and not less so in Greek, Latin and other tongues into which the Jewish books have been translated; but the Hebrew, which is said to be the original language of the Bible, lends itself to a very curious translation. The very first word in the Hebrew Bible is *Bereshith*, and that is translated "in the beginning" in the English Bible. But, in sober truth, no one can tell what it really signifies. That it may mean "in the beginning" I shall not flatly deny; but it is equally true that it may have some other meaning. *Bereshith* may be one word or two, *reshith* and *b*, *b* meaning *in, reshith beginning*.

"In the beginning" may be a pious expression, but it means nothing until we know of what it indicates the beginning. To say that God made or created the heavens and the earth "in the beginning" conveys no information as to the time when the work was done, and to say that he made them "in the beginning" of his making them, or when he began to make them, or at the date or time when he did make them, is solemn trifling, not sense; and the word might just as well have been left out, if that is all it means. That every work or job or task must have a beginning goes without saying.

Now I propose to translate the verse differently, and read it thus: "Bereshith made the Gods, the heavens and the earth." The only objection that can be urged against my rendering is custom, tradition, or theological prejudice. The last may be ignored, for theology is always in the wrong; custom and tradition may go for what they are worth; and they are certain to be urged against the new translation. Never mind, neither honest grammar nor honest lexicography will ever protest against it.

Of course, I shall be told that we know nothing about Bereshith, the newly found creator of Gods and all else. Well, we know nothing whatsoever about God, Gods, or any other creator yet mentioned in ancient or modern times, nor can anyone say what the heavens mean. Who Bereshith is or was I confess I do not know, but I feel confident that he, she, or it, is or was, quite as likely to create things as God or Gods; and I bind myself to demonstrate that as against any divine who cares to take up my challenge. Bereshith, I am confident, is as good a creator as any you can name, and as able to make Gods as God or Gods ever were to make the world. And what is very much more, while the Bible itself shows God's or Gods' character or characters in the blackest possible light, there is not, from Genesis to Revelation, a single syllable reflecting upon Bereshith.

If any Jew or any Christian cleric demands a sight of Bereshith, I engage to show him at the same time and place as they care to show God or Gods. If they demand to be told what I know of this creator, I engage to tell them when they tell me what they know of their God; and I will furnish as much authentic information as they. The fact that we have not heard much of Bereshith up to date may or may not be our fault or misfortune either; and it is quite as likely that Bereshith now sees fit to reveal to me what I am writing as that any other super-human being ever inspired anyone to write. I do

not pretend that my position is any better than some others; but only prejudice can fight against me, or blaspheme Bereshith.

I must explain that the Hebrew word translated God in the first verse of the Bible and in many others is a plural noun, *Elohim*; and if the root means God, the plural form must mean Gods; but orthodox Jews and Christians object to that, because they pretend that they have but one God. But in sober truth, the Bible is saturated with Polytheism, as Christianity itself is. But I must not enter into that subject at present.

I may say, in dropping this first verse, that I am not the first to read it as I have done. An ancient rabbi, Rashi, says, "God created in the beginning, etc. Without this transposition, the word Bereshith ..... might be taken for the name of the first deity, who created a second" (*Genesis: with a Talmudic Commentary*, by Paul Isaac Hershon; London, 1888; p. 5). Here there is a confession from an orthodox source that Gen. i. 1 should be read as I have read it, only that orthodoxy forbids. I have read it naturally; to save orthodoxy they must invert the order and so give it a meaning its author clearly never intended. The Gnostics and others held, not that the supreme God made matter and the world, but that a secondary or subordinate God did it; and the first verse of Genesis favors that view somewhat, though it credits Bereshith with the making of the heavens and the earth. From that time on Bereshith disappears. Should he some day turn up again, he may make it hot for Jews and Christians who ignore him and worship his creatures! Let us hope he is not "a jealous God" nor anywise revengeful.

If Elohim means Gods, as it certainly does, then the whole of first chapter of Genesis is Polytheistic, and therefore blasphemous. The wind of the Gods moved upon the waters; the Gods said, "Let light be"; they said, Let there be a firmament or roof, etc., and so on at every stage of the earth-making. In verse 26 we read, "The Gods said, Let us make Adam, in our image, after our likeness," etc. And the same form of speech is used in other parts of Genesis, showing that one or more Polytheists wrote it, and that subsequent editors played pranks with the work to give it a Monotheistic face. Much might be said upon this subject; and we, as Freethinkers, should never lose an opportunity of exposing those who pretend that the Bible is a Monotheistic book. That its latest editors were worshipers of but one God may be conceded with little demur; but the book has been tampered with to harmonise it to a newer creed; yet plentiful evidences remain in it to show that the original authors of the oldest portions, and much besides, were worshipers of more than one God.

"Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time.....and they served other Gods" (Josh. xiv. 2). But men like Professor Sayce—an able man, and yet a fanatic—will insist that the fabled Abraham was a real historic person and also a Monotheist. The Bible shows him otherwise. The ancient Phœnicians or Canaanites worshiped a God called El Elyon, or Elyoun. This was the God of Melchizedek, though that truth is obscured by our translation of the Bible where Melchizedek is represented as priest of the "most high God." It should have been written El Elyon. Even as it is the language is decidedly Polytheistic, for "most high God" has no sense unless there were other Gods in some sense lower down. But Abraham worshiped that Pagan God and swore by him; yea, and ate his sacrament of bread and wine, the oldest "Lord's Supper" or "Eucharist" or "Maso" mentioned in the Bible (Gen. xiv. 17 to 24). The Bible, in fact, shows Abraham a worshiper of Yahveh, of Elohim, of El Elyon, of El Shaddai—God enough, surely; and the facts exhibit the "Father of the faithful" and "the Friend of God" in the light of a real blasphemer. I think there can be no rational doubt that the "patriarchs" were all gods, not men; but if Christians and Jews will humanise them, it is our business to expose their character, moral and religious.

What could be worse blasphemy than to represent God, who is a spirit, smelling and sniffing the smoke of Noah's burning carcasses (Gen. viii. 21); eating Abraham's veal and cakes (xviii. 8); or gorging himself with a butcher's shop full of rams, fat beasts and blood (Isaiah i. 10 to 15)? What would the pious say if we said such things about their Deity? Yet, as God is unchangeable, there can be no sort or degree of doubt that what he did in Bible times he would do now. Either God is a disgusting savage or giant, or the Bible blasphemes him a thousand times worse than Freethinkers ever did. To be sure, Bible blasphemy is pious and privileged and God is glorified thereby, while ours is impious, rational, and in all other respects, commendable. Therefore are we liable to be punished for what we should be rewarded.

One of the most blasphemous texts in the Bible is Jeremiah vii. 22, and the Lord himself is the blasphemer, if the holy prophet does not slander him "I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices." Look through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, and you will find there but little else than such commands. The whole drift of those books, one may well say, is to acquire an abundant and permanent supply of gratis sacrifices and offerings for the Lord, that is, the priests; and all such orders were delivered by the Lord, say those books. Jeremiah here denies that the Lord said one word upon the subject. Of course, we believe Jeremiah so far; but still, look at his blasphemy. Let any Freethinker declare that the Lord never told the Israelites to offer sacrifices, etc., and he will be set down as a bold blasphemer for contradicting the plain language of the Pentateuch. But Jeremiah no more believed in the priestly rubbish and falsehoods of the Pentateuch than we do. What a dreadful blasphemer.

And there is almost equal blasphemy in Amos v. 25, 26, where we find that holy prophet denying that Israel sacrificed to the Lord for forty years in the wilderness! Nay, instead of the tent or tabernacle they had and carried with them being a place in which to worship Yahveh, it was, says Amos, the tabernacle of Moloch and Chiun, whose images occupied their places therein! What horrid blasphemy, to be sure!

JOS. SYMES.

