

# THE Freethinker

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*Have at them. Speak. Moveless as you find them, they are not all gross clay, and I say again, the true word spoken has its chance of somewhere alighting and striking root. Look not to that. Seeds perish in nature; good men fail. Look to the truth in you, and deliver it, with no afterthought of hope, for hope is dogged by dread.—*

GEORGE MEREDITH.

## The Great Ghost.

LONG before there were any kings there were chiefs. Even in the early Feudal days the king was only the chief of the barons, and many centuries elapsed before the supremacy of the monarch was unquestioned and he became really the sovereign. It was a process of natural selection. A mob of chiefs could not rule a mob of people. There was a fierce struggle, with plenty of fighting and intrigue, and the fittest survived. Gradually, as the nation became unified, the government was centralised, and out of the chaos of competing nobles emerged the relatively cosmic authority of the Crown.

Similarly in the world of religion. All gods were originally ghosts. But as polytheism declined a supreme god emerged from the crowd of deities, as the king emerged from the crowd of nobles and ruled from a definite centre. It was Zeus in Greece, Jupiter in Rome, Brahma in India, Thor in Scandinavia, and Yahveh in Israel. "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God," was an exclamation that sprang from Yahveh's lips (through his priests) when his godship was still in the thick of the competitive struggle.

The ghosts become gods, and the gods become supreme deities, looked after the interests of their worshipers; gave them long life, good harvests, and prosperity in warfare, if they were true to them, and plagued them like the very devil if they slighted them or nodded to their rivals. According to the Old Testament, when everything went well with the Jews their God was pleased, and when things went wrong with them he was angry. This state of mind survives into our advanced civilisation, where people still talk of "judgments," still pray for good things, and still implore their God for victory when they have a scrimmage with their neighbors.

But this infantile conception is dying out of educated minds. Prayer is seen to be futile. The laws of nature do not vary. Providence is on the side of the big battalions. God helps those who help themselves—and no one else.

Long ago, in ancient Greece and Rome, the acutest thinkers had come to the same conclusion. Lucretius, for instance, did not deny the existence of the gods; he merely asserted that they no longer concerned themselves with human affairs, which he was heartily glad of, as they were mostly bad characters. He observed "the reign of law" as clearly as our modern scientists, and relegated the deities to their Olympian repose, so beautifully versed by Tennyson:—

"The Gods, who haunt  
The lucid interspace of world and world,  
Where never creeps a cloud, or moves a wind,  
Nor ever falls the least white star of snow,  
Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans,  
Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar  
Their sacred everlasting calm."

Even the savage, in times of prolonged peace and prosperity, begins to speculate on the possibility of his god's having retired from business; for religion is born of fear, not of love, and the savage is reminded of his god by calamity rather than by good fortune. This idea has been caught by Robert Browning in his marvellous *Caliban upon Setebos*, a poem developed out of a casual germ in Shakespeare's *Tempest*:—

"Hoping the while, since evils sometimes mend,  
Warts rub away and sores are cured with slime,  
That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch  
And conquer Setebos, or likelier He  
Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die."

But presently poor Caliban is frightened out of his speculation by a thunderstorm, which makes him lie low and slaver his god, offering any mortification as the price of his escape.

There is a good deal of Caliban in our modern multitudes, but the educated are working free from his theology. Science and miracle cannot live together, and miracle and providence are the same thing. How far from us is the good old God of the best parts of the Bible, who held out one ear for the prayers of his good children, and one hand, well rodded, for the backs of the naughty ones. The seed of the righteous never begged for bread, and the villain always came to a bad end. It was the childish philosophy of the "gods" in a modern theatre. The more critical want something truer and more natural, something more accordant with the stern realities of life. Renan has some excellent remarks on this in the Preface to his second volume of the *Histoire du Peuple d'Israel*:—

"The work of the genius of Israel was not really affected until the eighteenth century after Jesus Christ, when it became very doubtful to spirits a little cultivated that the affairs of this world are regulated by a God of justice. The exaggerated idea of a special Providence, the basis of Judaism and Islam, and which Christianity has only corrected through the fund of liberalism inherent in our races, has been definitely vanquished by modern philosophy, the fruit not of abstract speculation, but of constant experience. It has never been observed, in effect, that a superior being occupies himself, for a moral or an immoral purpose, with the affairs of nature or the affairs of humanity."

