

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XXVIII.—No. 37

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 1908

PRICE TWOPENCE

*The man of deep reflection is not likely to gain much popular applause; and he does not stand in need of it. He has learned to live upon his own stock, and can build his self-esteem on a better foundation than that of vanity.*—WILLIAM HAZLITT.

## Divine Benevolence.

THE problem of how the goodness of God can be reconciled with the existence of evil is at least as old as the Book of Job, and the essence of the problem remains unchanged. Many different solutions have been offered, but the very best is nothing but a plausible compromise. Even the Christian theory of a personal Devil, practically almost as potent as the Deity, and infinitely more active, is a miserable makeshift; for, on inquiry, it turns out that the Devil is a part of God's handiwork, exercising only a delegated or permitted power. The usual resort of the theologian when driven to bay is to invoke the aid of "mystery," but this is useless as against the logician, since "mystery" is only a contradiction between the facts and the hypothesis, and the theologian can hardly expect to be saved by what is virtually a plea of "Guilty."

Darwin was brought face to face with this problem, and he was too honest to twist the facts, and too much a lover of truth and clarity to submerge them in the mysterious. He preferred to speak plainly as far as his intellect carried him, and when it stopped to frankly confess his ignorance.

Writing to Dr. Asa Gray (May 22, 1860), Darwin put a strong objection to Theism very pointedly.

"I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the ichneumonidæ with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice. Not believing this, I see no necessity in the belief that the eye was expressly designed. On the other hand, I cannot anyhow be contented to view this wonderful universe, and especially the nature of man, and to conclude that everything is the result of brute force. I am inclined to look at everything as resulting from designed laws, with the details, whether good or bad, left to the working out of what we may call chance. Not that this notion at all satisfies me. I feel most deeply that the whole subject is too profound for the human intellect."

Dealing with the same subject sixteen years later in his Autobiography, Darwin gave his opinion that happiness, on the whole, predominates over misery, although he admitted that this "would be very difficult to prove." He then faced the Theistic aspect of the question.

"That there is much suffering in the world no one disputes. Some have attempted to explain this with reference to man by imagining that it serves for his moral improvement. But the number of men in the world is as nothing compared with that of all other sentient beings, and they often suffer greatly without any moral improvement. This very old argument from the existence of suffering against the existence of an intelligent First Cause seems to me a strong one."

Darwin was perfectly conscious that he was advancing no new argument against Theism. An age of micro-

scopical science was, indeed, necessary before the internal parasites of caterpillars could be instanced; not to mention the thirty species of parasites that prey on the human organism. But such larger parasites as fleas and lice have always been obvious, and the theologians have been constantly asked why Almighty Goodness prompted Almighty Wisdom to provide humanity with such a sumptuous stock of these nuisances. It may also be observed that while cholera, fever, and other germs are modern discoveries, such things as tumors, cancers, and leprosy have always attracted attention, and they are more telling instances of malignant "design" than the ichneumonidæ in caterpillars, as they immediately affect the gentlemen who carry on the discussion.

Darwinism does, however, present the problem of evil in a new light. It shows us that evil is not on the surface of things, but is part of their very texture. Those who complacently dwell on the survival of the fittest, and the forward march to perfection, conveniently forget that the survival of the fittest is the *result*. Natural Selection is the *process*. And if we look at this more closely we discover that natural selection and the survival of the fittest are the same thing; the *real process* being the *elimination of the unfit*. Those who survive would have lived in any case; what has happened is that all the rest have been crushed out of existence. Suppose, for instance (to take a case of artificial selection), a farmer castrates nineteen bulls and breeds from the twentieth; it makes a great difference to the *result*, but clearly the whole of the *process* is the elimination of the nineteen. Similarly, in natural selection, all organic variations are alike spawned forth by Nature; the fit are produced and perpetuated, while the unfit are produced and exterminated. And *how* exterminated? Not by the swift hand of a skilful executioner, but by countless varieties of torture, some of which display an infernal ingenuity that might abash the deftest Inquisitor. Every disease known to us is simply one of Nature's devices for eliminating her unsuitable offspring, and a cat's playing with a mouse is nothing to the prolonged sport of Nature in killing the victims of her own infinite lust of procreation. Place a Deity behind this process, and you create a greater and viler Devil than any theology of the past was capable of inventing. Accept it as the work of blind forces, and you may become a Pessimist if you are disgusted with the entire business; or an Optimist if you are healthy, prosperous, and callous; or a Meliorist if you think evolution tends to progress and that your own efforts may brighten the lot of your fellows.

Dr. Russel Wallace, whose spiritual philosophy induces him, however unconsciously, to minimise the sufferings of the world, argues that the "torments" and "miserics" of the lower animals are imaginary, and that "the amount of actual suffering caused by the struggle for existence among animals is altogether insignificant." Dr. Wallace even goes to the length of saying that "their actual flight from an enemy" is an "enjoyable exercise" of their powers. But human beings do not enjoy themselves in running away from their enemies, and we can only understand the feelings of the lower animals through the medium of our own.

G. W. FOOTE.

## On Recantations.

TWO or three weeks ago the *Christian Commonwealth* justified its claim to be considered a truly Christian newspaper by publishing an account of the conversion of Robert Blatchford. The Rev. Dr. Warschauer reported a speech of the Rev. Rhondda Williams, in which it was alleged that the editor of the *Clarion* had renounced his Agnosticism, and confessed to a belief in a Heavenly Father. Mr. Blatchford promptly wrote denying his conversion. The Rev. Rhondda Williams also wrote denying that he made the statements reported by Dr. Warschauer, but impertinently suggested that Mr. Blatchford's *Clarion* articles did not convey his real opinions. On the face of it, either Mr. Williams or Dr. Warschauer was—to put it mildly—romancing. At the time of writing Dr. Warschauer has the last word in a letter in which, while not repeating the expressions disowned by Mr. Williams, he reaffirms that Mr. Williams' speech "gave us to understand" that the *Clarion* articles did not express Mr. Blatchford's "calm and reasoned opinions" on religion. He does not apologise for what he wrote, but concludes his letter by saying that he is "glad to have contributed to the clearing up of a misunderstanding."

Now this last expression is, in some respects, quite the most interesting I have come across for some time. The whole story of the Blatchford conversion rests with either Mr. Williams or Dr. Warschauer, or both. Apart from these two the story would not have been heard of—not yet, at least, because Mr. Blatchford is still alive, and it is only on their deathbeds that well-known Freethinkers are converted. Too impatient to wait until this particular Freethinker is dead, the story is told while he is still alive; and then, when the subject of the story flatly contradicts it, one of the parties responsible for the circulation of the falsehood turns round, and, assuming a lofty moral attitude, remarks: "I am glad to have contributed to the clearing up of a misunderstanding." Prodigious! John Smith slanders Tom Jones. Tom Jones promptly enters an action for libel, and wins his case. Whereupon John Smith loftily remarks: "I deserve praise because I have contributed to the clearing up of a misunderstanding." Really this is quite a novel way of justifying slander. By its application every man who has ever been convicted of slandering another has only "contributed to the clearing up of a misunderstanding." It is true that he was at the same time responsible for the misunderstanding; but that apparently matters little. The misunderstanding has been cleared up—when it was not found possible to circulate it. Personally I thank Dr. Warschauer for a most illuminating expression.

The remark is one that puts a deal of Christian history in quite a new light. When Christians accused Spinoza—who lived on about twopence-halfpenny a day—of leading a life of profligacy; when they made Voltaire die calling upon Jesus Christ; when they converted Thomas Paine into a filthy, drunken sot, lamenting on his death-bed that he had ever written the *Age of Reason*; when they made Charles Bradlaugh recant on his death-bed; when, in short, they circulated all the well-known slanders about Freethinkers—they were animated solely by the desire to clear up misunderstandings. We have no right to feel angry with them, no reason to resent their conduct; we simply have to admire the moral fervor that made them work so energetically to clear up misunderstandings. However many of the Christian traditions the New Theologians reject, they are evidently determined to stick to this one.

Seriously, why should Mr. Blatchford's recantation—or the recantation of anybody else—be considered a matter of first-rate importance? Suppose we assume that Mr. Blatchford has recanted; let us further assume that Voltaire, Paine, Bradlaugh, Holyoake—all of them—recanted. Let us grant that the editor of the *Freethinker* will one day become

a Christian, and that all the contributors to its columns will one day parade themselves as worshippers of the Christian myth. How will this affect the issue between Christianity and Freethought? Will the conversion of Robert Blatchford, or that of any or all of the others, prove that the Bible is inspired? Will it prove the divinity of Jesus, his resurrection from the dead, the existence of God, or the existence of heaven and hell? Does Dr. Warschauer think so highly of the intelligence of prominent Freethinkers that their testimony to the truth of these things will settle all dispute? If so, let me assure him that he rates their intelligence far too highly. If every living Freethinker became a convert to the Christian mythology, that mythology would be as ridiculous to-morrow as it is to-day. Is it not remarkable that the man whose reasoning at one moment is thoroughly untrustworthy should become at the next quite reliable? Does it not seem as though Christians have all the time an uneasy feeling that Freethought does, after all, manage to get hold of most energetic and virile intellects, and that the adherence of one of these is worth a host of the ordinary church or chapel worshippers?

Recantation, like the surrendered adherence, must be judged by the evidence it produces. If a man who has taught  $12 \times 12 = 144$  suddenly turns round and says  $12 \times 12 = 150$ , what effect has that on the multiplication table? Truth does not become falsehood because someone chooses to alter his opinion concerning it. An alteration in opinion only proves—in itself—an alteration in opinion, and no one but a fool or a knave attaches any deeper importance to it. If mere testimony could prove the truth of Christianity, its veracity was established centuries ago. If the testimony of all the Christians who have ever lived does not demonstrate the truth of Christian beliefs, the addition of one more name at this time of day seems hardly worth bothering about.

None of those who were made Freethinkers by Mr. Blatchford's writings, none of those who gave up their Christianity as the result of the work of other Freethinkers, surrendered their beliefs because any individual commanded them to do so. The only force brought to bear upon them was the logic of facts, the power of careful reasoning. When a Freethinker says Christian beliefs are untrue, he is not so stupid as to expect people to take his word for it, and they would be fools if they did. He shows them why they are not true, and cannot be true. His personality is a mere accident; and, when the personality is withdrawn, the facts and the reasoning still remain. And what Christians have to prove is, not that some Freethinker has changed his mind, but that the reasons he advanced for his Freethought are unsound, the facts upon which he rested his case are false. It seems childish to have to point this out, but when one is dealing with childish minds it is unavoidable.