In the primeval age a dateless while  
The vacant Shepherd wandered with his flock,  
Pitching his tent where'er the green grass waved.  
But soon Imagination conjured up  
A host of new desires: with busy aim,  
Each for himself, Earth's eager children toiled.  
So Property began, twy-streaming fount,  
Whence Vice and Virtue flow, honey and gall.  
Hence the soft couch and many-colored robe,  
The timbrel, and arch'd dome and costly feast,  
With all the inventive arts, that nursed the soul  
To forms of beauty, and by sensual wants  
Unsensualised the mind, which in the means  
Learnt to forget the grossness of the end,  
Best pleased with its own activity.  
And hence Disease that withers manhood's arm,  
The dagger'd Envy, spirit-quenching Want,  
Warriors, and Lords, and Priests—all the sore ills  
That vex and desolate our mortal life.  
Wide-wasting ills! yet each the immediate source  
Of mightier good. Their keen necessities  
To ceaseless action goading human thought  
Have made Earth's reasoning animal her Lord;  
And the pale-featured Sage's trembling hand  
Strong as a host of armed Deities.

—Coleridge

FROM A PASSIVE DESISTER,  
Some say the rancous "Dr." Clifford  
For spite has with the Primate differed  
While others say the doughty Primate  
Is destined for a hotter "climate";  
'Twas ever thus; these rows must be  
'Twixt Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

X, Y, Z.

## Acid Drops.

We have always held that Dr. Clifford was humbugging when he professed to be in favor of Secular Education. He never was in favor of it and he is not in favor of it now. Loud laughter greeted his letter to the Secretary of the meeting convened to establish a national Secular Education League. The crafty old Pecksniff of the Education controversy said that he had been in favor of Secular Education for twenty years, only he placed his own interpretation upon the word, and could not join a League which would probably try to turn the Bible out of the schools. Of course, nobody wants to turn the Bible out of the school library. A copy ought to be there, with a copy of the Koran and other "Sacred Scriptures," and the teachers should be at liberty to refer to it incidentally, as they would refer to other books in the course of ethical instruction. But that is not what Dr. Clifford means. He wants the Bible to be placed in the hands of all the children, every day, as the text-book of religion and morality; and this is absolutely incompatible with any honest meaning of Secular Education. And the crafty old fellow knows it just as well as we do.

The Lord Mayor of Liverpool—who ought not to be doing such things during his term of office—presided at a Town Hall meeting in aid of the Bishop of Liverpool's call for £100,000 to be spent during the next five years on "the spiritual wants" of his diocese; which is a euphemism for cash to be paid to the gentlemen who cater for the said spiritual wants. One speaker at this meeting said that there were "forty benefices in the diocese under £500 a year and fifteen under £200 a year." "Surely," he added, "this is a terrible blot on the escutcheon of the Church of England, and the sooner that blot is removed the better for us and the Church." Fancy! Forty preachers of the holy gospel of "blessed be ye poor" with less than £6 a week, and fifteen with less than £4 a week! It is enough to make one's heart ache. The very paupers in the workhouse ought to make up a collection towards putting an end to such a shocking state of things.

London clericals are as good beggars as the Liverpool ones. At the recent annual service of the Queen Victoria Clergy Fund, in St. Paul's Cathedral, the episcopal preacher said it was "a crying shame" that out of a total of 14,000 benefices in the Church of England 6,000 had stipends under £200 a year and 1,500 under £100. Nothing was said about the other 6,500. This was probably discreet.

The Very Rev. Dr. Richard William Randall, of Pelham, Lindsay-road, Bournemouth, late Dean of Chichester, left £27,678. The newspaper in which we read this fact reported a very different one; namely, that Mr. Justice Ridley, at Chelmsford, sentenced a poor laborer, one of the Peculiar People, to a month's imprisonment for following the Bible recipe for sickness in the house. There you are! That's just like the monstrous fraud called Christian civilisation. One man gains a fortune by preaching Christianity, and another gets a month for believing it.

Mr. Justice Ridley calls the Peculiar People's "a horrible and ghastly creed." But he wisely said he would not argue with them—for they find their creed in the Bible, and upon that very book Mr. Justice Ridley was himself sworn, as upon the Word of God, to administer justice from the bench.

"Who was this man," Mr. Justice Ridley asked, "who dared to pray to God for a miracle?" A Christian, your lordship—a Christian; one who thinks that Jesus Christ meant what he said by the words, "Whatsoever ye ask, believing, that ye shall receive." Your lordship appears to think that Jesus Christ was joking. But it was a sorry joke—and so was your strange sermon from the judicial seat. William Thomas Clark, a laborer, whom your lordship was trying, is at least a sincere Christian. What sort of a Christian your lordship is may be left to every honest man's judgment.

Rev. Arthur Pringle, of Purley, has been preaching at the City Temple and going it strong. He accused Mr. Meredith, Mr. Hardy and Mr. Pinero, amongst others, of being engaged in an "unpremeditated conspiracy" to make men and women appear worse than they are in reality. "You might judge," he said, "from the very works of these writers that every man is a blackguard and every other woman is not worthy of the name." Mr. Pringle must have been reading these writers with blue spectacles.

What this reverend gentleman says of the novels of Meredith and Hardy is, of course, entirely ridiculous. But even if it were not it is a strange objection to come from the mouth of a man who probably takes a text from the Bible every time he preaches. The Bible says that we were all conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity; that there is none righteous, no not one; and that the thoughts of man's heart are evil continually. Mr. Pringle should leave Meredith and Hardy alone, and tackle the Blessed Book.

Sir Oliver Lodge says that the higher faculties of man are not explainable as the outcome of evolution. Human vanity is a hardy plant. Man has always been paying himself these supernal compliments. He cannot make a flea, as Montaigne says, but he makes gods by the dozen.

"We may hope to co-operate with the Creator," says Sir Oliver Lodge. Much the same thing was said by Mr. Bernard Shaw a few weeks earlier. It is wonderful how great men arrive at the same truth. All we want to know now is what the Creator thinks of it.

Shelley wrote splendid poetry in the lines—

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

But it *was* poetry—not supernaturalism. Sir Oliver Lodge and Mr. Bernard Shaw, not being poets, take the matter more prosaically. These two little worms lift themselves up and say to the Creator, "We've come to help you."

It is astonishing how right we are in the *Freethinker* on most things we deal with. That is because we keep an open mind and take the trouble to think. We have said all along, for instance, that the outcry against the Turk as a bloody villain was mainly due to Christian prejudice. He is not, in our opinion, any worse than the Russian, even if he is as bad. What the Turk does in hot blood the Russian does with cool deliberation. Of the two scoundrels, we rather prefer the Sultan to the Czar, for the latter is also a contemptible hypocrite. This may sound strong language, but we note that Mr. Henry W. Nevinson, the special correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle*, takes just the same view that we have taken all the time. The following extract is from one of his latest letters on the Russian terror in Georgia:—

"There is a famous saying of Lord Salisbury's that at the time of the Crimean War we put our money on the wrong horse. I used to think it a fine and true saying, but I doubt it now. Between the Russian Government and the Turkish, it has really never mattered the turn of a halfpenny which horse we backed. In the race for incapacity and iniquity, they run neck and neck. It is not as though the sort of thing I have seen in the last ten days or so were new to me. Unhappily, I am rather hardened to it, and in Macedonia I have seen what the Turks can do on a more extended scale. Yet, if I had to choose at all, I should prefer the Turkish way, for the Turkish Government, at all events, calls itself neither Most Christian nor Holy, nor does it pose as the heaven-sent protector of the Orthodox Christians whom it slaughters and ruins. That extra refinement of hypocrisy in murder is left to the government of the Tsar."

What we learnt from history, Mr. Nevinson has learnt from experience.

A suggestion is made that the empty City churches should be used as picture galleries. The author of that suggestion may be a Churchman, but he must be rather a buttress than a pillar, and has never been *inside*.

"Thank you, my lord," said Thomas Young as he took his sentence of fifteen months' hard labor at the Clerkenwell Sessions. Well, it is pleasant to find gratitude, especially where it is least expected. While robbing and swindling right and left, this young man had been a lieutenant in the Church Lads' Brigade and a Sunday-school teacher. Of course, this doesn't prove much against Christianity, but at least it proves *this*, that if you want to take advantage of people there is nothing like appealing to their religious susceptibilities. They won't do much thinking then.

The death of Phyllis Wincott, aged eleven months, at Chorley, has "caused a painful sensation in the town." She was put to sleep in a cradle too near the fire, with a little brother aged four and a half rocking her while the mother went to fetch some needlework. Somehow the cradle caught fire and the baby was fatally burnt. We suppose the "painful sensation" is owing to the fact that the father of the baby is a Church parson. But "Providence" cares no more for parsons' children than for other people's. The coroner sensibly advised the mother to get a fireguard.