Renan has elsewhere said that the negation of the supernatural is a dogma with every cultivated intelligence. God, in short, has faded into a metaphysical abstraction. The little ghosts vanished long ago, and now the Great Ghost is melting into thin air. Thousands of people have lost all belief in his existence. They use his name, and take it in vain; for, when questioned, they merely stand up for "a sort of a something." The fear of God, so to speak, has survived his personality; just as Madame de Stael said she did not believe in ghosts, but she was afraid of them. Mrs. Browning gives voice to this sentiment in one of her poems:—

"And hearts say, God be pitiful,  
That ne'er said, God be blest."

The fear of the Lord is, indeed, the beginning and the end of theology.

When the Great Ghost was a reality—we mean to his worshipers—he was constantly spoken of. His name was invoked in the courts of law, it figured in nearly every oath outside them, and it was to be seen

on nearly every page of every book that was published. But all that is changed. To speak or print the name of God is reckoned "bad form." The word is almost tabooed in decent society. You hear it in the streets, however, when the irascible carman calls on God to damn your eyes for getting in his way. There is such a conspiracy of silence about the Great Ghost, except in churches and chapels, that the mention of his name in polite circles sounds like swearing. Eyebrows are lifted, and the speaker is looked upon as vulgar, and perhaps dangerous.

Thus theology gives way to the pressure of science, and religion to the pressure of civilisation. The more use we make of this life the less we look for another; the loftier man grows the less he bows to ghosts and gods. Heaven and hell both disappear, and things are neither so bad nor good as we expected. Man finds himself in a universe of necessity. He hears no response to his prayers but the echo of his own voice. He therefore bids the gods adieu, and sets himself to the task of making the best of life for himself and his fellows. Without false hopes, or base fears, he steers his course over the ocean of life, and says with the poet, "I am the captain of my soul."

G. W. FOOTE.

### New Preachers and the Old Faith.

THE Christian preacher who denounces certain historic teachings of Christianity as untrue, barbarous, or immoral, is now a tolerably familiar figure. His readiness to exchange old teachings for newer ones would be wholly admirable were it not that one feels that the exchange has been put off as long as was possible. To have played the part of a pioneer in repudiating certain Christian teachings would have been a good work; but to merely follow in the wake of a long line of heretics, and feebly re-echo *their* heresy, gives one the impression that these men are desirous of obtaining the credit of profound and fearless thinkers without experiencing the toil and inconvenience that comes to such in this divinely-ordered world. They have a tolerably keen sense of the direction in which public opinion is moving, and to this, rather than to any really first-rate or independent intellectual effort, one has to attribute their concessions. And it must be admitted that these "advanced" theologians gain the full benefit of their being slightly less theologically obtuse than their more orthodox brethren. The religious world brands them as revolutionists, and thus elevates them in the public gaze. Freethinkers are pleased to see these men lisp the Free-thought alphabet, and load them with praise. And so from both quarters theologians of this character gain an eminence that would not have been theirs had they stuck to the orthodox paths.

That these men deserve praise I do not for a moment deny. We praise the youngster who forms his letters correctly, or who rightly adds the figures of a sum, and we should certainly not withhold our praise for those who are beginning to spell out the first simple lessons in the right understanding of religious beliefs. But it is only on this principle that credit is deserved. For the complex thinking of the advanced theologian is so simple, his discoveries so elementary, his advanced thought so far behind the foremost thought of the age. Indeed, it is only in the pulpit that many of them could pose as thinkers at all. If they appear as speakers on non-religious platforms the attraction is not that they have any profound or original sentiments to utter, but that they, as Christian preachers, should be found taking an intelligent interest in social or political subjects. Or imagine one of our advanced Christian preachers setting out to address an audience of cultured Freethinkers on the subject of religion. The most that he could say would be to his audience the merest commonplaces, of no interest whatever save that of illustrating the fact that the speaker was "coming along," and might one day