A truth in connection with this subject is that Christianity is so much a matter of personal testimony that the average Christian cannot look at his religion from any other standpoint. He believes in his religion, not because he has any solid reasons to justify his belief, but simply because it is his religion. His belief in the miraculous—when it exists—is based solely upon the testimony of someone else—unknown, and to whose opinion on other subjects he would attach no importance whatever. The only evidence ever produced for the inspiration of the Bible was that someone said it was inspired; for the divinity of Jesus, that someone said he was divine; for the existence of an after life, that someone asserted it. His whole creed is based upon personal testimony without a single spark of evidence to support it. Unconsciously, therefore, he attaches an exaggerated value to personal testimony and regards a multiplication of "I believe" as an accumulation of evidence. He might as well cite the testimony of believers in special creation as evidence against the doctrine of evolution.

John Stuart Mill said that the emphasis laid upon the utility of religion by modern Christians was proof that the arguments for its truthfulness had

ceased to convince. So one may say that the importance Christians attach to personal testimony is proof that they despair of finding facts to support their beliefs. No one believes in gravitation *because* Newton believed in it; no one believes in natural selection *because* Darwin believed in it; no one believes in the circulation of the blood *because* Harvey believed in it. These truths, like other truths, are believed because they rest upon evidence that appeals to all who are capable of appreciating it. But *Christian* truth rests upon no such basis. Not all the generations of Christians have succeeded in producing a single piece of evidence that would convince anyone who was not already prepared to believe. Freethinkers have said this over and over again; Christians *feel* this to be true, and lacking the mental courage to face the world of fact and reason, they seek a cowardly consolation in an accumulation of mere names.

The bottom truth is, that every unbeliever is a standing indictment of the truth of Christianity. Christians have always realised this and have done their best to meet and overcome the danger. When Christianity was strong it forced people to recant; when the recantation was not forthcoming, it placed one in the mouths of those who were tortured in lonely prisons or burned amid the jeers of a Christian mob. It wrung a recantation from the lips of the aged Galileo, it placed one in the mouth of the dying and defiant Bruno. When Christianity grew weaker and heretics more numerous, the same policy was continued—with a change of form. Sometimes the heretic was bought and advertised his disgrace by praising a creed which he still held in contempt. When this was not possible there was always his death to fall back upon. Lying confessions were placed in his mouth, and these printed and circulated for the edification of the faithful and the warning of the recalcitrant. The circulation of these stories became a profession, their manufacture part and parcel of the Christian tradition. That they were lies mattered little, they served their purpose—for a time. In this respect, the Christian world seems incapable of reform. To slander opponents has always been the principal line of the Christian defence. It has existed right through Christian history, and will probably continue to exist so long as there remain believers in what has proved itself to be one of the greatest blights that has ever overtaken the human intellect.

C. COHEN.

### In Defence of the Eighteenth Century.

EXAGGERATION is usually regarded as an exceedingly venial fault, but scarcely ever as an unpardonable sin. Literal truth-speaking, we are often reminded, is the rarest virtue under the sun. Of a specially popular preacher, now deceased, a friend observed that he was the biggest liar of his generation, meaning that he idealised or magnified everything he touched. It is felt that in order to produce an impression, an orator or a writer must deal almost exclusively in superlatives. In olden times mighty giants graced the earth; to-day we must be content with miserable pigmies. Last night was the darkest ever experienced, and yesterday's sunset the most gorgeous ever seen. Such is the rhetorical style that finds favor with the majority of the public. That the public taste is perverted is doubtless true; but there is no lack of willing caterers for it, both on the platform and in the press. Everything must be heightened to please the mob.

There are conceivable circumstances in which exaggeration may be comparatively harmless. To exaggerate a man's virtues, for example, is not a heinous offence; but to amplify his vices would be to do him a grievous wrong. To be more than just to a friend may serve a good purpose; but to be less than just to an enemy is to be guilty of malignant cruelty. Exaggerated praise may have its origin in

pure benevolence; but exaggerated blame is due to a malevolent motive, and cannot be defended.

It is customary with Christian speakers and writers to exaggerate both the good points of their own people and the bad points of their opponents. At times, the exaggeration is so extreme that it cannot be distinguished from positive lying. As an example of the latter, we may take an article, entitled "The Courtesy of Attention to Religion," which appeared in the *Christian World* for August 27. It is an ably-written paper, but its spirit is bitter and contemptuous in the extreme. Its writer, the Rev. G. A. Johnston Ross, of Cambridge, poses as a superior person, who has a right to sit in judgment on all who reject the Christian religion. He seems to take it for granted that unbelievers are both thoughtless and wicked. He attributes "the want of the will to believe" to the "moral bondage that lies behind it." To "refuse to give Christ a reverent hearing" is to be rude, vulgar, and unmannerly; and "behind the unmannerliness that scorns to listen to Christ, there is the baseness of the soul that has a pet vice to cherish and conceal." Unbelief in God is only another name for rudeness *plus* self-indulgence. We readily admit that some unbelievers are not what they ought to be; but the same thing is true of a greater number of Christians. People who live in glass houses should not throw stones. But Mr. Ross's charge is monstrously false, and its falseness is so palpable that it requires no formal refutation. It is not mere exaggeration that the reverend gentleman indulges in here, but veritable untruthfulness, however unintentional.

As a whole, Mr. Ross's article is vague and dogmatic, but at one point it is clear and definite. Here the writer says that Christian men "have an almost contemptuous sense of the vulgarity of some aspects of unbelief," namely, "the unbelief that has behind it a rude and blustering impatience of religious appeal, and the thin silliness that cannot measure the gravity of the Gospel. This vulgarity shows itself among all ranks of men." One finds it in the lowest strata of society, as the grim story of McKay's attempt at evangelisation in Drury Lane in *Mark Rutherford* abundantly shows. Then Mr. Ross proceeds thus:—

"But it were a huge mistake to suppose this vulgarity unknown in higher circles. Perhaps its most colossal instance is the unspeakable vulgarity of the eighteenth century. That period, the century of the exquisite, the fop, the fine gentleman, the century of the glory of infidelity, when 'among persons of quality Christianity had almost ceased to be a subject of serious thought,' is notoriously the most vulgar in our national history; its vulgarity is even now upon our national architecture, and defaces by its ludicrous pomposity the very monuments to the dead in our great cathedrals."

On the face of it, this is gross exaggeration; but it is much worse. It is an entire misrepresentation of one of the most important periods in British history. We do not hold that the eighteenth century was wholly free from vulgarity. Of that commodity there is a superabundance in our own age, otherwise the article under consideration would never have been written. But to characterise the eighteenth century as "notoriously the most vulgar in our national history" is to culpably distort the truth. The late John Richard Green, surely a much greater authority than Mr. Johnston Ross, gives the lie direct to such a portrayal. In his Introduction to a collection of Addison's *Essays*, the distinguished historian says:—

"We hear sometimes that the last century is 'repulsive'; but what is it that repels us in it? Is it the age itself, or the picture of itself which the age so fearlessly presents? There is no historic ground for thinking the eighteenth century a coarser or a more brutal age than the centuries that had gone before; rather there is ground for thinking it a less coarse and a less brutal age. The features which repel us in it are no features of its own production. There were brutalised colliers at Ringwood before Wesley; there were brutal squires before Western; there were brutal mobs before the Gordon riots. Vile as our prisons were when Howard visited them, they were yet viler in the days of Elizabeth."

That, certainly, effectually disposes of Mr. Ross's wild indictment. But Green adds a more crushing consideration still:—

"What makes the Georgian age seem repulsive is simply that it is the first age which felt these evils to be evils, which dragged them, in its effort to amend them, into the light of day. It is in fact the moral effort of the time which makes it seem so immoral. Till now social evil had passed unnoted, uncensured, because, save by the directly religious world, it was un-felt. It was a sudden and general zeal for better things which made the eighteenth century note, describe, satirise the evil of society. Then, as now, the bulk of Englishmen were honest and right-minded. 'Between the mud at the bottom and the scum of its surface,' says Mons. Taine fairly enough, 'rolled on the great current of the national life.'"

John Richard Green was in Holy Orders, and could not have written as he has from the remotest sympathy with Infidelity. Lord Macaulay was another religious man who wrote in the same strain. In his famous Essay on Addison, he says:—

"On the service which his Essays rendered to morality it is difficult to speak too highly. It is true that, when the *Tatler* appeared, that age of outrageous profaneness and licentiousness which followed the Restoration had passed away. Jeremy Collier had shamed the theatres into something which, compared with the excesses of Etherege and Wycherley, might be called decency. Yet there still lingered in the public mind a pernicious notion that there was some connection between genius and profligacy, between the domestic virtues and the sullen formality of the Puritans. That error it is the glory of Addison to have dispelled. He taught the nation that the faith and the morality of Hale and Tillotson might be found in company with wit more sparkling than the wit of Congreve, and with humor richer than the humor of Vanbrugh. So effectually, indeed, did he retort on vice the mockery which had recently been directed against virtue, that, since his time, the open violation of decency has always been considered among us as the mark of a fool."

Nothing more need be added to completely disprove Mr. Johnston Ross's libel on the eighteenth century. We have quoted from two incontestable authorities to the effect that this vilified century was a decided improvement upon its immediate predecessors. Of course, we understand that what makes it so unspeakably vulgar in the reverend gentleman's estimation is the fact that it was "the century of the glory of infidelity." Now, will Mr. Ross tell us which of its Infidels were "notoriously the most vulgar" writers in our national history? How does Shaftesbury compare with Steele, or Addison, or Swift? One eminent author characterises him as a "satirist with a finer and keener weapon than was wielded by either Steele or Addison, and a much better temper than was owned by Swift or Berkeley;" and another observes that his works "did much to raise the character of English Deism." Was Anthony Collins more vulgar than Bentley, who answered him? Sir Leslie Stephen says that Collins "appears to have been an amiable and upright man," and it is universally admitted that he was a skilful controversialist, and that his ability as a writer was above the average. Were Woolston's *Discourses on Miracles* filthier than the sixty pamphlets published in opposition? The truth about Thomas Woolston probably is that he was not an unbeliever at all, but simply an extreme allegorist after the pattern of Origen. Was Tindal's *Christianity as Old as Creation* coarser than all the hundred and fifty replies to it? The Bishop of London's objection to Tindal's books was, not that they were vulgar, but that they "undermined religion and promoted atheism and infidelity"; and that objection was thoroughly well grounded. These Infidels were Deists, not Atheists; and yet Bishop Berkeley, because he was powerless to counteract their influence, advocated their being punished with equal severity with those who were guilty of high treason. But their chief vulgarity consisted in their denial of the truth of orthodox Christianity. It was for this, and not for his ribaldry, that Woolston had to spend the last four years of his life in prison; and it is for this same

action that the Freethinkers of to-day are dubbed vulgar, rude, unmannerly, and base of soul. But such reckless denunciation is not argument, neither will it prove of the slightest service in the effort to stem the tide of Freethought that is now so irresistibly rising throughout the civilised world.