Rev. C. Leslie Jones, of Oswestry, preaches "Back to the Bible." Let us dismiss Milton's *Paradise Lost*, he says, and get back to a literal acceptance of the Bible; including, we suppose, the story of the talking donkey, in which the reverend gentleman should be interested.

Evan Roberts is reported to be better in health and to be ready to conduct fresh revival services. We all know what that means. The Welsh revival is dead and Evan Roberts is a spent rocket.

In "Acid Drops" a fortnight ago, we referred to a discussion on "Can a man read the *Clarion* and be a Christian?" which took place at Norwood P.S.A., and stated that "the principal man of God who took part in the debate, tried to make out that Christians ought not to read the *Clarion*." We made that statement on the strength of a press report which was sent to us, but which we have not preserved—for such things go in the waste-basket as soon as they are dealt with. That our statement was justified by the report in question, we have no manner of doubt. It seems, however, that the report was inaccurate. A correspondent who was present at the debate informs us that "the reverend gentleman gave offence to some of his most prominent supporters by declaring that the man who could not read the *Clarion* was not worth calling a Christian." Having printed one thing about the reverend gentleman to his disadvantage, we cheerfully print another to his credit. We presume that our correspondent is correct, for he is a Freethinker and knows other Freethinkers who heard the debate.

Rev. T. L. Murray, vicar of St. Mary and Chad, Sandford Hill, Longton, Staffs, may have a perfect right to beg for his religious enterprises from Churchmen in other parts of the country; but he certainly has no right to send out begging letters indiscriminately to persons whose addresses he finds in the London Directory, and whom he judges to be well to do from the locality they live in. The reverend gentleman appears to want £3,000 down and some £500 a year besides. We suggest that he should advertise for what he wants in the Church papers. That would be preferable to begging in the dark from people who, for all he knows, may be Jews, Turks, or Infidels—to use the elegant language of his own Prayer Book.

Lord Charles Beresford is reported to have said that the death of his brother recently was announced by the wailings of a banshee at the family home at Curraghmore. These banshees seem to pay attention to "noble" families. Common folk have to put up with a ticking in the wainscot.

Rev. R. C. Fillingham, of Hexton vicarage, sarcastically suggests that the Bishop of London should have Westminster Abbey sold to some American syndicate. Mr. Fillingham ought to know that the Bishop of London has no control over or connection with Westminster Abbey. The Abbey is under the Dean's control, and the Deanery is independent of all Bishops—being, as it were, a diocese of its own, under the Crown. That is why the Church bigots could not attack Dean Stanley, although he was such a close and pestilent friend of Bishop Colenso's.

Mr. Fillingham is more to the point in the following extract from his letter to Bishop Ingram:—

"May I be allowed to congratulate your Lordship on your continued and persevering efforts to destroy the City churches? Your Lordship's desire of using the proceeds of the sale of these buildings to erect churches in the East is most laudable; for in the East End nobody goes to church. What, then, can be more rational than to destroy buildings which on week-days are crowded at the midday service, and with the funds to erect others which will be empty on Sundays and week-days as well?"

In the East End nobody goes to church! It is not the "infidel" editor of the *Freethinker* who says that, but a Church parson.

Rev. G. Ernest Thorn, the Congregational minister whose portrait appeared in the papers some time ago dressed in a full suit of armor, in which he proposed to preach at the Crown Theatre, Peckham, on Sunday evening, does not approve of the "New Theology." That settles it. Mr. Campbell will have to shut up.

Incidentally, the Rev. G. E. T. praises "the Congo heroes who gave themselves to Christ." No names are given, so we wonder if King Leopold is in the list. He is a very devout Christian.

Dr. Barnardo's Homes had a big advertisement in a London daily. It was headed "Where are the Children?" immediately below which was the following verse:—

"They are out in the wilds of the city,  
Out in the storms of sin;  
Go seek them and gather them every one,  
And fetch Me the children in.  
In cellar, in garret, in alley and court,  
They weep and they suffer and pine."

There was more of the same, but we haven't room for it. Having read thus far we wondered why "Me" didn't gather the children in himself—and why he ever allowed them to be out in such misery. The advertisement might have been headed, "He careth for you," but perhaps it might have looked facetious.

The village church at Holbrooke, near Belper, has been seriously damaged by fire. Of course, the parson and his congregation put all their trust in the Lord; still the damage is covered by insurance.

Mr. Hamar Greenwood, M.P., describes Kingston after the earthquake as resembling "the edge of hell." We wonder how he recognised it.

General Booth is going to Japan. His movements up to his arrival there are all mapped out. What he will do afterwards does not seem to be settled. We shouldn't be surprised if he wanted to be Mikado.

Rayner was overwhelmed with pious letters, tracts and books, while in hospital. It is astonishing what a lot of people want to pilot him to heaven. Rayner probably wished that many of them had taken the trip themselves.

That deep thinker, Mr. Arthur S. Booth-Clibborn, writes from St. Cloud to the *Tribune*, which, of course, inserts his vastly important letter. Mr. Clibborn girds at Mr. Campbell, without mentioning him, as declaring "with the French infidel and the German rationalist that the sweet old Gospel story is all a myth." In the next sentence, Mr. Clibborn "hopes the 'New Theology' will not cross the Channel"—which is like hoping that coals will not be allowed to go to Newcastle.

In another letter to the *Daily Chronicle* this Mr. Booth-Clibborn refers to "our aggressive Gospel work among French infidels." Perhaps he will get some independent person to tell what effect he has made upon them. We never saw him mentioned in any French Freethought paper. Perhaps they think that no defence is necessary against his aggression—and perhaps they are right.

Mrs. Edith Gagen, living in Huntingdonshire, has obtained a judicial separation with costs against her husband in the Divorce Court. The Rev. John Michael Gagen is held by the Court to have committed adultery with a young lady attending St. Savior's Church, Shepherd's Bush, where he was curate. The man of God wanted to bring the young lady home to live with his wife and children. He has evidently read that polygamous book the Bible to great advantage.

Working men are not much nearer old-age pensions yet. The clergy will probably get these pensions before they do. Already a scheme has been propounded by a committee of the Chester Diocesan Conference. It is suggested that parsons should be allowed to retire in all cases at the age of sixty-five, with a pension of two-thirds of their average income during the last ten years of their service; and that provision should be made for an earlier retirement if a reasonable cause were shown. Should this be carried out it will create a paradise for old parsons, and their longevity will probably be astonishing. Even as it is many of them, keep out of heaven a wonderful long time.

The press boycott of the Editor of the *Freethinker* continues. Mr. Foote's speech at the *Tribune* Rendezvous meeting for establishing a national Secular Education League was remarkable for two things; first, it was the one speech that brought the meeting back to the proper ground of principle on which citizens of all varieties of opinion could unite to withdraw religious teaching from the State schools; secondly, it was the one speech that carried the meeting along from first to last and kept it enthusiastic. Yet the *Tribune*, as far as we know, was the only paper that mentioned Mr. Foote's name. We have seen reports in several provincial papers, but they all follow the lead of the dear *Daily News*, and pretend that they never heard of Mr. Foote's

existence. The poor ostriches! As though their boycotting of Mr. Foote could destroy his influence.

Good sometimes comes of evil—accidentally. We are rather glad, in a certain sense, that the press did boycott Mr. Foote on that occasion; otherwise they might have tried to make out that it was a Secularist meeting for the promotion of Secularist education—which is the very thing we wish to prevent.

Dr. Clifford delivered "a fiery speech" to the Passive Resisters at Whitefield's Tabernacle. He hopes a lot of them will go to prison rather than pay the Education rate. For his own part, he prefers to have his spoons seized. He gets the advertisement all the same.

"I still hold," the Rev. Campbell Morgan says, "that the first two chapters of Genesis are true." Yes, as the Rev. Dr. Clifford believes in Secular Education. He would want to put his own interpretation on the word "true." There is not an educated man in England to-day who believes that the first two chapters of Genesis are true, in the sense of meaning precisely what they say. Mr. Campbell Morgan no more believes in the six-days Creation than we do. He is simply blarneying. Neither does he believe the Bible to be "the infallible Word of God" without putting a subtle meaning on the word "infallible." We challenge the reverend gentleman to declare from his pulpit whether he believes that a serpent talked to a woman and a donkey (a four-legged one) to a man, and that a missionary had a three days' submarine trip in the belly of a whale. Don't let him tell us what the stories *teach*; our point is, does he believe them?