"arrive." To find one of this class of preachers announcing his disbelief in the God of the Bible, or in the inspiration of the Bible, throwing overboard the belief in miracles, a virgin birth, or an eternal hell, invites the question, Why should we expect them to believe these things? There never was evidence enough to establish their reasonableness. Their absolute unreasonableness has been demonstrated over and over again for many generations. Even children, when they give up believing in fairies, do not claim credit for their advanced views. They simply state the fact, and sometimes feel a little ashamed of having believed in them for so long. But our advanced theologian claims the title of a profound thinker for little more than giving up a number of beliefs that an educated, thoughtful man should be ashamed to entertain. Really, he might as well claim credit inasmuch as he does not in the twentieth century believe in the astronomy of the twelfth.

But this is not all. Our advanced theologian not only denounces a number of Christian beliefs as "untrue," "socially pernicious," and "morally mischievous," he claims for historic Christianity credit that could only be its due if all these beliefs were absolutely true. On the one hand, as a proof of his fearless thinking, he denounces almost every belief that goes to make up historic Christianity. On the other, to uphold his character as a Christian, he "blathers" about the good Christianity has done in the world, of the comfort it has brought people, of the truer, purer views of life it has impressed upon them, and all in virtue of a set of beliefs that he has been denouncing as mentally, morally, and socially mischievous. As an illustration of theological subtlety, this may be admirable enough. As an exhibition of intellectual strength or rectitude it is beneath contempt. For one cannot have one's cake and eat it. If a man wishes to secure the credit of being abreast of the times, and rejects certain beliefs because of their demoralising influence, he cannot fairly hold that these beliefs have been the medium of conveying lasting benefit to the human race. If, on the contrary, he believes that Christian beliefs have conferred upon the world incalculable benefits, he must give up the pleasure of posing as an advanced thinker by denouncing these beliefs as morally and socially pernicious. That is, of course, if he is to retain the respect of thoughtful and cultured people. If he merely wishes to be popular in the pulpit he may easily combine both attitudes.

The truth is—and this is the whole point of this article—every attack by Christians upon historic Christian doctrines involves an impeachment of Christianity's influence upon civilisation. People cannot well be enlightened by being taught false views of nature; they cannot be made intellectually upright by teachings that are a direct negation of equal mental liberty, nor can their moral nature be strengthened and purified by teachings that are admitted to have distorted and falsified human nature. If Christianity has erred in either of these directions—scientific, intellectual, or moral—its influence has been pernicious to the extent that it has departed from the truth. That Christian critics of historic Christian beliefs do not perceive this to be a logical deduction from their attack is only proof that their criticism is due to the unconscious pressure of public opinion rather than to an intelligent appreciation of the real nature of the problem before the world.

Now, what are the facts of the case—facts that are now practically beyond dispute? On scientific matters the Churches for long took up a dogmatic attitude. Where they obtained the teachings by which they stood, or whether they correctly represented Christian teaching, matters nothing; it is sufficient they were there. It is also enough that because of these teachings the progress of science was obstructed for centuries, and is obstructed even now. Yet the defeat of the Church in matters of science has been complete and final. Not a single one of its teachings now commands the assent of

any educated person. They are not even matter for discussion; they are simply relegated to the region of myth or delusion. Yet it remains true that in their name scientific workers were imprisoned or murdered, while saner and more truthful teachings were denounced as crimes. On this point, clearly, the influence of Christianity was wholly bad; its work that of feeding the world upon falsehood so long as it was possible to do so.