J. T. LLOYD.

### The "Cottager's Monthly Visitor."

THE question of village libraries was discussed at the recent Library Association Conference at Brighton, and I, being at the time in retreat in a remote cottage, thought to ask the landlady what books were available for the public of the little village. She answered None; but there had been a library in past years, and, at its breaking-up, two volumes had been presented to her. So, wishing to know what sort of mind-food was provided for the rustic flock by the Powers That Be, I begged to see them. They were two volumes, dated 1835 and 1836, of the *Cottager's Monthly Visitor*. These I closely examined.

They reeked with the unhealthy evangelicalism of the early Nineteenth Century. The doctrines of the Blood, Judgment, Hell, and Human Depravity grew luxuriantly, like weeds in an ill-kept churchyard. Of the insufferable priggishness of the style here is a characteristic sample:—

"Address to Lying-in-Women.—The following address, printed in the form of a handbill, has been sent to us by the husband of the benevolent lady who wrote it, and who is in the habit of circulating it among the females of her neighborhood.—'My good woman, it has pleased Almighty God,' etc.

We may be quite sure the "lady" who circularised the neighboring "females" did not include the local marchioness in the scope of her tract distribution. The proletariat are referred to as "the humbler classes," "the poor," the "laboring men," etc., and the general policy of the *Visitor* is to keep the intellect of the workers in subjection, to preserve a perpetual promise of future glory (on conditions), to encourage an almost inhuman passion for thrift, and to denounce gin. It is singular to note in passing that, the teetotal movement being then at its feeble beginnings, beer is reluctantly allowed by the Christian editor, and an article by a middle-class contributor recommends the establishment of a brewery in every parish, the liquor to be sold to "the poor laboring man" at somewhat under cost-price, the philanthropists making up the deficiency. While beer is permissible, Trades-unionism is not:—

"Trades unions can be of little or no use; and they do injury to the poor by holding out hopes and expectations that cannot be realised."

And the original Malthusian doctrine is gravely preached:—

"How can you make labor dear, or more profitable? There is one, and only one way of doing this; and that is, by decreasing the supply—by not marrying too early. If you marry early, and have more children than there is regular work for, labor must be cheap, there must be poverty and distress, and no human laws can prevent it."

A solemn anecdote holds up to contempt a Wiltshire laborer who complained to the county magistrate that he received only four shillings a week for working on the parish roads, but it was proved that he had declined other work at the current wage of the district (seven shillings!) because the employment would have removed him from the vicinity of the ale-house. The presiding magistrate remarked on the improvement of industrial conditions, for he called to mind the days of his youth when the weekly pay was only six shillings instead of a glorious seven. Every issue of the *Monthly Visitor* hisses a pious course on drink as the cause of poverty, and I have not succeeded in tracing any doom pronounced on the wine-bibbing of the upper classes. A horrible placard, entitled the "Drunkard's Tree," and summing up the evils of alcoholism (including "eternal damnation"), is commended for suspension on cottage

walls! While gin-drinkers are warned that "two glasses of gin a day, for one year, at three-halfpence per glass, will cost a sum which will purchase two shirts, etc." (a full inventory following), no hint is allowed to escape of similar calculations that might be made in the case of champagne disposed of by the non-laboring classes. No attempt is made by the Editor to indicate the need for counteractive recreations. Christian cottagers must not attend fairs. They must beware of ale-houses. They must avoid races. They must not gamble. No effort is visible to interest the reader in the fine arts. Music is represented by a hymn (the score of which is printed) just then coming into favor, "O that will be joyful" (that is, the never-adjourned meeting in heaven). Tobacco is banned by implication, for the Visitor reports that, in the opinion of the governor of Knutsford Gaol, "the present practice of cigar-smoking among young men had led principally to the increase of crime"! Even tea and coffee are not urged upon the favorable consideration of the cottager, possibly because their increased use would lead to a demand for higher wages for "mechanics" and the "humbler classes." A special essay, in fact, deals with blackcurrant leaves and dandelion roots as substitutes for tea and coffee respectively! The medical advice ranges along an equally low level. One may find a cheap preventive of "plague" by frequently throwing hot stones into a pot of tar placed "just inside the street-door," and so creating a vitalising steam!—a recipe which has its precious birth in Germany. Or you can dodge scarlet fever by occasionally applying to the nose a handkerchief saturated with chloride of lime. And in order to procure such luxuries as chloride of lime, or dandelion roots, or pots of tar, etc., you are everlastingly exhorted to deposit money in savings-banks. A bourgeois correspondent relates the tale of his own footman who started at a wage of four guineas per annum, and in ten years had saved enough to set up a dairy of ten cows worth £145. All cottagers are expected to approximate more or less to the heroic scrape-farthing feats of this footman. Meanwhile, the Visitor gives in each number hints on gardens, bee-keeping, pig-feeding, and the like.

A feeble endeavor to minister to the cottager's intellect flickers through these sepulchral tracts. For instance, one comes upon scrappy lessons in history. In August, 1885, the cottager is asked, "What were the circumstances of Queen Anne's death, and in what year did it happen?" If, in the intervals of stewing dandelion root, and struggling with the gin craving, he cannot think out the problem, the Editor tells him in September that "the Queen's health and spirits had been, for some time, sinking, and she died in the year 1714"; and so on. Or we have tit-bits of "natural history," such as:—

"The more we examine the works of Providence, the more full of wonder they seem to be.....It is said that the sword-fish and the whale never meet without coming to battle, and that the sword-fish generally begins the quarrel."

But it is the spiritual side of the cottager that is made the particular target of the Visitor's deadly rifle-practice. Sudden death is a powerful instrument towards influencing his views of the universe. A woman in the Broadway, Hammersmith, fights her husband, and calls on God to strike her blind, speechless, etc., and she abruptly collapses, unable to utter a word, and we see her being carried off the stage by her husband and a policeman. A pew-opener does not attend the holy communion, though on a Sunday she tells the rector she means to; and the next morning she is found dead in the church gallery. A substantial farmer, residing near Chard, Somersetshire, transacts business at the market, gets drunk, mounts his horse, and declares to a remonstrating friend that he "could ride to hell in a quarter of an hour"; and, "awful to relate, he was found dead on the road, having fallen from his horse at a spot just a quarter of an hour's ride from the town!"

Sabbath-breaking is, of course, a darling theme. At the Day of Judgment, children who were not

sent to Sunday-school will take the opportunity to address their parents thus:—

"O cruel parents, you neglected to instruct us, and neglected to send us where we might have been instructed. We were young and thoughtless, and not aware of the advantage of spending the Sabbath in a proper manner," etc.

Possibly the parents, on Ibsenite principles, might attack their own ancestors in a similar courteous tone, but the Monthly Visitor does not carry the imagination further.

One of the most striking scenes presented for the cottager's study is the hanging of George Watts. George "had enjoyed the advantage of education," and could name the chapter and verse of any Bible passage named. At the same time (though the statements slightly clash) we are assured "his life, though short, was spent in idleness and profligacy." This poor lad—less than seventeen years of age—was executed for rick-burning. Our Editor says not a word on the immorality of the law, but lays before us the contents of a handbill headed "Sabbath-breaking, Beer-shops, Drinking on Sunday." George wrote "earnest and well-expressed exhortations" from the condemned cell to his relatives and associates. Also—

"On the fatal drop he addressed the crowd for some time, and repeatedly entreated them to avoid, from his own sad example, the danger of keeping bad company, of frequenting ale-houses and beer-shops, of Sabbath-breaking; and particularly of drinking on the Sabbath, which he declared had been the means of bringing him to his present awful situation."

I have lived in villages, have mingled with people who, in their youth, had been fed with such literature as the Monthly Visitor, and I have known not a little of the unwholesome atmosphere of the Protestantism of the Low Church and the Dissenting Chapel. This mockery of religion, this brutal snobbery, this paltry economics, and this vile neglect of true culture, mark a most gloomy period in the evolution of the common people of England. What I feel to be the worst evil in the Evangelical Terror is the entire absence of respect for the noble qualities of the cottager, his wife, his children, and his forefathers. Gray, in his exquisite Elegy, did a high measure of justice to the "short and simple annals of the poor," and the native virtue of the English villager. But Gray wrote before the advent of the dreadful flood of tracts and Philistinism. A piety was to arrive which scowled at the sorrowful wage-earners who formed the basis of England's social fabric, and which, in its vulgar ignorance and conceited Bibliolatry, insulted the Humanity that wore fustian and sheltered under thatch.

F. J. GOULD.

#### TRUE NOBILITY.

'Tis not the wealth that makes a king,  
Nor the purple coloring,  
Nor a brow that's bound with gold,  
Nor gate on mighty hinges rolled.  
The king is he, who, void of fear,  
Looks abroad with bosom clear;  
Who can tread ambition down,  
Nor be swayed by smile or frown;  
Nor for all the treasure cares  
That mine conceals, or harvest wears,  
Or that golden sands deliver,  
Bosomed in a glassy river.  
What shall move his placid might?  
Not the headlong thunder-light,  
For all the shapes of slaughter's trade,  
With onward lance, or fiery blade.  
Safe, with wisdom for his crown,  
He looks on all things calmly down;  
He welcomes Fate, when Fate is near,  
Nor taints his dying breath with fear.  
No—to fear not earthly thing,  
This it is that makes the king;  
And all of us, whoe'er we be,  
May carve us out that royalty.

—"Seneca," translated by Leigh Hunt.

## Acid Drops.

September the 3rd was Cromwell's death-day, as it was also the day of his greatest victories on the battlefield. Naturally the date was celebrated in the *Daily News*. Of course it wrote on Cromwell from a Nonconformist point of view—which has really nothing to do with his place in English history. Much was made of Cromwell's piety—as if *that* were his passport to Valhalla. It was remarked that he always said, "Trust in God," and always added, "Keep your powder dry." The *Daily News*, with its muddle-headedness where religion is concerned, does not perceive that these two mottoes destroy each other. Trusting in God is mistrusting yourself; keeping your powder dry is trusting in yourself. Cromwell trusted in God theoretically. Practically he took care to leave God as little as possible to do.

Mr. Will Crooks' heart is in the right place, but he is rather apt to be sentimental instead of rational. His protest against the treatment of poor Daisy Lord does him credit. But why did he ask, "What would our great Master have said in her case?" Does he fancy that all the people of this country regard Jesus Christ as their Master? Christians are always talking as if they were everybody. They forget that there are others. Our great Master! Mr. Crooks should remember that a newspaper is not a chapel. And, after all, what does it matter what Jesus Christ would have said? The important point is, what do reason and humanity say? On a point like that there is a chance of coming to an agreement; whereas what Jesus Christ *said*—passing by what he *would* say—is still being disputed amongst Christians themselves after the lapse of nearly two thousand years.