One of the silliest things we ever read appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* the other day under the signature of Harold Spender. This gentleman referred to the following foolish prophecy of the late Lord Shaftesbury:—

"I am as certain as I am of my own existence that science, in a more extended compass, long, very long, before it is perfect, will be the surest, stoutest, most irresistible apology for the Bible in the whole history of facts and arguments since controversy began. It will prove the Mosaic creation, the authenticity of the Pentateuch; it will establish the Deluge and Noah's Ark. It will render all Joshua credible: the miracles of Moses and the Red Sea. It will make every syllable of the Old and New Testament as clear and certain to our minds and souls as hunger and thirst, food and raiment, pain and pleasure, are to our bodies."

Lord Shaftesbury did not live to see these things realised; no one ever will live to see them realised; and Mr. Spender seems to be as well aware of this as we are. But he bids those who laugh at Lord Shaftesbury to recollect what philanthropic work he did "in the strength of this meat"—how he fought for the women and children in factories and the little boy chimney-sweepers. Had he not believed in the Mosaic Creation, Mr. Spender says, nothing might have been done for the factory hands and the chimney-boys! Could the force of folly further go? Besides, we might remind Mr. Spender that the people who profited by the hardships of the factory hands and chimney-boys believed in the Mosaic Creation as much as Lord Shaftesbury did.

One of our most esteemed correspondents ("F. S.") supplies us with some interesting information about Mr. W. J. Bryan. "I have been much interested," our correspondent says, "in reading your excellent articles on 'Mr. Bryan's Boastings,' and it may be a clue to the attitude he has assumed as a champion of Christianity when the fact is made known that before he became a politician he was a preacher. It is now nearly forty years since I first went to the United States, and I lived there three years. At that time Bryan was famous far and wide as the 'Celebrated Boy Preacher'; so that it would appear that when his reputation as a preacher declined he took up with politics solely for the purpose of keeping himself prominently before the public. There's the whole case in a nutshell."

Captain Waring, the Liberal candidate at the Banffshire by-election, was asked by Mr. W. P. Adamson: "Are you prepared to vote for the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, under which Freethinkers are liable—as Christians are not—to prosecution, fine, and imprisonment for disseminating their opinions." Captain Waring did not answer the question. He talked about the infrequency of prosecutions "under that Act"—an expression which shows his ignorance; and about the freedom we enjoyed in this country "provided the language used is in no way obscene." Evidently the gallant Captain imagines that if the Blasphemy Laws were abolished there would be no law against obscenity left. We advise him to get a little information on the subject.

The *Protestant Standard*, Liverpool, begs its readers to "sustain" it by "every means in your power" and "cause its circulation to increase more and more." It is going to sweep back "the advancing tide of Ritualism, Romanism, Unitarianism, and Infidelity." Our contemporary's supporters will have to shell out for a big broom to do all that. We understand that only a few bristles are available at present.

Rev. Edward Thomas Billings, of Torquay, formerly vicar of St. Matthew, Chatterton, Lancashire, left £21,714. Rev. Richard Tate, of Clontarf, left £10,954. If the teaching of their Master be true, these holy gentlemen are now cooking in the Devil's kitchen. They have our sympathy.

Very Rev. Dr. Richard W. Randill, of Bournemouth, left £27,678. This gentleman has our sympathy too. His friends should try to send him on some ice. It is cheap now.

"Unhinged by Revival" is the heading of a report in the *South Wales Echo*. Mr. Griffith Roberts, a leading Llandudno tradesman, drowned himself in a water tank at the top of his premises. He was greatly affected by the Welsh revival two years ago, and has attended chapel as frequently as possible since. In his safe was found a sheet of paper, on which he had written:—

"At last my conscience is awakened, and I have continual visions of my past deceitful and hypocritical life. No wonder I have become so hardhearted. God has left me to go my own way, and now I cannot repent or pray, and feel I am beyond praying for by others, so I am a ruined man body and soul, and have no hope whatever before me. My life has become a burden, and it is time it came to an end. When this does take place it is my desire to be buried quietly and be soon forgotten."

Such are the consolations of religion.

People have to be very careful in Kaiserland. It is "Me and God" with William, and he doesn't allow his partner to be insulted. A beershop keeper opposite the Nazareth Church in Berlin has been visited by the police and told that he must not call his establishment "Daniel in the Lions' Den." The religious susceptibilities of the Kaiser's orthodox friends have to be respected.

James Fordham ought to have been safe when at work on one of the Lord's buildings. But he wasn't. He was engaged on the tower of St. Thomas's Church, Liverpool, when "Providence" let him fall to the ground, where he was picked up—dead.

"For his tender mercies are over all his works." Especially in China, where three millions of people are dying of starvation. "Providence" has withheld the fruits of the earth, and the Missionary Societies are asking for money to defeat that party's amiable intentions.

There are many secret murder societies in Italy. "In Naples," according to the Rome correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle*, "the associates of secret societies are for the most part persons of pronounced piety, who contribute generously to the upkeep of the priesthood."

"Religion," a Sunday paper says, "is evidently going to have its turn. It is known that Mr. Bernard Shaw is writing a book on it." "That," says the *Star*, "is certainly calculated to give it a turn."

#### DIDN'T KNOW THE WAY.

A small boy was fishing in the canal a short way from Georgetown, when a reverend gentleman accosted him.

"Can you show me the way to Georgetown?" inquired the gentleman.

"Yes, sir," said the small boy, sticking his pole in the hollow stump of a tree, and proceeding to elucidate.

The old gentleman thanked him and went on his way. Three or four hours later the gentleman appeared on the scene again.

"Caught any fish, my little man?"

"Naw."

"Don't you know it's a sin to fish on Sunday?"

"No," was the quick reply.

"What is your name, my little man?"

"Billy Smith."

"Ever go to Sunday school, William? Know anything about Jesus?"

"No, sir," was the somewhat delinquent reply.

"Ever hear of heaven?"

The boy shook his head doubtfully.

"Well, my little man, that's too bad. If you will come up to my Sunday school next Sunday I'll show the way to heaven."

"Oh, you go to hell; you didn't even know the way to Georgetown."



## Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, February 17, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, London, W., at 7.30., "Do the Dead Live?"

February 24, Queen's Hall.

March 3, Glasgow; 17, Manchester.

## To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—February 17, Camberwell; 24, Birmingham Town Hall. March 10, Forest Gate. April 14, Glasgow.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—February 17, Newcastle-on-Tyne; 24, Camberwell. March 10, Birmingham; 24, West Stanley.

RIP VAN WINKLE.—Glad you take our little joke in such good part; it bespeaks a truly pleasant nature. Pleased to know you get your *Freethinker* through Smith and Son.

W. S. LEESON.—See paragraph in "Acid Drops." Thanks for your trouble in the matter. We don't pretend to infallibility, and are always ready to correct any mistake that may creep into our pages.

THE JOSEPH SYMES FUND.—Previously acknowledged, £273 4s. 11d. Since received: Uncle Tim and Wife, 5s.; E. Moorhouse, 2s.; W. H. Spivey, 1s. 6d.; T. Whitely, 1s.; R. Tabrum, 1s.; Rip Van Winkle, 10s.; E. Langridge, 2s. 6d.; John Bradley, 2s. 6d.; J. Baker, 1s.; J. Robinson, 2s. 6d.; J. Ries, 10s. 6d.; G. Gowland, 2s. 6d.; M. Tempest, 2s. 6d.; Failsworth Secular Sunday School, £1; W. Emery, 1s.; T. Cutler, 1s.; Newcastle Branch (proceeds from draw), £1 3s.; J. Ralston, 2s. 6d.; J. Stewart, 2s. 6d.; W. Scott, 2s.; W. Waddell, 2s.; A. Fraser, 2s.; J. Stewart, 2s.; W. Muir, 2s. 6d.; G. Dallas, 2s.; J. Walker, 2s. 6d.; J. Miller, 1s.; Howarth (Manchester), 5s. *Per Miss Vance*.—W. Bailey, £5; Woolwich (1), 1s.; Woolwich (2), 1s.; Mr. Storey, 2s. 6d.; R. Lancaster, 10s.