Many of these false scientific teachings had far-reaching and disastrous social results. I need only cite the belief in witchcraft and demoniacal possession as illustrations of this. Those who talk so loudly of the good done by Christianity forget—or pretend to forget—the many thousands of women and children who were burned or drowned for the Church-made crime of witchcraft. Or they ignore how the thoroughly Christian teaching of demoniacal possession provided whipping-posts on English village greens to which insane people were tied and whipped in the hope of expelling the indwelling demon. It is true that neither of these superstitions originated with Christianity; but it is also true that in connection with both cruelties were practised such as no other religion witnessed. It is, indeed, hardly straining the truth to say that the good done by Christianity was incidental, the evil a direct result of its official teachings. But here, at any rate, are two more colossal falsehoods with which Christianity fed the world.

So, too, if we take the ethical aspect of Christian doctrines, the same truth emerges. Scores of Christian preachers now dilate upon the barbarous nature of the historic teaching concerning the atonement, the fall of man, or the doctrine of eternal damnation. Some of them point out, and with truth, how the belief that God demanded an innocent sacrifice before he would forgive the guilty, confused men's social sense of right and wrong. Others dwell upon the distortion of man's moral sense by the doctrine of the innate depravity of human nature, and how this has led to an appeal to human nature at its worst instead of an appeal to it at its best. And yet others point out how the belief in eternal punishment cast a gloom over childhood and an oversensitive maturity. All of these statements are perfectly true, but they contain more than they who make them imagine. They not only impeach the specific doctrines; they impeach also the whole influence of the Christian religion. For centuries the Christian Churches taught that which is now universally acknowledged to be false, even by Christians themselves. Generation after generation was brought up in an atmosphere of delusion and carefully-perpetuated falsehood. Upon the retention of these falsehoods they have been assured depended their eternal salvation. Their ethical sense has been distorted, their intellectual nature prostituted. That many preachers nowadays join with Free-thinkers in denouncing the most offensive of Christian teaching is a hopeful sign of the times. We are pleased to record their repentance, even though it be in the nature of a death-bed conversion. But their admissions only serve to emphasise the evil consummated by Christianity during the long period which it held the world in bondage, the bad effects of which may be still traced in contemporary life.

C. COHEN.

### An Impossible Reading of History.

THE puzzling question which perpetually forces itself upon believers is, Where does God come in? What room is there for Providence? As we contemplate the events of daily life, what signs of the presence of any directive Divine action do we see? It is universally conceded, even by the most conservative divines, that judging superficially, or by outward appearances, the Deity is conspicuous only by his absence. He certainly does not obtrude himself upon the historic boards, nor does he suddenly and

decisively interpose in any great emergency. The Crusades afford a case in point. Their object was to rescue the Holy Sepulchre from the perilous guardianship of the barbarous Infidels. Surely such a purpose deserved the active support of Heaven, if any pious human purpose ever did. And yet after three hundred years of the most determined and cruel fighting, in which, from first to last, some nine million lives were sacrificed, the armies of the Cross were defeated and driven back by the Christless forces of the Crescent. Why did not the Sovereign of the Universe come to the help of those who so bravely fought for the honor of his Beloved Son? Although Christian wars have frequently inundated the world with blood, no ghostly arm has ever been stretched out for the miraculous deliverance of the Lord's anointed. This is readily conceded by orthodox defenders of the Faith simply because they are powerless to deny its truth. Such is history if we read it with naked eyes. There is no God in it at any point whatever.

Just at this stage, however, theology steps in and says: "In order to read history accurately, in order to see all, both on the lines and between them, you must put on the latest fashion in spiritual spectacles, which I have devised and heartily recommend as the most effectual supernatural aid to your defective natural eyesight." Take the story of the crucifixion and read it first as it appears to the natural eyes. This is the result, as a popular divine puts it:—

"The whole stage is occupied by the man who figured on the occasion. God is not abruptly thrust in as if he intervened to shape matters. Each individual plays his own part out. The decision to slay is watched as it becomes a growing necessity. Accidents further it. Events impel it. Men, in their freedom, determine it. It is the worldly and cynical diplomacy of Caiaphas that finally forces it. It is the weakness of the Roman judge, struggling desperately against his own defeat, which allows it to happen. It is the betrayal of Judas from within the circle of friends which offers the opportunity, and the record notes all the appeal made even at the last to the friendship of the man by the offer of the sop, to abandon his intention. Each tiny detail of the crucifixion is brought about by incidental circumstances, historically real; and the tragic deed is recounted just as if it in itself as a dire event was the sole absorbing interest."