Christian law, Christian prosecutors, Christian magistrates, Christian jurymen, a Christian judge, and Christian gaolers, are responsible for poor Daisy Lord's horrible position. And very likely the man who went wrong with her was a good Christian too. So the less we hear about Christians and their "Master" in this affair the better. We venture to say—and it really doesn't require much boldness to say it—that Daisy Lord's treatment would have been very different at the hands of Freethinkers. Freethinkers may not be as good as Christians pretend to be, but they do listen a little to the voice of reason and humanity—for the simple reason that they have nothing else to listen to.

During the trouble with the excursion steamer *Queen*, of Southampton, a big German, six feet high, tried to jump into the first lifeboat before the women and children. When they pulled him back on the steamer they found he had four lifebelts on. He succeeded in jumping into the second lifeboat. We suggest that the Suffragettes should engage him at a fair salary. They could take him round the country on show as "A model voter, and a son of Adam." Good old Adam! God made him (as Portia would say), but still he wasn't a man. He was a skunk. When we think of it, there's a good deal in the suggestion that Eve saved the race. Paul thought otherwise—but who was Paul?

Canon Irton Smith, vicar of Leigh, preached in the parish church on the Maypole Pit disaster, taking for his text, "Shall not the judge of the earth do right?"—which, by the way, is the very point in dispute. The reverend gentleman probably thought he was talking profound wisdom, but it seems to us very shortsighted absurdity. He referred to volcanic eruptions, and said that they were necessary to the general safety of the earth's crust, and that this was why God allowed them to work such havoc in their vicinities, even to the wiping out of a whole town of forty thousand inhabitants, as was the case of St. Pierre, at the foot of Mont Pelée, in the West Indies. In that catastrophe, by the way, only one person escaped, and he was a negro criminal in a prison cell. Now this seems a very odd case of "providential" preservation; it suggests a question which we will put to Canon Smith, and which he ought to have asked himself. Supposing the volcanic eruption at Mont Pelée was necessary, from a scientific point of view; was it also necessary that forty thousand people should be slain in that awful fashion? Could not God, who (we are told) knew the eruption was coming, give the forty thousand people notice, so that they might get out of the way of its destructive fury? Had he acted in that way, it would have involved no interference with ordinary physical laws; he would have done what the Bible says he did a thousand times of old, and what he is still said to do by all who teach the doctrine of at least the subjective efficacy of prayer. Why, then, did not God warn the inhabitants of St. Pierre? That is the question which Canon Smith has got to answer.

We are living in a redeemed and God-governed world. A corset-maker is paid 10½d. a dozen pairs! As it takes her a day and a half to make a dozen, and that means rapid work, it follows that she can only earn 3s. 6d. a week! Nevertheless, the Lord reigneth, hallelujah!

How completely are God's purposes being thwarted. He is said to have set Sunday apart, and commanded his people to keep it holy, in order that all the other days might become sacred. In point of fact, instead of the one day transforming the other six, we find the six transforming the one. Where, then, is the Divine omnipotence, where the Being who doeth according to his will everywhere?

It is really amusing, and not a little instructive, to notice the strangely apologetic tone the pulpit has lately adopted. One preacher says, "I am still old-fashioned enough to believe in the literal accuracy of the Genesis creation-story, and in the fallen condition of the human race"; another, "This, my brothers and sisters, is the truth I have found for myself in the teaching of my Bible, still the Word of God to me"; and another, "Let the critics babble as they may, I have not yet lost the courage to avow my acceptance of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection." Such semi-bravado is symptomatic of an inherent sense of defeat. It is as if the men of God said, each for himself, "I am aware that logic, science, and the spirit of the age, are dead against me; but still, though unable to justify my beliefs at the bar of reason, I hold them as tenaciously as ever."

There is absolutely no proof that a single prayer has ever been supernaturally answered, though many prayers have answered themselves. The important fact, however, is that the majority of prayers find no answers whatsoever. To one who had most earnestly prayed for the life of a dear one without avail, and who, in consequence, had turned to Agnosticism, the Rev. D. Warschauer offered the evasive and wholly cowardly consolation of the Biblical phrase, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." As if a God of infinite love could "will" to send typhoid fever to kill a young man of twenty-three!

A lady reader of ours at Tonbridge Wells received an envelope the other day with a halfpenny stamp on it. It was not fastened up, and the Post Office people looked inside, and found that the contents were "liable to letter rate," so there was 1½d. to pay on delivery. What the envelope contained was not worth a millionth part of the three-halfpence. It was a specimen of the "Endless Chain Prayer" nuisance. A certain man of God, called Lawrence, who was (or is) a Bishop, conceived the idiotic idea of drawing up an exceptionally imbecile prayer which Christian people were to write out and send on by post to nine other people, each of whom might send it on to nine other people, and thus it might go round the world—and keep on going round the world, so that even the sleepy eye of the do-nothing Christian God couldn't help seeing it. According to the formula, any person who receives this prayer and sends it nine days running to nine different people, shall on the ninth day receive some great joy. The document winds up with the words, "Please do not break the chain." But it is a very dear chain at three-halfpence a link, and the good Christian who sent the prayer to our lady reader must be trying to obtain that "great joy" very cheaply.

Rev. R. J. Campbell has been talking about "God's laboratory"—where, we suppose, he turns out New Theologians, who are, after all, a good deal behind date.

"God is training you for heaven," Mr. Campbell said in the same sermon. In the case of a good many "souls" it would have been better if God had trained them for earth—before sending them here.

Rev. Dr. Alexander Whyte, in the *British Weekly*, says that he prayed to God once for the life of a sick friend, and God asked him to show that he was in earnest by agreeing to give up one-half of his remaining years, whatever they might be, to his sick friend. Dr. Whyte sprang to his feet "in a torrent of sweat," but he managed to say, "Let it be as Thou hast said." The reverend gentleman says he doesn't know "how the matter is to end." We do. If he goes on at this rate, he will earn the situation of Ananias vacated by the late Rev. Hugh Price Hughes.

We have received a thick pamphlet headed "Diocese of Carlisle," and containing the "Examination in Religious Knowledge of Pupil Teachers and Children by the Board of Examiners of the Diocesan Education Society and Associa-

tion of Voluntary Schools, held March 18, 1908." Pages 35-38 contain the questions which had to be answered at the Examination. We have looked through them carefully, and we do not see that one of them bears any relation to the "spiritual and ethical religion" which we are asked to believe is taught in Church schools. Take the following, for instance. Pupil-teachers were asked, "How did our Lord defend his action in healing the withered hand on the Sabbath Day?" This withered-hand story is mere fudge at the present day, and it is infamous that the time of pupil teachers should be occupied with such things. Other items were these: "Describe the Vision of Jacob's Ladder. What was the message to Moses from out the Burning Bush?" Fancy fairy tales like these being solemnly brought forward in a pupil-teachers' examination in the twentieth century! It is this sort of stuff that the clergy are fighting to maintain. And the Nonconformists are just as bad. The religious lessons they uphold in the various Council schools are of the same antediluvian character.

But we have not done with this Diocese of Carlisle examination paper yet. Here is a bit from the afternoon examination of children:—

"Mention briefly an event which happened at each:—

- (i.) Shechem.
- (ii.) Cherith.
- (iii.) Dothan.
- (iv.) Dan.
- (v.) Nineveh."

What on earth can it matter what happened at these places? We mean, of course, at this time of day. It is only in an education controlled by the clergy that such trivialities would find any room at all. The clergy are simply wasting the time, and adding the brains, of millions of children, who want every bit of their mental, moral, and physical strength to meet the demands of secular civilisation. That is why, in many respects, England is being left behind in the race.

Lady Grove's letter to the papers on the approaching International Moral Education Congress calls for a little notice in our columns. Her ladyship appears to write with some authority. She declares that the Congress, in spite of statements to the contrary in certain religious papers, is not antagonistic to the Church. The promoters of the Congress, while bent on promoting true moral education, do not wish "the extinction of true religion in teaching," which would simply "paralyse" education instead of vivifying it. Her ladyship winds up with an extraordinary slap at the French nation, whom she seems to regard as very wicked "infidels." She asserts that the choice of those who really want religion and not sectarianism in the schools, must lie "between what the Congress will propose and expound, and what is to be seen in France to-day—secularism, ostentatiously free from all religious or ethical bias, naked and unashamed." We hope this does not represent the mind of the promoters of the Congress. If it does, they might as well save their time and money and declare the Congress "off." Even a lady must be told the plain truth when she talks pestilent nonsense in public. Lady Grove must be very ignorant of the facts of the case if she believes that Secular Education in France is without ethical character. French children are taught natural morality, and the manuals of ethics and sociology used in the schools are vastly superior to anything of the kind we have in England. We trust the official representatives of the International Moral Education Congress will hasten to correct Lady Grove's wanton attack on French "secularism."

Dr. Clifford has been declaring at Berlin that "Christ is the centre of unity." Meanwhile, the race in battleships goes on between Christian England and Christian Germany. And its about three to one that the most Christian nation will win.

They had a Shakespeare at the Baptist Congress in Berlin. But it was not William—nor anything like him. Nobody could fancy William Shakespeare a Baptist—not even Dr. Clifford.

The Rev. Dr. Campbell Morgan went to Aberystwyth to justify Foreign Missions. His defence was of the usual claptrap character, and has been exposed times without number. One of his points, however, we feel called upon to refute; namely, that "only those who belong to the Church catholic can understand foreign missions." As a matter of fact, foreign missions can be understood by all who care to study them; and those who investigate the facts concerning them without prejudice soon discover that on no rational grounds whatever can they be justified. The gist of Dr. Morgan's eloquent defence came to this: We Christians are

the best people on earth, and this wonderful pre-eminence we owe to Christianity, the only absolutely perfect religion in existence. Therefore, let us send messengers abroad into all the world, to make our unique greatness universally known and respected, and to inform the heathen that if they wish to become great and noble, they must renounce their own religions and adopt ours. That, in a word, is the real motive and explanation of Foreign Missions.

The Rev. J. B. Stedford, in the exercise of an exceptionally discerning mind, has just made the marvellous discovery that "the Churches cannot do without the people." This discovery has the high merit of being absolutely genuine. The Churches really *cannot* do without the people, and yet, strange to say, they are obliged to do with a constantly diminishing number of them, which looks ominous.

Of all contemptible things on this planet, the chief is Christian humility. "I am unworthy," each Christian exclaims on bended knees. On their feet they are all high-minded and haughty, pretending to be the only "worthy" people in the world.