THE COHEN "SALVATION ARMY" TRACT FUND.—Previously acknowledged, £14 7s. 6d. Since received: Admirer, 10s.; D. Baxter, 3s.

UNCLE TIM.—The Sunday Society you refer to seems to be different from most bearing the name; and if you are helping to ventilate Freethought principles you are doing a good work. Sorry we could not assist in the way suggested. Why not get a catalogue from our publishing office and order from time to time what seems suitable.

W. H. SPIVEY.—Best wishes for better times.

F. S. writes: "Now that your arduous, and I am pleased to see successful, labors in connection with the Symes Fund are ended, I desire to congratulate you, not only on account of them, but also because of your able editing of the *Freethinker*. As a constant reader ever since its first issue, I am bound to say that, in my opinion, it has never attained to so high a standard of literary merit as it possesses at the present time: a fact which the Freethought party ought to be proud of, and one which I, personally, am delighted to acknowledge."

W. LEACH.—Our answer was only "curt" in the sense of being brief. It was perfectly civil. We cannot do impossibilities.

M. B.—Marie Corelli knows as much about Science as we know about Sanscrit. If she says—as you state—that Jesus's walking on the water was a pure act of electricity, she is talking absolute nonsense.

W. P. M.—Much obliged for cuttings, etc.

J. ROBERTS.—Your enclosures are generally useful.

W. VILE.—We do not know Chinese and are therefore at the mercy of translators. Dr. Legge gives the Confucian "Golden Rule" in the negative form; but, as we explained last week, negative and positive are really all one, as they come to the same thing in the end. The Golden Rule was stated in the positive form by Isocrates hundreds of years before Christ. Saint Augustine, the greatest of the Christian "fathers" (quoted by Hooker, Bk. 1, Ch. viii, 10) plainly said that "Do as thou wouldst be done unto, is a sentence which all nations under heaven are agreed upon." But Saint Augustine, with all his faults, was a very great man, and utterly incapable of the modern Protestant folly of supposing that Christianity invented morality or improved it as morality.

A. J. NOTLEX.—From the very first number this journal has always been supplied to the trade on "sale or return." If your newsagent has any difficulty, the fault lies with the wholesale agent who supplies him. He should insist on "sale or return" terms. Sometimes, of course, newsagents allege false reasons in order to cover their own bigotry.

E. R. WOODWARD.—Many thanks for your trouble, but we can only repeat that the Camberwell Central Library, Peckham, is on our free list, and that a copy is posted regularly. Even if that copy missed one week by any accident the chances are overwhelming against its missing several weeks in succession. We cannot answer anonymous letters. Correspondents must give their names and addresses as a guarantee of good faith.

E. MOORCROFT.—The idea of any *Freethinker* being converted by that paper is indeed a joke.

T. D. CHAPMAN (Johannesburg).—Pleased to receive the "best wishes" of "a grateful convert to the glorious cause of Freethought."

R. STEVENSON.—The extract will be useful. Glad to receive your pleasant letter.

NORMAN MURRAY (Montreal).—You will never persuade us that the principles of toleration which Freethinkers appeal to in their weakness are not the principles which should guide them in their strength. Nor are we quarreling with our friends. The overwhelming majority of those who have written to us are with us—not against us.

CEPHUS.—Sorry we cannot deal with it this week.

J. MACLEOD.—Thanks for cuttings.

"JAN DE BOER."—Yes, the good old sun is coming north again; and, as Mirabeau said when he was dying, if that isn't God it is at least his cousin-german.

J. RALSTON.—Our compliments to the Motherwell friends. Glad to have your appreciative letter.

J. BROUGH.—Mr. Foote is better, but hardly expects to be quite well until the weather is more civilised.

J. OWEN.—Send whenever the spirit moves.

S. BOWRING.—Thanks.

W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always very welcome.

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THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

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

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

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## Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote's audience at Queen's Hall on Sunday evening was a good one, but it would have been much larger in all probability if it had not been for the horrid foggy weather which prevailed on Saturday night and most of Sunday. The lecture on "Mr. Campbell's New Theology" was very warmly applauded. Mr. Victor Roger came over from Camberwell to take the chair. He invited discussion, but there was none, though several questions were asked and answered.

Mr. Foote occupies the Queen's Hall platform again this evening (Feb. 17), and we hope the London "saints" will help him in the simple and easy way of giving the lecture publicity amongst their friends and acquaintances—as it is impossible to placard the huge metropolis with bills of such a meeting. Mr. Foote's subject will be "Do the Dead Live?"

We hear that Mr. Cohen had good meetings on Sunday at Manchester, the evening meeting being the largest he has yet had in the Secular Hall. Midland "saints" will please note that Mr. Cohen lectures next Sunday (Feb. 24) in the Birmingham Town Hall. This will be his first appearance on that platform as a lecturer, and we hope the Branch's enterprise will be well supported.

Rev. R. J. Campbell's recent utterances in Newcastle on "The New Theology" have attracted considerable attention in the locality, and the Newcastle Branch have endeavored to take advantage of this public interest by engaging Mr. Lloyd to lecture on this evening (Feb. 17), in the Co-operative Hall, Darn Crook, on the subject. Mr. Lloyd will also lecture in the afternoon at 3, on "Does Secularism Safeguard Morality?" Good audiences are expected.

Our esteemed contemporary, the New York *Truthseeker*, in its issue for January 27 published a notice of the death of Joseph Symes from the pen of Mr. E. Pack. This was followed, in the next issue, by a sympathetic account of the funeral from the same pen, with an excellent summary of the

President of the National Secular Society's speech over the coffin. It is rather curious that the *Truthseeker* has reproduced nothing from our own pen on this subject. No one in England knew Joseph Symes as well as we did; and during his twenty-three years' absence from the old country we never allowed our readers to forget him.

The provisional committee of the Secular Education League held its first meeting on Monday evening, and measures were decided upon for forming a large General Council of influential friends of Secular Education in all parts of the country. We hope to be able to make a more definite announcement on this matter shortly.

The *Bethnal Green News*, in gossip of the week, under the heading of "What I've Heard," says that "Councillor Neate refused to stand when the 'Loyal toasts' were drunk, and he was the cynosure of all eyes"—at the highly successful banquet to Councillor Charles Wood, ex-Mayor of Bethnal Green, at the Holborn Restaurant. Mr. James Neate is a vice-president of the National Secular Society, and a member of the Board of the Secular Society, Limited. He says he doesn't understand how Freethinkers can stand up and take part in "God save the King."

We have received the first number of a penny monthly called the *Scottish Nation*, edited by W. Henry Mcmuir and J. Westwood, and published by Peddie, Ewen & Co., 57 York-place, Edinburgh. The editors are thoughtful and courageous; how far they are right is a question for their readers' judgment; all we are concerned to say is that they should get a hearing. They write from the Positivist point of view, and start with Comte's great motto: "Love for principle, Order for basis, and Progress for end." An article on the front page on "Improvement of Religion" ends with the hope that men will "get rid of those dark clouds of superstition and mythology which have for so long blinded and mystified Humanity in the Past." This, at any rate, is a new note in Scottish periodicals.

"Clergymen and Politics" is the heading of an outspoken letter by "Free Enquirer" in the *Danven News*. The writer deals, incidentally, with the question, why working men do not go to church—which he answers as follows: "Long enough before working men ceased to go to church there were men of a class who would sneer to be called working men who ceased to go to church, and they ceased to go for the same reason that working men have ceased to go, namely, that the doctrines of the Church are so contrary to reason and ascertained knowledge as to be obviously untrue, and as such have gone the way that all untruth does in the light of scientific investigation." Letters of this kind do great good in the local newspapers, and we wish Freethinkers would contribute them more frequently.

We are able this week to publish another article by the late Joseph Symes. It appears to have been written some weeks before his decease. We have also in type some Free-thought verses written as late as November. Our old comrade's mental powers were far from failing, and the more we think of it the more unfortunate his tragic death becomes.

Last week's *Freethinker* was sold out early. Any reader who failed to obtain a copy will be able to get one from the returns by ordering from his newsagent or applying direct to our publishing office.