Whether the story, in that form, is historically true or not is at present a matter of no moment. If God existed and Jesus was his servant, there was no sign of any miraculous intervention to deliver the latter out of the hands of wicked men bent on his destruction. Jesus was cruelly abandoned to his inevitable doom. Such is the story as it appears to the natural man, or as read through the unassisted eye. Now, the theologian intervenes, saying: "What you have read is all true. It actually happened as related. But there is something there which you have not seen. Between the lines, written in invisible ink, is the most vital part of the narrative, the part which adds sublime and eternal meaning and purpose to all the rest. Here is a specially-constructed magnifying-glass through which you can read the complete story." The part of the story which can only be seen through the magnifying-glass of faith is pithily expressed in words attributed to Peter on the day of Pentecost: "Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hands of lawless men did crucify and slay" (Acts ii. 23). Jesus was recklessly put to death because the official classes hated him and wished him out of their way. His crucifixion was a fearful tragedy, a gigantic crime, for which the Jews have been execrated and persecuted throughout Christendom ever since; and Canon Scott Holland expresses the belief that the crime was quite voluntarily committed, that its perpetrators were in the truest sense free-agents in the matter, and could have committed or not have committed it just as they pleased. This is how the reverend gentleman puts it:—

"Ah! but the facts are cruel, are evil, are godless. Yes that may be true. The facts of which my text speaks certainly were. They were as evil, as cruel, as

hateful to God as it was possible for any fact to be. 'By wicked hands his blessed Son was taken and crucified and slain.' Desperately wicked, the deed! A horrible outrage on the Divine righteousness. A savage insult to the Divine love. Wicked, wicked hands they were that did it. Yet the recognition of the wickedness does not in the least bar the declaration of the apostle that, in and through the wickedness and cruelty, he could follow the tracks of God's predetermined counsel and God's eternal control. God's overmastering will pressed all human action into its service. Still out of man's revolt and blindness God wrung some gain for his counsel. Still he bent evil under the yoke of his victorious purpose."

Here we see Determinism and Indeterminism joined together in the unholy bond of an unnatural and impossible marriage. The two can never live together in anything like harmony, because the one must contradict and give the lie to the other, being eternally irreconcilable. The reverend Canon, evidently, is not in the least perturbed by the fact that he is inescapably fastened between the horns of a dilemma. If God has predestinated and foreknown all the events of time, man cannot be free; or, if man is free, God himself cannot control his actions. Furthermore, if God is supreme, man is not free and cannot act wickedly or lawlessly. If my actions are under the control of a will other than my own I am in no sense or degree responsible. Therefore, if guilt or blameworthiness attaches to anything I may do, that guilt or blameworthiness is God's, not mine. This is so self-evident that even the greatest theologians, such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, and the profoundest philosophers, such as Hobbes, Lock, Leibnitz, and Jonathan Edwards have vehemently repudiated the belief in human freedom as fundamentally inconsistent with the belief in the Divine Sovereignty. But Canon Scott Holland is audacious enough to hold both beliefs at one and the same time. I find them both in the Bible, he seems to say, and what is good enough for the Bible is good enough for me. "Always it is content to state things under both contrasted terms. Always it accepts the reality of both perspectives. Always it uses freely either half of the antithesis." That is doubtless true, but it only makes it all the worse for the Bible, and is of no service whatever to the Canon.