"What is this latest yarn about Bradlaugh? The Rev. Mr. Weller, who preaches in the City (probably to the sexton and the clerk), says that in one of his very last letters Bradlaugh admitted that he 'no longer dared to say "There is no God."' Mr. Weller is bound, in honor, to produce the letter. As a matter of fact, Bradlaugh *never did* make the assertion which he is supposed to have repented of. Let Mr. Weller refer us to a line in any of the dead man's writings containing it. Being an infinitely greater priest than Mr. Weller, he had the modesty of greatness; and being an infinitely more religious man than Mr. Weller, he had the reverence of intellectual honesty—he simply said 'I do not know.' And if Death has revealed the great secret to him, he is now an archangel—and some day Mr. Weller will pay him homage."—*John Bull.*

There was a Salvationist wedding the other day at Balham. The affair was advertised, with a threeponny charge for admission, and a collection before going out. That is the ruling passion in these people. General Booth exhibited his dead wife in her coffin for so much a head.

General Booth has been having "wonderful receptions" in South Africa. He will get some wonderful receptions nearer home if he doesn't answer Mr. Manson's book.

We regretted the other day that Mr. Robert Blatchford had taken to talking about "God" again. In last week's number of his paper we noted an answer to a correspondent to the effect that—"The word 'God' is used, as we commonly use it, as a synonym for 'Nature' or 'World-forces.'" Mr. Blatchford seems to be a Socialist in everything except the Dictionary. There he is a thorough Individualist. Words are to mean anything he likes. It might do him good, however, to reflect that accurate thinking is impossible without accurate language; and that a journalist should write, not to understand himself, but to be understood by his readers.

The *Boston Independent* has an article on "The Atheist Drum," with reference to the "misguided youth" called Joseph Bates, who insists on preaching Atheism in the town, to the intense annoyance of the Christians, who think the town belongs to them. Our Conservative contemporary winds up with a brilliant and original sarcasm. "The Atheist drum," it says, "makes a loud noise. But it is hollow." So is the Christian drum. Every drum is hollow. It wouldn't be a drum otherwise.

In our Boston contemporary's article we see the statement that a leaflet was distributed at one of Mr. Bates's meetings containing the Rev. J. Weller's lying story about Bradlaugh's saying that he no longer "dared" to make the confident denial of his earlier days, "There is no God." The *Independent* must know that the Rev. J. Weller's story was exposed by Bradlaugh's daughter, Mrs. Bradlaugh-Bonner, in the *Daily Telegraph*; but the lie is still circulated, in spite of the exposure, which shows that the *Independent* is a truly Christian paper. We congratulate it on the orthodox purity of its principles.

We are glad to see from the *Boston Guardian* that the crowd is getting more friendly towards Mr. Bates. It reports that while he was lecturing on Bargate-green, a member of the audience frequently interrupted, and expressed his intention of interrupting as long as the meeting

continued. Mr. Bates then appealed to the audience for fair play, and they promptly shifted the inspired inter-rupter outside. We also see by the *Guardian* that the Chief Constable's summons against Mr. Bates for "obstruction"—at a spot where Salvationists and other Christians are allowed to obstruct as much as they please—is to be heard on Friday, September 25. In the circumstances, Mr. Bates declares that he will go to prison rather than pay any fine.

The *New York Sun* of August 26 contains a long account of the suicide of the Rev. Albert Trick, a retired Presbyterian clergyman, who suffered from loss of sight, loss of income, and general despondency. He once attracted the attention of his whole Church by his vigorous defence of the Higher Criticism of the Bible, delivered before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1893, before which the Rev. C. A. Briggs laid his appeal from the action of the New York Presbytery in expelling him for heresy. Mr. Trick left a pathetic letter to his family, and another letter to his friend Dr. Dowd, in which he wrote bitterly about the worldliness of the Church. He declared that America's great Trinity was "success, pleasure, and gold." The average man cared nothing for what Jesus taught; but a better day was dawning, in which all superstitions will have passed away, and "truth, justice, love, liberty, purity, and humanity, shall rule." The Church, however, cared for none of these things. But its day was nearly over. Yes, and the reign of Jesus was over too. People were "no more bound by what he taught, did, and thought than they are by the precepts of Robert Ingersoll," and already "follow this exemplary and kindly and honest American more than they do the Oriental."

Jingo Fitchett, the Australian man of God who found a little goldmine in the literature of blood and slaughter, has just published a book on *The Beliefs of Unbelief*. We haven't read it—having better work to do. But we see the statement in the *Daily Chronicle* review that "he bowls over agnostic and atheistical arguments in a spirit of great enjoyment." We don't doubt the enjoyment. Fighting absent enemies is exhilarating enough to a man of Mr. Fitchett's build. But that he "bowls over" any arguments—Freethought or other—is far too flattering to his powers of mind. This reverend gentleman is intellectually on the level of the common-garden street-corner preacher.

The *Daily News* regards the Bible as inspired, but is not too familiar with its contents. The following story, taken from our contemporary's editorial columns, will illustrate our meaning:—

"To-day's story: 'Move up, you Jew,' said the American in the 'bus, rather peremptorily, but the man next him merely shrugged his shoulders and said, 'I don't move for an American.' 'But—but one of my ancestors signed the Declaration of Independence,' returned the American, loftily. 'One of mine signed the Ten Commandments,' was the rejoinder."

According to the Bible, the Ten Commandments were written "with the finger of God." If anybody signed them it must have been Yahveh. He was the Jew-God, but we did not know he was a Jew, or that he had a family.

The *South London Free Press* must be very short of matter to print two columns' report of a Brockwell Park address by Mountbank Waldron. We don't intend to notice his fooleries, but we will correct one of his statements. He said that the Secularists had "an office in a side street in the neighborhood of St. Paul's," but "they had to clear out because they could not pay their rent." "Sir," said Dr. Johnson on a similar occasion, "he lies, and he knows it." Neither at Stationers' Hall Court nor at 2 Newcastle-street have the Secularists been unable to pay their rent. The change was made for the sake of more commodious (and more expensive) premises. There was never a penny of rent owing at Stationers' Hall Court; there is not a penny of rent owing at 2 Newcastle-street. Mountbank Waldron is a born liar, and long practice has perfected his native talent. This would handicap a man in some professions, but in Mountbank Waldron's profession it is an elegant and useful accomplishment.

Frances Willard says, "Live as if He were, and you will soon come to find that He is." That is precisely how lies come to be taken as truths. That is exactly how illusions get to be regarded as realities. Live as if there were a God, and at last, far hence, you may, perhaps, learn to believe that he really is. Such is the religious life, even at its best.

Marie Fillon, writing in the *Sunday Chronicle* on "Prussianising the Pole," gives the following illustration of the beauty of applied religion:—

"The schools are another source of persecution, because of the Prussians' attempts to stamp out the Polish language. The Poles are a Roman Catholic people, and this fact does not please their masters, who do all in their power to ruin the priests and abolish Roman Catholic churches. 'Religion' is taught to the Polish children by German masters, who try to force their charges to say their prayers in German. This leads to all sorts of struggles, for the children refuse to pray in any language but their own. For persistent refusal they are beaten, and little mites of seven years old can be seen with cuts and bruises all over their bodies, inflicted by German masters during the 'religion' lessons."

We need not comment on what tells its own tale so clearly.

Rev. John McNeill lost a good friend in that make-the-most-of-both-worlds Christian, the late Lord Overtoun. He appears to be obliged to settle down to a particular church. He has undertaken the Rev. F. B. Meyer's church for a year. Mr. Meyer has taken his wonderful gifts abroad for that period—as a sort of religious commercial traveller. He sends home good reports, but we haven't heard of any orders.

Evan Roberts is said to be getting better. The Welsh Revival nearly settled him. But he won't run the same risk again. Welsh Revivals only occur every fifty years. The dear young man will have to join the Salvation Army now if he resumes business.

"Regarding a man named Van Wyck, who has been posing in Burma as a former private secretary to Colonel Ingersoll and a lecturer for the Freethought movement, but who now professes to have 'found Jesus,' we have a letter from Mr. C. P. Farrell, Colonel Ingersoll's brother-in-law and publisher. Mr. Farrell writes from Greenwich, Conn., under date of August 6:—

'Mr. Thomas McLean Van Wyck was a ne'er-do-well of a young man who was in the theatrical business when he came to me to sell the Colonel's books on the lecture tours in 1898-'99. He was a great reader and fond of arguments. His father was a New York lawyer—some connection of the Mayor Van Wyck. "Tom" was a Catholic. When he left me he was shy in his account 150 dollars. He went into the army and went to the Phillipine Islands. I think he was much impressed by the Colonel's lectures. He never spoke for or did anything for Freethought that I am aware of. He was never in any way employed by Colonel Ingersoll. He still owes me the 150 dollars, and I guess always will. I do not think he has ever been any comfort to his family, and I think he will pose as anything to make a dollar.'

The best that can be said of Van Wyck is, that had he been a Freethinker his character was such that his joining the Church would have benefited both parties."—*Truthseeker* (New York).

An "Important Notice" has been posted up in the leading Catholic sanctuaries in London, that Catholics must be married in the presence of a Catholic priest, and that "the ceremony of marriage in a Registrar's Office or in a Protestant Church will not only be unlawful, but null and void," and Catholics who go through such ceremony "will not be married in the sight of God." Here are two "crammers." Marriages that are legal in England cannot be made "null and void" by the Pope, and that gentleman knows no more about "the sight of God" than the most ignorant man in Rome.

The poor old Pope says that Liberty is trampled upon in France by those who have declared war upon God—which is all fudge. His Holiness rejoices that "the Holy Wafer is honored throughout the streets of London"—which simply means that Catholic processions behind the Mass are not yet broken up, though nobody knows how long this insolent folly will be tolerated in the public thoroughfares.

Mrs. Wilkins, aged seventy-three, was worshiping in Oversea Baptist Chapel, near Burton. On rising from prayers she suddenly expired. There is no safety for the righteous even in the Lord's sanctuary. Death makes no distinctions. What the Bible says of men and beasts may be said of Freethinkers and Christians—"Yea, they have all one breath."

A missionary-van went out West in the United States, fresh and trim, bearing the inscription, "In God we trust." After a time it came back, dilapidated and dirty, with a further inscription, "By God, we're bu'st."



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, September 13, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, London, W., at 7.30, "General Booth on the Woman Question."

September 20, 27, Queen's (Minor) Hall.

October 4, Glasgow; 11, Leicester; 18, Manchester; 25, Stanley Hall, London.

### To Correspondents.

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Previously acknowledged. Annual Subscriptions, £221 15s. Received since.—R. E. D., 10s.; N. S. Munday, 10s. 6d.; J. G. Findlay (2nd. sub.), 10s. 6d.; Mrs. Crummy, 2s. 6d.; J. Bland, 5s.; W. Cromack, 5s.

H. H. POLKINGHOM.—Being sent as desired. Glad you are so pleased with the *Freethinker*. You touch the bed-rock in one part of your letter. Society will always be what knowledge and education make it; man's possession of truth, in various forms, decides his civilisation. Without dealing with politics at all, in this journal, we are therefore doing more for the future of society than most of those who boast of being "practical."