I dropped my pen; and listened to the Wind  
That sang of trees upturn and vessels tost—  
A midnight harmony; and wholly lost  
To the general sense of men by chains confined  
Of business, care, or pleasure; or resigned  
To timely sleep. Thought I, the impassioned strain,  
Which, without aid of numbers, I sustain,  
Like acceptance from the World will find.  
Yet some with apprehensive ear shall drink  
A dirge devoutly breathed o'er sorrows past;  
And to the attendant promise will give heed—  
The prophecy,—like that of this wild blast,  
Which, while it makes the heart with sadness shrink,  
Tells also of bright calms that shall succeed.

—Wordsworth.

## God's Catastrophes.

"Nature answers neither the questions nor the plaints of man; she inexorably flings him back upon himself."—*Ludwig Feuerbach*.

"Millions of prayers have been vainly breathed to what we now know were inexorable laws of nature."—*Lecky*, "*History of European Morals*," 1886, vol. i., p. 55.

"All nature, all the universe that we can see, is absolutely indifferent to us, and except to us human life is of no more value than grass. If the entire human race perished at this hour, what difference would it make to the earth? What would the earth care? As much as for the extinct dodo, or for the fate of the elephant now going."—*Richard Jefferies*, "*The Story of my Heart*," p. 57.

WE have seen the feeble and flimsy excuses put forward by the pious in the attempt to exonerate God as the author of earthquakes and volcanoes. It is very easy for these men to sit at home in ease and security to make light of these fearful catastrophes. Probably no one is capable of realising the full horror of the thing except by personal experience. Last year two cities were destroyed by earthquakes. San Francisco in the United States and Valparaiso in Chili, South America. Let us try and form some idea of what happened.

The earthquake at San Francisco occurred without the slightest warning; an eye-witness says: "There was one great detonation, followed immediately by a succession of frightful crashes. Then, instantly, came sheets of flame, which broke out everywhere about us." This occurred at a quarter past five in the morning (April 18), the concussion only lasted two minutes but the consequences were terrific. "Presently" continues the narrator, "I saw people pouring out of houses everywhere, all scantily clad, wailing and crying and calling upon the names of their loved ones. They fled in every direction, no one knowing where to go or what to do." A lady, a guest at the Occidental Hotel, describes her terrible experience: "After the first shock the door was jammed and I could not escape. I screamed for help, and someone broke down the door," some of the streets she fled through she describes as "simply lanes of flame," it seemed to her like "a horrible nightmare." Hundreds of others, less fortunate, were trapped and unable to escape, were roasted to death in the flames, many of them within sight of the firemen and military, who helpless to effect a rescue, were agonised to see fellow human beings thus tortured.

Fire engines were tearing about, almost aimlessly. The efforts of five thousand fire fighters were useless, owing to the water mains having been destroyed by the earthquake; they confined their efforts to dynamiting the houses, of which they destroyed block after block, in the hope of limiting the area of the conflagration; but after each successive effort the flames would leap across the seemingly impassable gulf and sweep the "Queen City" of the Pacific from end to end.

The Chinese quarter burned down in less than an hour. The Chinese mob came rushing out, mad with terror, and fought in wild insanity with each other to escape. Meeting in Portsmouth-square with the refugees from other foreign quarters, there ensued a sheer riot of madness in which safety appeared to be less sought after than the lust of racial conflict; the military had to turn aside from the work of fighting the flames to restore order with cold steel. Others with the ruling passion for drink strong upon them—stronger than the love of life itself—broke open the liquor stores at the north end of the city and hundreds of men could be seen carrying bottles of drink. "It was a mad orgie" says the Mayor of San Francisco, "like the Dance of Death." Not content with looting the stores and shops, many wretches were shot down in the act of robbing the dead. To complete the inferno, the abattoir caught fire and three hundred cattle breaking loose charged down the burning street, trampling under foot all who stood in their path.

Three hundred thousand people fled from the burning city. Under the stress of this hurried flight

the roads were so cut up as to become impassable. They resembled the track of a retreating army. The roughness of the roads caused the wheels of the vehicles to come off, in other cases to stick in the mud and the track was strewn with the personal belongings of the flying multitude, making their way to the parks outside the city.

"The night was one of horror," says the *Daily Chronicle* correspondent, speaking of the men, women and children in the parks—

"Sleep was impossible to them, and they remained the night huddled in frightened groups together, while the noise of the explosions, the crash of falling buildings, and the crackling of the flames literally frightened many of the weaker ones to death. I made my way to Black point, on the Golden Gate, about two miles from Nob Hill, which is now the only safe place on the north end of the peninsula. Here I witnessed most heartrending scenes. Shrieking women clinging about the necks of their husbands and fathers, little children crying and piteously begging for food and water, while the soldiers, forced by stern necessity, continued to drive the people into open spaces with fixed bayonets. The wailing of the young, mingled with the moans of their elders, added to the inferno burning at their backs, created a pandemonium indeed."

The next day the city was still burning furiously, in spite of all efforts to isolate the area of the fire by blowing up the adjoining houses. The struggle to check the flames at Van Ness Avenue resembled a battle. Huge United States cannon were drawn up to aid the dynamiters to demolish the mansions along the east side of the avenue, and the steady booming of artillery and the roar of dynamite were heard for hours above the howl and crackling of the flames. A thick pall of smoke overhung the city. The same correspondent, continuing his narrative on the following day, says:—

"Meanwhile the suffering of the survivors is increasing. Multitudes passed last night in the most distressing fashion, many without food or water. The thick black smoke was driven groundwards and pervaded every quarter of the city. It choked the poor creatures who had taken refuge in the Golden Gate, Black Point, and other parks, and left them gasping for breath, while the terror went on raging all round them. Last night I saw the shelterless women and children lying on the grass of the parks, the heavy dew of which saturated their clothing. It was heartrending to be forced to turn away from their piteous cries for aid. It was impossible, however, to help them. I saw hundreds lying too helpless on the ground to rise. Some were certainly dying, others doubtless were already dead.

The crackling of the flames in the distance, was broken now and again by the boom of explosions of gun cotton, which all night was used freely in the destruction of the magnificent mansions along Van Brunt avenue, which but a few days ago were inhabited by the wealthiest class on the Pacific coast. They now lie in ruins and desolation. Day dawned on a hopeless community of hollow-eyed men and women of all classes."

The finishing touch of irony occurred after the city had been burning several days, and had practically burned itself out; it then began to rain in torrents, at the same time turning very cold, adding to the miseries of the homeless throngs in the parks.

The earthquake was not confined to San Francisco but extended over an area of a hundred miles radius round the city, and many towns suffered severely from the shock. Santa Rosa was totally destroyed and five hundred people killed, the remaining ten thousand of the inhabitants fled to the hills. The State insane Asylum at Agnew was overthrown, one hundred and three patients were crushed to death and two hundred and seven injured, thirty fatally. At San Jose the business section of the town collapsed and fifty people were killed. Santa Cruz, Monterey, Gilroy, Hollister, Delmonte and Los Angeles, were also reported to have suffered.

This fearful catastrophe occurred in April, 1906. In the following August, Valparaiso in Chili was destroyed in a similar manner. It was a repetition of the scene at San Francisco, the water mains being destroyed by the shock and the inevitable fires com-

pleting the work of destruction. The correspondent of the *Chronicle*—we quote the *Chronicle* because it is not identified with the yellow press, still less with Freethought—telegraphs:—

"It is evident that severe as was the loss in Valparaiso, in comparison, the losses throughout the country—the provinces of Chili—are far greater. For instance, it is stated that the towns of Los Andes and Melipilla, which respectively have populations of eight thousand and three thousand, have been swallowed up. Eight or ten other towns are reported to have met with a similar fate, notably Vina del Mar, Quirihue, El Salto, Limache, and Quillota. The rest are villages lying between Quillota and the Andes."

At Santiago the prisoners in the gaol were singing a hymn when the catastrophe occurred. The walls fell and buried one hundred and forty of them. The usual looting took place; at Valparaiso alone, one hundred looters were shot by the military.

Now we have to record the destruction of Kingston, in Jamaica, making three disastrous earthquakes within nine months. If there is a God it is time he was superannuated.