In the light of such teaching from the pulpit, is it any wonder that the people's faith in a Supreme Being is dying out? Is it any wonder that Church attendance is steadily declining in all Christendom? Who can believe in a God who is said to have predetermined, from all eternity, all that has ever happened in this world, and of whom it is declared that he will cast into hell-fire all impenitent sinners, though they are the instruments through whom his eternal purposes are being fulfilled? How can people be accounted wicked if what is called their wickedness is subservient to the Divine plans? Determinism, pure and simple, we can understand; but Determinism in conjunction with human freedom and responsibility is absolutely unthinkable. Here is a man who is crushed beneath a terrific weight of adverse circumstances, or who is tossed about and unmercifully tortured by a cruel fate, what is the use of adding to his misery by saying to him: "Your facts cannot be so cruel or so wicked as those which slew your Lord?" That is like adding insult to injury. Of what benefit have the undeserved and unjust sufferings of Jesus ever been to the world? Of what comfort could it have been to Bruno to be told that he was not the greatest martyr in history? And how is it conceivable that God fulfilled any noble purpose by putting innocent men to death, or that he fulfils it now amid and by means of "the turmoil of a disordered earth"? To cry out, "The facts are so cruel, men are so wicked, everything is so wicked," and at the same time to talk glibly about a God of infinite justice and goodness, who is above, beneath, and through all, is to furnish irrefutable evidence of a mind hopelessly obscured, if not unhinged, by a superfluity of blind faith.

For an imaginary Deity of infinite justice, goodness, and power, substitute Nature and her iron laws, and the problems of history, though still unsolved, will be considerably simplified. The bare idea of any infinite person, clothed with infinite attributes, as the maker and ruler of the universe, is a contradiction of all the laws of thought. Atheism explains nothing, resolves no mystery, illumines no darkness, but it rids us of all artificial problems, and brings us face to face, not with ideal perfection in any shape or forms, but with the undeniable facts of an evolving universe, and particularly with ourselves as imperfectly developed beings struggling to understand themselves and their varied relations to the world in which they are destined to live and die.

J. T. LLOYD.

### George Eliot.

WHEN Voltaire sat down to write a book on Epic Poetry, he dedicated his first chapter to "Difference of Taste in Nations." A critic of our day might well find it necessary to expatiate on the difference of taste in generations. Changes of taste are always taking place, and occasionally we are embarrassed by their recurrence. One morning we wake up and find the gods of our youthful idolatry treated with contempt, and sometimes consigned to the dustbin. This week I saw, over the signature of a widely-known journalist, the remark that "George Eliot" was no longer read. I put down the periodical in which this airy opinion was printed, and thought of the Marie Corellis, the Hall Caines, and the Guy Boothbys who had so dispossessed the really great woman, who was once acclaimed as one of the literary glories of England.

It is nearly thirty years since the world was trying to realise the extent of the gap made by the death of "George Eliot." She had long been accepted as one of the foremost writers of her age, and, what is not always the case with Freethinkers, she was very popular.

The interval has affected her reputation. Her fame has shrunk. Her books are neither so much read nor so much quoted as they were. As regards some of her work, this is not surprising. *Theophrastus Such*, with its repellant title, is dead. *Daniel Deronda* and *Middlemarch* are dying. But that *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, *Silas Marner*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Romola* should be obsolete, is incredible. This priceless legacy in books must last while the world values superlative achievements in English prose.

"George Eliot" is unique. No woman has attained to so high a place among the writers of our country. She has often been spoken of as Shakespeare's sister. The simile is a happy one. They were both cradled in Warwickshire. They were both nursed by the same outward influences. The same forest of Arden was round them both. It is pleasant to think that the great trees of her childish memories, survivors of the great Forest, may have cast their shadows on that immortal poet to whom we owe the deathless gifts of the ever-charming Rosalind and the melancholy Jaques. There was something Shakespearean in "George Eliot's" genius. Who that has known them can forget pretty Hetty Sorrell, poor Mr. Tulliver, or the Dodson sisters? Mrs. Poyser is one of the most extraordinary creations in all literature. She took her place from the first moment by the side of Sir John Falstaff and Sancho Panza. It was but a few weeks after the appearance of *Adam Bede* that a speaker in the House of Commons quoted one of Mrs. Poyser's inimitable sayings, certain that his hearers would understand him. "George Eliot's" sketches of women were specially wonderful, but the characters of Tito and Arthur Donnithorne show that her pitiless penetration was not confined to her own sex.