W. AINSLEY.—It will be useful. Thanks.

J. BLAND.—Thanks for paper, but the matter marked is a little off our "beat" in this journal. Glad to have your good wishes.

W. P. BALL.—Your weekly batch of cuttings is very welcome.

R. J. HENDERSON.—Mr. Foote is keeping well. Thanks.

H. B. DODDS, 182 Philip-street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, has been appointed Secretary of the local N. S. S. Branch, in succession to Mr. Elstob, who had to resign in consequence of removal.

E. S.—Our knowledge of the Byron verses referred to is confined to what "J. F. C. F." said about them in our columns. Perhaps he will say more on the subject. We are not particularly interested in Byron's remote ancestors.

G. RENCHER.—Thanks for cutting from the *Birmingham Daily Mail*. It is, as we said, common for newspapers to print Christian with a capital "C" and Atheist with a small "a." We note, too, that the Blasphemy Laws against Freethinkers are "not obsolete," but the more recent laws against Catholic processions belong to "musty old archives." Christians make and interpret the law to suit themselves.

G. ROLEFFS.—Pleased to hear that the Liverpool Branch "saints" had such a good time, in such glorious weather, at Mr. Bonte's generous invitation; and that forty sat down to tea—a sacred number.

W. CROMACK.—Yes, that year's imprisonment was a grim reality, though one may smile now in looking back to it.

R. M.—Too late for this week; in our next. Glad you have got us a new subscriber, who "says he has really enjoyed life since taking the *Freethinker*."

J. BYRNE.—We are going to deal at length with the Rev. James Weller and his Bradlaugh fiction; probably in our next issue.

THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

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

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

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

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.

PERSONS remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send *halfpenny stamps*.

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### Personal and Otherwise.

THERE are times when a man has to talk about himself, and the most modest way of doing it is to use the first personal singular and speak with perfect straightforwardness.

I want the Freethinkers who read this journal, and who value its work, to see whether they cannot

make up at once the £80 or so which is still needed to bring the President's Honorarium Fund up to the amount suggested in the original appeal.

The money is really needed just now for other than personal objects. I have undertaken fresh responsibilities, and I trust my friends will help me to bear them. I am not asking them at present for direct assistance. If they subscribe that £80 I will devote it to this object.

Shareholders in the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, will understand what I mean when I tell them that the Directors have acted upon the suggestion made in their late circular letter, which was accepted with practical unanimity.

It was impossible to continue any longer on the old lines. I could go on working without salary, but I could not go on, as I have been obliged to for some time, finding money out of my own pocket to keep the ball rolling. In the interest of the *Freethinker*, which is, after all, the main thing, I have taken it and all its adjuncts into my own hands. This gives me certain assets, which are not easily realisable; and certain liabilities, which have to be promptly discharged. It also saddles me with the task of conducting the business, at least for the present, at a loss. My friends will understand, therefore, why I have been "busy behind the scenes" of late, and why I shall have to be very busy for some time in completely reorganising affairs at 2 Newcastle-street.

There is no cause for alarm. I do not wish to frighten anyone. I have just stepped into the breach, as I have often done before; and I shall probably get through all my difficulties while I have health and strength. But I believe I have friends who will feel bound to lend a hand.

There is not time to go more fully into details at this juncture. Suffice it to say, just now, that there are circumstances (caused by persecuting laws and bigoted feeling) which place the *Freethinker* in a special position of disadvantage. We are obliged to live, as it were, more expensively than other enterprises, because of our perpetual insecurity. This disadvantage would be counterbalanced by a much increased circulation of the paper, and a larger sale of other publications. As for the circulation of the paper, it is a good deal better than it was three or four years ago, and it will be better still during the coming winter if its friends in every part of the country try to place it in fresh hands with a view to securing fresh subscribers.

The great thing to do at once is to make up that £80 anyhow. It will not enable me to meet the liabilities already referred to, but it will give me a little breathing space. And if I get that I will take the hill in front of me with a firm and confident step.

G. W. FOOTE.

### Sugar Plums.

There was a capital gathering at Queen's Hall on Sunday evening to hear Mr. Foote's lecture on "Bradlaugh's Recantation"—including a fair sprinkling of ladies and a large number of strangers. The lecture was very warmly applauded, and followed throughout with that close attention which is the highest compliment a speaker can receive. One of Mr. Foote's auditors was Mr. Wallace Nelson, who is on a visit to England from Australia, after twenty-two years' absence. Mr. Nelson will be remembered by some of the older "saints." He lectured on Freethought for some years at the antipodes, then joined the Labor party and entered parliament. He is now engaged in press work, and is gathering material for special articles in the influential paper with which he is connected. Mr. Nelson, of course, is still an ardent Freethinker. He said that he thoroughly enjoyed himself on Sunday evening

Mr. Foote's second lecture of this Queen's Hall course will be on "General Booth and the Woman Question." General Booth's two manifestoes on this subject before leaving England for another foreign trip have been praised

by the press, even by the "advanced" press. Mr. Foote will subject them to a different treatment and show what they really amount to. We appeal to Freethinkers to induce as many ladies as they can to attend this lecture. Every effort should be made to rescue the actual and potential mothers of the race from the incubus of Christianity.

The *Star* was good enough to announce Mr. Foote's lecture on "Bradlaugh's Recantation," and a very fair report of the lecture appeared in Monday's *Morning Advertiser*. Other papers seem to have been too busy to do justice to a great Atheist.

Mr. Foote's *Reminiscences of Charles Bradlaugh* contains more of the great "Iconoclast's" personality than anything else that was written soon after his death. It gives a better idea of Bradlaugh in some of the great moments of his career than could be gathered from a formal biography. This thick pamphlet is the first of a number of publications which are to be offered for sale at a reduced price in view of the new position of the business at 2 Newcastle-street. Instead of sixpence, this pamphlet can now be obtained for twopence. All who purchase it at this price will have "a bargain."

The New York *Truthseeker* reproduces our article on Byron, in reply to Mr. Cecil Chesterton, who claimed the poet as a Christian. We are glad to see that Mr. E. M. Macdonald, the *Truthseeker* editor, reports an improvement in his physical condition.

Mr. Wishart, who is still "missioning" for the N. S. S. Executive in South Yorkshire and South Lancashire, visited Leigh recently and delivered the first Freethought lecture heard there for a long while. He had a good meeting, which would have been quite orderly if it had not been for a zealous Christian, who had to be removed by the police. Leigh is seven miles from Wigan, and a few "saints" there have decided to join the Wigan Branch. We hear that the district Freethinkers are anxiously looking forward to a visit from Mr. Foote.

We hope a good many of our readers take the *Humanitarian*—the little monthly organ of the Humanitarian League, 53 Chancery-lane, London, W.C. It always gives us pleasure to call attention to this publication. The September number contains much interesting matter—as far as the crusade against cruelty can be called "interesting." One item is "Shakespeare and Johnson on Vivisection," by G. W. Foote. On a later page, an extract is given from Mr. Foote's *Shadow of the Sword*, under the heading of "How to Prevent Wars." We mention these things just to show that the *Humanitarian* is conducted on lines of tolerance and impartiality. Before putting the pen down, we should like to refer to Mr. Joseph Collinson's important article on "Imprisonment for Debt," with special relation to the Proceedings of the Select Committee, presided over by that hopeless statesman, Mr. Herbert Gladstone. Twelve thousand poor people are imprisoned for debt every year, and are now treated like common criminals. It is shocking to think of the mass of misery which this represents.

Mr. Tom Robertson has resigned the secretaryship of the Glasgow Branch, which he has held so long and with so much benefit to the Society. His reasons are very simple. His business is making ever greater claims on his time and energy, and unfortunately he does not enjoy robust health. He remains on the Branch committee, and will help in the work as far as possible. Not a shadow of friction exists between him and his fellow committee-men, who hold him (as we do) in the very highest respect. Mr. Robertson's successor in the secretaryship is Mr. William Owen.

#### RUSKIN ON "DIVINE" NATURE.

Do you know, Susie, everything that has happened to me (and the leaf I sent you this morning may show you it has had some hurting in it) is little in comparison to the crushing and depressing effect on me, of what I learn day by day as I work on, of the cruelty and ghastliness of the nature I used to think so Divine?—*Hortus Inclusus*, p. 151.

But indeed man is, and was always, a blockhead and dullard; much readier to feel and digest, than to think and consider. Prejudice, which he pretends to hate, is his absolute lawgiver; mere use-and-wont everywhere leads him by the nose.—*Carlyle*.

## The Foreknowledge of Jesus.—IV.

(Concluded from p. 565.)

IT is a fact not admitting of doubt that the accounts of the great prediction ascribed to Jesus in the three Synoptical Gospels were derived from copies of an earlier Gospel—probably that "according to the Hebrews"—which prediction, in its most primitive form, was composed "before that generation had passed away," or was supposed to have "passed away." The exact date of the composition of this "prophecy" cannot now be fixed, but it must be placed *after*, not *before*, the destruction of the holy city in A.D. 70. Of this there can be no doubt, for the original writer was absolutely certain of the occurrence of that event, as well as of the terrible sufferings of his countrymen during the siege, and the unspeakable horrors attending it. To rational critics the only wonder is that the second part of the prediction which time had proved to be false—the second coming of Jesus to judge the world "immediately after" the destruction of Jerusalem, and before that generation had "passed away"—was not eliminated by the three second century editors who compiled the Synoptical Gospels. How, then, is the latter fact to be accounted for?

The most probable explanation is that in the days of these compilers the second portion of the prediction was too well known to be omitted in a document professing to be a correct copy of the Gospel. Moreover, the people in that age were not critical, and any doubts that might arise could easily be removed by some plausible explanation or far-fetched reconciliation—as is practised with credulous or unthinking believers to-day. Hence, all three Synoptists, doubtless, thought it better to transcribe the whole text of the document, leaving to Christian teachers the task of interpreting or explaining away the most glaring of the Gospel falsehoods—an example of which is preserved in the "Second Epistle of Peter."

The result of our examination of the grand "prophecy" put in the mouth of Jesus can be given in a few words. That much-lauded individual—or, what is the same thing, the writer of the "prophecy"—had little or no knowledge of the past history of the Jews: this is proved by his reference to the "abomination of desolation" in the Book of Daniel; neither, again, had he the smallest foreknowledge of the many disastrous and terrible events in store for that unhappy nation subsequent to the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans, nor of any of the great events of history which should afterwards shake the world. He knew of nothing between the great catastrophe of A.D. 70 and the end of the world—nothing whatever—not even of the still more crushing defeat of his countrymen by the Romans in A.D. 135.

Now the complete lack of prescience shown by Jesus in the portion of the prediction which is open to the test of time must be taken into account when considering the *alleged* foreknowledge attributed to him in the case of the destruction of Jerusalem. When it is borne in mind that there is not a scrap of evidence that the prediction of the last-named event was uttered *before* A.D. 70, it would be simply ridiculous to credit the Christian Savior with foreknowledge in this case, when we have conclusive proof that he possessed none in the other.