It is needless to relate the incidents attending the destruction of Kingston, the facts being still fresh in the public mind. Suffice it to say, that in its main outlines it repeated the disasters of San Francisco and Valparaiso. This is not the first time Jamaica has been visited by earthquake. On the 7th June, 1692, Port Royal was destroyed. In two minutes all the principal streets next the water sank with the people who were on them. A high rolling wave closed over them, and in an instant sixteen hundred human beings—amongst them the Attorney General, the Provost Marshall, and the Lord Secretary—found a grave. The Rector of Port Royal, who himself had a narrow escape, writes: "I saw the earth open and swallow up a multitude of people, and the sea mounting in upon us over the fortifications." In a subsequent letter he writes:—

"It is a sad sight to see this harbor—one of the finest I ever saw—covered with dead bodies of people of all conditions, floating up and down without burial; for our burying-place was destroyed by the earthquake, which dashed to pieces tombs, and the sea washed the carcasses of those who have been buried out of their graves. We have had accounts from several parts of the island, but none suffered like Port Royal; whole streets with their inhabitants were swallowed up by the opening of the earth, which when shut upon them, squeezed the people to death, and in that manner several are left with their heads above ground; only some heads the dogs have eaten, the others are covered with dust and earth by the people who yet remain in the place." †

Altogether two thousand people, whites and negroes, perished, and another three thousand died of a plague which broke out, caused by the hardships and want endured by the survivors.

One of the greatest, if not the greatest earthquake on record, was that at Lisbon on November 1, 1755. The concussion extended over all Europe—over North Africa, where in one town in Morocco 8,000 or 10,000 people perished. Its effects extended even across the Atlantic to Madeira, where it was very violent, and to the West Indies. "In six minutes from the commencement," says Sir John Herschel, "60,000 persons were crushed in the ruins." Continuing he says:—

"It happened to be a religious festival, and most of the population were assembled in the churches, which fell and crushed them. That no horror might be wanting, fires broke out in innumerable houses where the wood-work had fallen on the fires; and much that the earthquake had spared was destroyed by fire. And then, too, broke forth that worst of all scourges, a lawless ruffian-like mob, who plundered, burned, and murdered in the midst of all that desolation and horror." ‡

While the people were assembled in the churches, praising "God from whom all blessings flow," the walls fell upon and crushed them to death. What a commentary upon the words of the psalmist, "Like

\* *Daily Chronicle*, August 21, 1906.

† *Chambers Journal*, October 20, 1883.

‡ *Herschel, Familiar Lectures on Scientific Subjects*, (1867), p. 37.

as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." If they had been immoral houses, or gambling dens, he could not have served them worse. If they had been infidel meeting places, the pious would have seen an instance of God's judgment on unbelievers.

A new quay had lately been finished at Lisbon, built entirely of marble at an immense expense. On this quay, says Sir Charles Lyell:—

"A great concourse of people had collected there for safety, as a spot where they might be beyond the reach of falling ruins; but, suddenly, the quay sank down with all the people on it, and not one of the dead bodies ever floated to the surface. A great number of boats and small vessels anchored near it, all full of people, were swallowed up as in a whirlpool."\*

Twenty-two years later, a similar catastrophe occurred at Guatemala. To quote Sir Charles Lyell again:—

"The ground on which the town stood gaped open in deep fissures, until at length, after five days, an abyss opened, and the city, with all its riches and eight thousand families, was swallowed up. All vestiges of its former existence were entirely obliterated, and the spot is now indicated by a frightful desert, four leagues distant from the present town."†

These are by no means the most destructive earthquakes recorded. That of Sicily in 1693, destroyed one hundred thousand lives. That of Pekin in 1731, another hundred thousand. In that of Yeddo, Japan, in 1703, two hundred thousand lost their lives. While in that of Antioch in the year 526, two hundred and fifty thousand perished! This also happened during a religious festival; and Gibbon records that the "domestic multitudes were swelled by the conflux of strangers to the festival of the Ascension."‡

As John Stuart Mill remarked, in his *Essay on Nature*:—

"In sober truth, nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another, are Nature's everyday performances. Killing, the most criminal act recognised by human laws, Nature does once to every being that lives; and in a large proportion of cases, after protracted tortures such as only the greatest monsters whom we read of ever purposely inflicted on their living fellow creatures."

And yet we are blandly invited to "look through nature up to nature's God." No, we had rather not. Moreover, it is hard for the unsophisticated mind to understand why the worshipers of the God of nature should despise the heathen, who "in his blindness bows down to wood and stone," and yet profess to love and reverence a being who permits the fearful calamities, a few of which we have described.

W. MANN.

## Miracles.

WHAT is a miracle? Some people would reply, an act of God. But this definition is far too wide. In the theistic sense, it would include everything that happens; and in the sense of our archaic bills of lading, it would include fire and shipwreck.

Others would reply, a miracle is a wonder. But this definition would include every new, or at least every surprising new fact. A black swan would have been a wonder before Australia was discovered, but it would have been no miracle. Railways, telegraphs, telephones, electric light, and even gas light, would be wonders to savages, yet neither are they miracles. One of the Mahdi's followers was astonished by an English officer, who pulled out his false eye, tossed it in the air, caught it, and replaced it; after which he asked the flabbergasted Arab whether his miraculous Mahdi could do that. It was a greater wonder than the Mahdi could perform; still it was not a miracle. Ice was so great a wonder to the King of Siam that he refused to credit its existence. Yet it

was not miraculous, but a natural product, existing in practically unlimited quantities in the polar regions. We might multiply these illustrations *ad infinitum*, but what we have given will suffice. If not, let the reader spend an evening at Maskelyce and Cooke's, where he will see plenty of startling wonders and not a miracle amongst them.

Hume's definition of a miracle as a violation of a law of nature is the best ever given, and it really is as perfect as such a definition can be. It has been carpied at by Christian scribblers, and criticised by superior theologians like Mozley. But, to use Mr. Gladstone's phrase, it keeps the field. Even the criticisms of Mill and Huxley leave its merit unimpaired. The ground taken by these is, that to say a miracle is a violation of a law of nature is to pre-judge the question, and to rule out all future facts in the interest of a prepossession. Mill, however, allows that a miracle is a violation of a valid induction, and as a law of nature means nothing more it is difficult to understand why he takes any exception to Hume's statement of the case. It is perfectly obvious that Hume's argument is not metaphysical, but practical. He does not discuss the *possibility* but the *probability* of miracles. He reduces the dispute to a single point, namely, whether the person who relates a miracle (for to the world at large the question is necessarily one of testimony) is deceived or deceiving, or whether the otherwise universal experience of mankind is to be disbelieved; in other words, whether he or the rest of the world is mistaken. One man may, of course, be right, and all the human race opposed to him wrong, but time will settle the difference between them. That *time*, however, simply means general experience through long ages; and that is precisely the tribunal which Hume's argument appeals to.

Quarreling with Hume's definition is really giving up miracles altogether, for, except as supernatural evidence, they are no more important than shooting stars. The very nature of a miracle, in whatever formula it may be expressed, is superhuman, and having a purpose, it is also supernatural; in other words, it is a special manifestation of divine power for a particular object. Whether, being so, it is a violation, a contravention, or a suspension of the laws of nature, is a mere question about words.

We may say that a miracle has three elements. It is first a fact, unaccountable by science; secondly, it requires a conscious agent; and thirdly, it results from the exercise of a power which that agent does not naturally possess.

Let us descend to illustration. Huxley takes the following case. Suppose the greatest physiologist in Europe alleged that he had seen a centaur, a fabulous animal, half man and half horse. The presumption would be that he was laboring under hallucination; but if he persisted in the statement he would have to submit to the most rigorous criticism by his scientific colleagues before it could be believed; and everybody would feel sure beforehand that he would never pass through the ordeal successfully. The common experience, and, therefore, the common sense of society, would be dead against him, and probably he would be refused the honor of examination even by the most fervid believers in ancient miracles.

But after all, the centaur, even if it existed, would not be a miracle but a monstrosity. It does not contain the three elements we have indicated. Real miracles would be of a different character. Plenty may be found in the Bible, and we may make a selection to illustrate our argument. Jesus Christ was once at a marriage feast, when the wine ran short, which was perhaps no uncommon occurrence. Being of a benevolent turn of mind, and anxious that the guests should remember the occasion, he turned a large quantity of cold water into fermented juice of the grape. Now water contains oxygen and hydrogen in definite proportions, and nothing else, while wine contains in addition to these, carbon and other elements, being in fact a very complex liquid. Jesus Christ must, therefore, in turning water into wine, have created something, and that transcends

\* Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, (1832), p. 505.