"George Eliot" was at once novelist and poet. She was the singer of the intellectual life, sincere and dignified, full of a scholarly reverie. Her poetry

brings with it a far-off sound of bells heard down some lovely valley on a golden afternoon. The "still, sad music of Humanity," which had fired the austere imagination of Comte, was to her a spring of exhaustless inspiration. She was content to know that though her personality be blotted out by "the popped sleep, the end of all," her influence would go to swell the volume of human worth. In her own beautiful lines:—

"O may I join the choir invisible  
Of those immortal dead who live again  
In minds made better by their presence; live  
In pulses stirred to generosity  
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn  
For miserable aims that end in self,  
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars  
And with their mild persistence urge men's search  
To vaster issues."

In her dual character of Freethinker and author, "George Eliot" united the critic who analyses and the artist who creates. The pen which had interpreted Strauss and Feuerbach, two most relentless opponents of the Christian superstition, this very pen drew the portrait of Dinah, the Methodist girl, and composed the pathetic prayer in the condemned cell. All writers, but the greatest, take interest in their own class, their own religious or philosophical ideas, alone. Then their characters are merely marionettes. But the really great writer shows that even the humblest, "if you prick them, will bleed," and discovers the touch of Nature in most unpromising characters—in frivolous Hetty Sorrell, in sensuous Arthur Donnithorne, as well as in pious Dinah and Mr. Irwine. Or, as the Master saw it, in pleasure-loving Falstaff, in crafty Iago, in ambitious Lady Macbeth, or in mad Lear.

"George Eliot" was one of the freest thinkers on all subjects. Her union with George Henry Lewes is a proof of its extent. This union was undoubtedly the most important event in her life. It was a true marriage, undertaken with all deliberation, and was a source of strength and happiness to both. The dedications of the manuscript of each succeeding novel declare in varying language how her beloved friend was the source of all her insight and her strength. She was, in his eyes, at once a genius and a lovable woman. Without his literary guidance and sympathy, it is doubtful whether she would have produced the writings which have placed her on the topmost pinnacle of fame. A fable has been invented that this marriage was the tragedy of "George Eliot's" existence. It is as absurd as it is false. The clerical slanderer who talks of the "immorality" of "George Eliot" invites the scathing denunciation of Laertes over the dead body of the drowned Ophelia:—

"Lay her in the earth,  
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh  
May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest,  
A minist'ring angel shall our sister be  
When thou liest howling."

Despite the cackle of irresponsible journalists, it is impossible to neglect the personality and work of "George Eliot." The greatest woman among her contemporaries, maybe the greatest of all Englishwomen, she did magnificent work in her day and generation. She counts among the pioneers of the age. She was one of the first women to attempt to free the life of the nation from clericalism. Loftiness of purpose and splendor of genius have won for her a high place in the Valhalla of her country, and no more worthy name is inscribed upon the long bead-roll of noble Englishwomen.

M.

#### MEN AND WOMEN.

A woman's head is usually over ears in her heart. Man seems to have been designed for the superior being of the two; but as things are, I think women are generally better creatures than men. They have, taken universally, weaker appetites and weaker intellects, but they have much stronger affections. A man with a bad heart has been sometimes saved by a strong head; but a corrupt woman is lost for ever.—Coleridge.

#### Acid Drops.

Rev. John Hugh Smyth-Pigott, the Grand Old Turk of the "Abode of Love" at Spaxton, is the father of another baby produced, not by his wife, but by one of the other ladies of his holy harem—Ruth Annie Preece, a lady of independent means. A good many Christian journalists speak of this Grand Old Turk with great bitterness. We believe they envy him. Not sharing that feeling, we are also not bitter. We know from history that religion and lust have always gone very well together.

The Spaxton Messiah ought to have arranged the birth of this new baby at a different season. This is the time of the year (the silly season) when the newspapers give him their attention. And he has helped them to columns of copy.