There can, then, be not the slightest doubt that the whole "prophecy" is of the same character as the sermon on the Mount—a purely literary composition—and that it was never spoken extempore to the disciples, as represented. The key to the whole composition is to be found in the statement of Josephus, already quoted, concerning the Essenes: "There are also among them who undertake to tell things to come by reading the holy books.....and being perpetually conversant in the discourses of the prophets." That such a method of manufacturing "prophecies" was practised by Christians in the first century is beyond question: the Book of Revelation was com-

piled in this way; the apologetics of the early Christian "Fathers" are also of this character. Such a fraudulent system of deception was, no doubt, in that day considered legitimate, and even praiseworthy.

The author's method of concocting this grand prophecy was simply to paraphrase scraps of unfulfilled predictions from the Hebrew scriptures, more especially those relating to judgments to come upon the Jewish nation in "the latter days." The following are the chief items in the second portion of this wonderful "prediction":—

GOSPEL SAYINGS.

Matt. xxiv. 29. "But immediately after the tribulation of these days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

Matt. xxiv. 30. "And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn."

Luke xxiii. 30. "Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us."

Matt. xxiv. 30. "And they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

Matt. xxiv. 33. "So ye also when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors."

Luke xxi. 28. "But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh."

Matt. xxiv. 35. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

Matt. xxiv. 36. "But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only."

Matt. xxiv. 42-43. "Watch therefore: for ye know not what day your Lord cometh. But this know, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched."

Matt. xxiv. 44. "Therefore be ye also ready: for in an hour that ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

This second batch of bogus sayings completes the grand "prophecy" attributed to the Gospel Jesus. As will, no doubt, be at once perceived, no foreknowledge was necessary for the composition, the only requisites being writing materials and a copy of the Hebrew scriptures. The whole bundle of sayings which make up this so-called "prophecy" can only be fitly described in the words of one of Carlisle's reviewers; they are nothing less than "a heap of clotted nonsense."

In conclusion I feel constrained to say that some such prediction was bound to be written; for the only historical Jesus at all likely to have been glorified, after his death, by the Nazarenes was the fanatic mentioned by Josephus (Wars, vi., v., 3), who for seven and a half years (A.D. 62-70) went up and down the country crying "Woe, woe, to Jerusalem," who was scourged by the Roman procurator (Albinus), who to all questions as to who he was? whence he came? why he predicted disasters on his countrymen? maintained an obstinate silence, and who when released went about, as before, uttering the

OLDER WRITINGS.

Isaiah xiii. 9-10. "Behold the day of the Lord cometh ... the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be in darkness in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine."

2 Esd. xvi. 39. "And the world shall mourn, and sorrows shall come upon it on every side."

Rev. i. 7. "And all the tribes of the earth shall mourn."

Hos. x. 8. "And they shall say to the mountains, Cover us, and to the hills, Fall on us."

Dan. vii. 13-14. "And behold there came with the clouds of heaven one like the Son of man.....and there was given him dominion and glory."

2 Esd. ix. 1-2; ii. 34. "When thou seest part of the signs past, which I have told thee before, then thou shalt understand that it is the very same time wherein the Most High will begin to visit the world..... For he is nigh at hand that shall come in the end of the world."

Isaiah xl. 8. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of your God shall stand for ever."

Zech. xiv. 7. "But it shall be one day that is known unto the Lord."

2 Esd. ii. 13. "The kingdom of heaven is already prepared for you: watch."

Rev. iii. 3. "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."

2 Esd. ii. 35. "Be ye ready for the reward of the kingdom, for everlasting light shall shine upon you for evermore."

same doleful cry. One can easily imagine, after the fall of the holy city, the credulous Essenes (more especially if this Jesus belonged to their sect) saying "Truly this was a son of God" (Matt. xxvii. 54). To those who say that this fanatic lived too late, because the real Jesus was contemporary with Paul and the apostles James, John, and Cephas (Gal. i. 18-19; ii. 9; 1 Cor. xv. 5-8; etc.), I would ask in reply—"When did Paul live?" If this question can be answered satisfactorily, we can easily get an approximate date for Jesus. For this purpose, the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, being demonstrably unhistorical, are, of course, inadmissible: only the remaining portion of the New Testament and any independent outside testimony can be used as evidence.

ABRACADABRA.

Christ in Lodgings.

AN indubitable and, in many ways, refreshing example of simple humor and the frankly commonplace has been achieved at a leading London theatre by that well-known humorist, Mr. Jerome K. Jerome, in the production of his play, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*.

We have all been courteously informed in the "puff preliminary" that this play was to be a dramatic answer to the insane question, "If Christ came to London?"

In a squalid house tenanted by a motley collection of human beings, who seem to have escaped from one of George R. Sims's melodramas, Jesus Christ comes as a "paying guest." One by one these people get "chummy" with the Second Person of the Trinity. There is no mention of miracle; but the old familiar games of the Gospels begin again. The sacrosanct paying guest does not turn the tea into coffee, or make the last sardine in the tin feed the whole of the guests of the lodging-house. Nor does he restore a deceased landlady to life to her amazed and sorrowing relatives, after they have spent the club money. Mr. Jerome is merciful, and spares us these "chestnuts." None the less, the divine lodger does work miracles. The landlady no longer puts margarine on the breakfast table instead of "eighteen-penny Dorset." The retired soldier is transformed from a cadger and a bully into an officer and a gentleman. The lady guest, who uses a powder-puff not wisely but too well, forgets her cosmetics and becomes an imitation Joan of Arc. The shady company promoter forgets that he is a "circumcised Christian," and flushes once more with pride in the ancient name of Jew. It is all splendid, but it is not serious drama. It reminds the hardened old playgoer of the time when, as a toddler in frocks, he saw Cinderella transformed by the fairy, whilst the "pumpkin" coach waited at the "wings" alongside of the bedizened and bejewelled ballet-girls.

One thing really troubles us in the midst of our delight. Mr. Forbes Robertson's great gifts should be reserved for noble works, and not squandered on amiable trivialities. The majestic presence of the man, his splendid voice, his superb dignity, these splendid gifts are wasted in *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*.

The net result of the whole thing is a production which, in spite of its obviousness and its many defects, does really add to Mr. Jerome's reputation as a humorist. This story of the Trinity-in-Unity in Lodgings is likely to be more popular than *Three Men in a Boat*. Thousands appreciate the delightful and humorous idyll of our good grey river; but merry England is paved with thirty millions of people, mostly—Christians.

M.

Philosophy complains that Custom has hoodwinked us from the first; that we do everything by Custom, even Believe by it.—*Carlyle*.

## Wanted—A Spook.

BY AUSTIN BIERBOWER.

THE greatest question of the present time is whether man shall live after this life. If any being were restored from death it would be sufficient evidence of future existence. We have, however, not the evidence. There are many who pretend to have it, claiming to produce spirits or miraculous cures; but there is no evidence of the genuineness of these. If Spiritualists could produce one being that would stand the examination of scientists, it would be enough. Almost every negro claims to have seen ghosts; miraculous cures are alleged by a number of religions; Spiritualists produce many spirits from the other world which give their communications; evidences of the supernatural are not wanting; but what is wanting is a conviction that these are real. Some few people are convinced, but they are very few and very incompetent to pass judgment on the evidence. No good lawyer, accustomed to sift evidence, would admit that a ghost or spirit is proven. No scientist or historian would admit it. No miraculous cure has been established on indisputable authority.

Those who allege manifestations of the supernatural should busy themselves to get the proofs. Any one case would be sufficient to establish the supernatural in man, but the case has to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. The benefits, however, are worth the effort to so prove it. Some of the owners of dime museums would give millions of dollars for a real ghost—not such as is in the minds of negroes and superstitious persons, but such as appeals to all and may be observed by all. We should like to have a ghost that we can see and feel and hear talk, not such as vaguely appears to the mind of a medium or insane person. Anyone who knows the working of the mind knows that such people can believe readily in ghosts, and pretend to be actuated by them, but sensible people are not ready to take the sayings of the insane as true. Many frauds are practiced on the public which should be discriminated from those who have genuine evidence. The Society of Psychical Research is too easily humbugged. Some members of it are convinced when practical and scientific men cannot be. We want real evidence of a ghost or spirit such as will satisfy the best minds. There is no reason why the evidence should not be forthcoming, if ghosts or spirits do exist so abundantly. Proofs in the dark ought to yield to proofs in the light. The supernatural world, if such exists, ought to be compelled to manifest itself, and to do so clearly. We have plenty of evidence of material facts, and they are not disputed. The facts of history and science are generally admitted by the people, learned and unlearned, and we know no reason why alleged supernatural facts cannot be so established. Certainly some ought to be. If there is one such, as stated, it disposes of the whole question of the supernatural. Nothing is more wanted now than proof; and nothing will establish the supernatural but the proof. If it exists it ought not to have to come through weak minds given to hysteria, or be doubtful from any other cause. We ought to be able to prove a ghost as well as a natural fact, if there is any to prove. Evidence can take hold of the supernatural as well as the natural. There is only one kind of evidence for all.

As yet we have no evidence of the supernatural. All the alleged proofs are seen to be flimsy when examined. No cure of Christian Scientists, relics, or the healers of any religion have been incontestably established. Where they are thought to exist some other cause can be alleged for the opinion. The supernatural is not needed to explain them. We have not testimony that would establish supernatural relations with anybody or for any purpose.

Therefore, we say, that we need a ghost, and we call on Spiritualists and others who believe in mani-

festations of the supernatural to produce one, or to produce the evidence in clear shape. Such evidence would destroy infidelity, materialism, and establish the spiritual view of life which, without it, is held to be a mere delusion. We want a ghost for the best reason in the world. One is enough. It would make the other world as real as this, and people would be satisfied that there is another life. That Christianity is but one of its supernatural facts. Let Spiritualism, therefore, produce one spirit. Let Christian Scientists restore one person that is dead, or set a limb that has been severed. Let any religious healer cure one that is clearly incurable by natural means; let there be one manifestation of the supernatural, and all doubt will vanish; but until we have this, men will persist in refusing to believe in future existence and the other world.

—*Humanitarian Review* (Los Angeles, California).

## The World of Books.

How refreshing it is to hear a cry of the human heart conveyed through a beautiful voice! In last week's *Academy* we came across the following brief poem quoted from Mr. Seumas O'Sullivan's new volume, *Verses Sacred and Profane*:—

### "THE MONK.

I go with silent feet and slow,  
As all my black-robed brothers go;  
I dig awhile and read and pray,  
So portion out my pious day  
Until the evening time, and then  
Work at my book with cunning pen.  
If she would turn to me a while,  
If she would turn to me and smile,  
My book would be no more to me  
Than some forgotten phantasy,  
And God no more unto my mind  
Than a dead leaf upon the wind."