† *Ibid.*, p. 502.

‡ *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. 43.

human power. Here, then, we have a complete miracle, according to Hume's definition and our own theory.

We do not say the miracle never occurred, although we no more believe in it than we believe the moon is made of green cheese. We are willing to regard it as susceptible of proof. But does the proof exist? To answer this we must inquire what kind of proof is necessary. An extraordinary story should be supported by extraordinary evidence. It requires the concurrent and overwhelming testimony of eye-witnesses. We must be persuaded that there is no collusion between them, that none of them has anything to gain by deception, that they had no previous tendency to expect such a thing, and that it was practically impossible that they could be deluded. Now let any man or any Christian seriously ask himself whether the evidence of Jesus Christ's miracle is of this character. Four evangelists write his life and only one mentions the occurrence. Even he was certainly not an eye-witness, nor does he pretend to be, and the weight of evidence is against his gospel having been written till long after the first disciples of Jesus were dead. But even if the writer distinctly declared himself an eye-witness, and if it were undeniable that he lived on the spot at the time, his single unsupported testimony would be absurdly inadequate to establish the truth of the miracle. Every reader will at once see that the established rules of evidence are not conformed to, and whoever accepts the miracle must eke out reason with faith.

So much for the evidence of miracles. Their intellectual or moral value is simply *nil*. The greatest miracle could not really convince a man of what his reason condemned; and if a prophet could turn water into wine, it would not necessarily follow that all he said was true. In fact, truth does not require the support of miracles; it flourishes better without their assistance. Universal history shows that miracles have always been employed to support falsehood and fraud, to promote superstition, and to enhance the profit and power of priests.

G. W. FOOTE.

—Reprinted from "Flowers of Freethought."

## Correspondence.

### WHAT IS ATHEISM?

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The further letter from "South Devon" does not advance the argument. He retreats, somewhat ignominiously, to "Christian explanations of Atheism," a sure indication that your correspondent, with all deference, has a few more stages to go along the path of Freethought.

"Our language alters," declares the Agnostic. But has the root meaning of the term "Atheist" changed? No; it still stands as the equivalent of the Greek *atheos* = "without god."

"I use the word 'Agnostic,'" says your correspondent, "because it....clearly expresses the idea of ignorance of God." Apart from the palpable contradiction involved in the phrase "idea of ignorance," may I suggest that he who is "ignorant of God" is without God, or words have no meaning. But the truth is out in the next paragraph, for "South Devon" there frankly confesses that "Agnostic" embraces not only those who are without knowledge of God, but also those who "are inclined to believe he exists." This latter declaration requires no kind of emphasis to reveal the truth that the indefiniteness and variability in the meaning of terms lies, admittedly, at the door of the Agnostic.

Believers in the existence of God, as Huxley contended, are properly classed as Theists, and it is this excrescence of Theism into the realm of Agnosticism that renders the word inadequate.

It is true that Mr. Bradlaugh always asked for his opponent's conception of God; but it was the *conception*, and not "his existence," as "South Devon" asserts, that was denied, for he was always careful to declare that he could not deny that of which he had no idea. (See *Plea for Atheism*.)

The question as to whether "Christian explanations" are accurate in describing the Atheist as "non-moral," "immoral," or "lunatic as far as social faculties are concerned,"

is, like all others, one which can be settled by an appeal to the evidence; and if your correspondent is versed in the details of his work, he will be sufficiently alive to the fact that out of 21,580 prisoners in His Majesty's Prisons in England, Wales and Scotland on March 28, 1906, only 22 are registered as "No religion"; the remainder, 21,558, being classed as Christians of specific denominations. These figures are taken from a State Paper compiled and tabulated by Christian officials for presentation to Parliament, which is still chiefly Christian; and as for "lunatics," space will not allow me to say more than that religious emotionalism has a good deal to answer for in this direction.

F. R. THEAKSTONE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—"South Devon" says that Mr. Bradlaugh gave the formula "God = x" as a "definition." I should call it an exceedingly condensed or epigrammatic presentment of the fact that the word "God" is to a large extent a symbol for the unknown. It is certainly not a definition, and it was obviously never intended to bear the strain of being treated as one. It merely means that where knowledge ends people *imagine* a God to fill the gap. It is in this sense that God = the unknown.

"South Devon," however, says that "If the formula has any meaning, it is that God exists, is unknown but knowable." This would by no means follow from the equation "God = x." If your correspondent calls his algebra to mind, he must admit that the value of *x* often turns out to be nothing, or a negative or impossible quantity.

W. P. BALL.

There is a bondage worse, far worse, to bear  
Than his who breathes, by roof, and floor, and wall,  
Pent in, a Tyrant's solitary Thrall:  
'Tis his who walks about in the open air,  
One of a Nation who, henceforth, must wear  
Their fetters in their souls. For who could be,  
Who, even the best, in such condition, free  
From self-reproach, reproach that he must share  
With Human-nature? Never be it ours  
To see the sun how brightly it will shine,  
And know that noble feelings, manly powers,  
Instead of gathering strength, must droop and pine;  
And earth with all her pleasant fruits and flowers  
Fade, and participate in man's decline.

—Wordsworth.

As he went through Cold-Bath Fields he saw  
A solitary cell;  
And the Devil was pleased, for it gave him a hint  
For improving his prisons in Hell.

—Coleridge.

### TOO LONG.

Dr. George Dana Boardman, the famous Baptist preacher, used to tell this story against himself: "I preached a funeral sermon at one time, and spoke longer than was my custom. The undertaker was a man of nervous temperament, and as the afternoon was going he began to be anxious to be on the way to the cemetery. He finally whispered to one of my members, 'Does your minister always preach as long as that at a funeral?' 'Well,' said the brother, 'that is a good sermon.' 'Yes,' said the undertaker, 'the sermon is all right, and I believe in the resurrection; but I am afraid if he does not stop pretty soon I will not get this man buried in time.'"

### DECEIVED.

"Sister Henderson," said Deacon Hypers, "you should avoid the appearance of evil."

"Why, deacon, what do you mean?" asked Sister Henderson.

"I observe that on your sideboard you have several cut glass decanters, and that each of them is half filled with what appears to be ardent spirits."

"Well, now, deacon, it isn't anything of the kind. The bottles look so pretty on the sideboard that I just filled them half-way with some floor stain and furniture polish, just for appearances."

"That's why I am cautioning you, sister," replied the deacon. "Feeling a trifle weak and faint, I helped myself to a dose from a big bottle in the middle."

**SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.**

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

**LONDON.**

QUEEN'S (MINOR) HALL (Langham-place, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Do the Dead Live?"

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, New Church-road): 7.30, C. Cohen, "Some Barbarisms of Civilisation."

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES HUMANITARIAN SOCIETY (Fife Hall, Fife-road): 7.30, F. A. Davies, "The Freethinkers of the Bible."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S.: Thursday, Feb. 21, at 8.30, Debate on "Alcohol and Individuality." Invitations from Hon. Sec., c/o N. S. S. Office.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, 27 Romford-road, Stratford): 7.30, E. Pack, "Did Jesus Ever Live?"

**COUNTRY.**

FAIRFORTH SECULAR SUNDAY SCHOOL (Pole-lane): 6.30, Oldham Clarion Vocal Union.

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, J. McLean, "Some Remarks on Spiritualism"; 6.30, Chamber Concert.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Dr. C. H. Desch, "Fairy Mythology and Early Religion."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road): H. Percy Ward, 3, "Can a Socialist be a Christian?" 6.30, "Heaven and How to Escape It." Tea at 5.

NEWCASTLE BRANCH N. S. S. (Co-operative Hall, Darn Crook): J. T. Lloyd, 3, "Does Secularism Safeguard Morality?" 7, "Rev. R. J. Campbell and the New Theology."

NEWCASTLE RATIONALIST DEBATING SOCIETY (Lockhart's Cathedral Café): Thursday, Feb. 21, at 8, A. L. Coates, "The Drama in England."

PLYMOUTH RATIONALIST SOCIETY (Foresters' Hall, Octagon): 7, A. Frayn, "The Service of Man."

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