The last three couplets are very fine in their large simplicity, and the last of all is simply perfect.

\* \* \*

The same number of the *Academy* contained an extremely well-written article by "J. F." on "The Course of English Prose," in which the importance of the English Bible—that is, the Authorised Version—is greatly exaggerated. To call it "the one indispensable book for the study of the English language" is really absurd. And no less absurd is the writer's implied view that melody and harmony would never have existed in English prose at all without the 1611 edition of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. This is putting the cart before the horse. The 1611 Bible was not a miraculous production; it did not drop down ready-made from heaven; it was the work of Englishmen during several generations; for the Authorised Version was not a brand-new translation, but one largely made up from previous translations; in fact, the Revisers were charged, in the document appointing them to the work, to depart as little as possible from the Versions already in use. For the rest, we venture to repeat, or rather to summarise what we said on this subject in the twelfth chapter of our *Book of God*. The language of the English Bible is a language that never was written or spoken outside it. Its language was a consecrated diction gradually built up from the time of Wycliffe. It was not the language of Chaucer's prose, or Wycliffe's prose, or Tyndale's prose, or Coverdale's prose, or Hooker's prose, any more than it was the language of Bacon's prose or Shakespeare's prose. It was not even the language of the Revisers themselves. Their Introduction and their Dedication to King James are written in a language which is poles asunder from that of their so-called translation. The English Bible is really an exotic in English literature. We do not deny its great charm in its finest parts. We merely contend that the influence it has exercised has been chiefly indirect, and that it has always stood apart from the main development of English prose.

\* \* \*

The *Academy* writer adopts the statement that the English Bible is "the book that begat English prose." This is not scientific criticism; it is pious ecstacy. The fact is that the English Bible has had more influence upon English literature during the past hundred years than it had during the hundred years immediately following 1611. It had more influence upon the writing of Carlyle and Ruskin than it had upon the writing of Taylor, Smith, and Barrow, who were all divines as well as masters of prose. And the reason

of this is not difficult to discover. While the Bible was literally believed it stood by itself; the Word of God could have no relation to the word of men. But when the Bible began to fall into discredit as a revelation, it naturally began to assume vast importance as "literature," and the study of it mainly from that point of view gave a certain Biblical quality to the work of semi-Christians such as Carlyle and Ruskin, who were steeped in it. It gave no such quality to the work of Shelley, who read the Bible a great deal and "admired it as a composition"—as Byron said. Shelley was not even a semi-Christian. That is why the Bible as "literature" did not exercise a disproportionate influence over his style. And it may safely be said that the day of the English Bible as "literature" is as much over now as its day as a "revelation." It is literature, of course, but its predominance is gone for ever.

When orthodox people see through the doctrine of Christ's divinity, they talk about his incomparable character. That is merely the afterglow of their sunken faith. When orthodox people see through the Bible as a revelation, they talk about its incomparable literature. This is another afterglow. The two cases are entirely similar.

### Correspondence.

#### THE MISSIONARY BOOM.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—With reference to the article on Missions which appears in your issue of August 30, the following extract from Flora Anna Steele's recent work, *India Through the Ages*, may prove of interest:—

"'I found it impossible,' Sir Thomas Roe writes, 'to convince them that the Christian faith was designed for the whole world, and that theirs was mere fable and gross superstition. Their answer was amusing (?) enough.' 'We pretend not,' they replied, 'that our law is of universal application. God intended it only for us. We do not even say that yours is a false religion; it may be adapted to your wants and circumstances, God having, no doubt, appointed many different ways of going to heaven.'"

Mrs. Steele adds, "Whether amusing or not, the argument was singularly unanswerable."

Sir Thomas Roe was the ambassador from James I. to the court of the Emperor Jehangir at Ajmir, and he sailed for India in 1613 with the first vessels despatched by the East India Company. Ever since then, the emissaries of Jesus have been working in India to make converts to the Christian faith; with what results anyone acquainted with the East knows only too well.

E. B.

#### A WONDERFUL CURATE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR.—The curate of St. George the Martyr, Wolverton, has been giving a series of addresses to the Sunday Afternoon Men's Society in his church. No printed copies of the addresses are available, but I think you ought to know what this man is doing in the town. I have been to hear several of the addresses, and questions being invited, I sent several (written on paper, of course, as one is not allowed to ask questions in church), one of them being a question of God's infinity, as follows:—

"You grant that God is infinite in power and knowledge; if so, when he made the serpent, the man, and the woman, and the tree of knowledge he must have known that the man and woman would fall when tempted by the serpent. If so, is he justified in punishing the human race for what was inevitable?"

In reply, the curate pointed out strongly that it was out of our province altogether to question the infinite, as, being finite, we could not understand the infinite. He admitted, however, that "God is subject to his own laws" (a most damaging admission) and that, no doubt, the punishment of man was for his (man's) ultimate good!

Another question asked was, "God, being all powerful, why should he rest on the seventh day and be "refreshed"?"

The curate admitted that he was puzzled by this question as he did not know that it was in the Bible. He looked it up in the Concordance and then in the Commentary, and found that others had been puzzled. Eventually, he turned up the original Hebrew and found that it meant that God "breathed himself out." A pretty answer to the question.

With reference to the deluge, the curate pointed out that earlier in the world's history the crust of the earth moved up and down, and it was quite conceivable that if the hills were lowered and the valleys elevated, there would be a

wave started which would travel round the earth. This, in fact, was what had occurred for which proof could be produced, as this wave had carried great boulders to a height of 1,900 feet. Also, there was plenty of water to drown the whole world if the mountains could be lowered, as the valleys were as deep in the sea as the mountains were high.

With reference to the deluge, the curate was asked if he thought the ark described in Genesis could withstand the shock of a wave that would carry boulders to the height mentioned and remain seaworthy, to which he replied, that the ark would rise on the crest of the wave and ride there in safety. When asked how a wave could remain at a height of over three miles for more than six months, as it must have done if the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat, in the seventh month, he replied that the Bible did not state that the water was three miles high, but only about thirty feet. Of course, he ignored the fact that Mount Ararat is over three miles high. When quotations from Sir Charles Lyell and Samuel Laing were quoted against a universal deluge, he said that Sir Charles Lyell's figures could not be relied on and that Samuel Laing was either a "most ignorant man or the biggest liar on the face of the earth." Such is the arrogance and ignorance of the curate of St. George the Martyr.

T. S. E.

#### A FEW WORDS ON SUNDAY RECREATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The Cricket Season is practically over, although we still have a match or two to play. Taking all things into consideration, the Iconoclasts' Cricket Club, which I founded this year, has been quite successful. We have a good team, and have played some extremely interesting matches; the number of spectators, too, has often been most gratifying.

The Rationalisation of the Sunday is a matter of great importance, and it is to be hoped that Freethinkers especially will assist it to the best of their ability. The Cricket Club is firmly established, and will doubtlessly last as long as I am able to put my shoulder to the wheel. I should, however, like to see the athletic side of the Sunday movement greatly increased, and am therefore trying to form a Football Club, and would thank those who would care to assist me, and join the proposed club, to communicate with me.

There is no reason, either, why we should not have a Cycling or Cross-Country (Harriers) Club.

Of course, one cannot do everything at once with the relatively small means that we have at our disposal, but I am sure that the younger Freethinkers could do far more for the cause than is at present done by them, and I would ask them to bear in mind that every one who takes part in Sunday Games, or induces his friends to take part, or even only look on, is driving a nail into the coffin of Sabbatarianism, and thereby, if only in a small way, carrying on the work of the Giants who have gone before.

H. E. VOIGT.

31 Blenheim Gardens, Cricklewood, N.W.

#### THEOLOGY.

Student.

Your words but make me shrink the more.  
Happy who profits by your lore!  
Theology, now, to my heart lies nearer.

Mephistopheles.

I were loth to lead you into error.  
Thus hold I of this discipline:  
In such a maze the road so hard to gain is,  
Such store of hidden venom lies therein, [bane is.  
And scarce you know which medicine and which  
Here, too, 'twere best one master you should hear,  
And what he says, that do you swear.  
In sum, hold fast by words, then straightway  
You'll enter by the sure, safe gateway  
Into the Temple of Certainty.

Student.

Yet some idea behind the word must be.

Mephistopheles.

O yes! yet need we not with too great scruples  
For just where all ideas lack us, [wreck us,  
Comes an apt word to fill the vacancy.  
With words you can argue, and subtly twist 'em;  
From words construct a goodly system;  
In words believe, nor can you whittle  
From a word, a single jot or tittle.

—Goethe's "Faust."

**SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.**

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

**LONDON.****OUTDOOR.**

QUEEN'S (MINOR) HALL, Langham-place, London, W.: G. W. Foote, 7.30, "General Booth on the Woman Question."

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

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Station-road, 11.30, W. J. Ramsey, a Lecture. Brockwell Park, 3 and 6, W. J. Ramsey, Lectures.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S.: Ridley-road, 11.30, F. A. Davies, "A Lop-Sided Religion."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S.: Parliament Hill, 3.30, F. A. Davies, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S.: Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, 7, A. Allison, a Lecture.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S.: Hyde Park (near Marble Arch), 11.30, a Lecture.

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

**COUNTRY.**

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S. (Rationalists' Club, 12 Hill-square): Tuesdays and Thursdays, at 8.30, Bible Classes.

**OUTDOOR.**

BLACKBURN: Market, 3 and 7, Mr. McClellan, Lectures.

BOSTON: Bargate Green (near the Cannons), 2.45, Joseph Bates, "What Civilisation Owes to Freethought."

DALKEITH: Saturday, September 12, at 7, a Lecture.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S.: The Meadows, 3, a Lecture; The Mound, 6.30, a Lecture.

LEEDS: Town Hall Square, Saturday, September 12, at 7.30, M. Sollet, a Lecture. Woodhouse Moor, Sunday, September 13, at 3, M. Sollet, a Lecture.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (corner of Shiel-road and Boaler-street): Sidney Wollen, 3, "The Crimes of the Protestants"; 7, "God and the Murder of Children."

**H. S. WISHART'S LECTURES.**

LEEDS: Friday, September 11, Town Hall Square, at 7.30, "The Falsehood, Folly, and Futility of Dr. Warschauer's 'Anti-Nunquam.'"

BURNLEY: Sunday, September 13, Market, at 11, "Useless Christ"; at 3, "The Salvation Army"; at 7, "Christism and Slavery." Tuesday, September 15, at 7.30, "'Good' God."

NELSON: Wednesday, September 16, Secondary School Grounds, at 7, "Christism, Socialism, Secularism."

ROCHDALE: Thursday, September 17, at 7.30, "Anti 'Anti-Nunquam.'"

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