General Booth landed in South Africa in August. A week or so afterwards a strong article headed "Salvation Army Indicted" appeared in the *South African Review*, which apologised for having countenanced the Grand Old Showman's reception by the civic authorities of Cape Town. During the interval it had read Mr. Manson's book, which it proceeded to give its readers an account of. It wound up its long article by recommending "the Mayor of Capetown and the worthy gentlemen who assembled on the City Hall platform to welcome General Booth, to procure this book and read it for themselves. We make bold to say," it continued, "that if the Mayor of Johannesburg, who is welcoming the General to-day were acquainted with its pages, he would cancel the reception immediately, as would also the Mayor of Pretoria, Dr. Savage, and the leading citizens of Bloemfontein, Kronstad, and Ladysmith, which places are in the tour." This is plain-speaking—and it will spread. General Booth's policy of bragging on one side, and "dignified silence" on the other side, is getting played out. Nemesis is overtaking him at last.

Marie Corelli is on the screech again. This time it is in the *Manchester City News* and on the subject of "Impurity"—which seems to have an irresistible fascination for a certain type of Christian. After praising the Watch Committee of Cottonopolis for keeping Maud Allen out of its holy precincts, the agitated lady preacher exclaims—"If we are truly Christians we ought not to tolerate any insult to the Gospel on which our faith is founded." She offers no explanation, however, of how Maud Allen has insulted the Gospel by picturing, instead of talking about, Salome's dance for the head of John the Baptist. The taste of the performance may be open to discussion, but to call it an insult to the Gospel is—well, mere Corelli-ism.

The great Marie Corelli has her withering eye on "blasphemers." She does not appear to regret the falsehoods she told about Mr. Foote's lecture in the Birmingham Town Hall. She is out again for a similar rampage. Yet a lot of people—mostly half-educated females—regard her as one of the greatest teachers of the age. "Sweet Marie!"

It has always been a principle of Rome that the end justifies the means. All is right that helps dear old Mother Church. The Catholic schools at Newcastle-on-Tyne were used to give political orders to the children's parents. Handbills were put into the children's hands to take home to their parents telling them to vote for Mr. Ronwick. Of course this move was engineered by the priests. A civilised country would never tolerate such a use of its schools.

It is officially stated that "there never has been any question of his Majesty receiving the Papal Legate to the Eucharist Congress in London." Calling Cardinal Vannutelli the Papal Legate—which we said he was not, and never would be—is one of those little tricks in which Rome is so accomplished. A Papal Legate is a representative of the Pope, as temporal sovereign, at the seat of a foreign country's government. The last Papal Legate left England, never to return, hundreds of years ago.

Rev. Dr. Warschauer lectured in a Harrogate gospel-shop on Agnosticism, with the Rev. Frank Ballard in the chair. According to the *Christian Commonwealth* report, "a considerable number of avowed Agnostics" were present. We have heard this sort of thing before. The very word "avowed" gives the game away. How many "avowed Agnostics" are there in Harrogate? But that is not all. After the lecture a vote of thanks to Dr. Warschauer was "supported by a gentleman who admitted himself to be an

Agnostic, and yet desired, on behalf of those holding similar opinions, to thank him for his treatment of the subject." We know that Agnostic too. He has figured at so many of these Christian meetings! Altogether, we are reminded that it was Dr. Warschauer who was chiefly responsible for the story of Mr. Blatchford's recantation.

The Rev. Rhondda Williams is a star in the firmament of the New Theology that shines with a brilliance second only to that which distinguishes the City Temple luminary. Mr. Williams has been telling the country that they "have left the Old Orthodoxy, in which creeds and dogmas are imposed upon us by authority." "To that," he exclaimed, "we can never go back." True, probably; but have they not invented a new orthodoxy in which creeds and dogmas are imposed by an authority incalculably less dignified and commanding than the rejected one? The old orthodoxy is clearly untrue, but it is logical; the new orthodoxy is at once false and illogical, at once dogmatic and irrational. Logically, every New Theologian is an Atheist, a Determinist, and a Monist, while religiously or emotionally he professes to be a Christian Theist, a Free-Willer, and a Dualist. What a position for men of education and some intelligence to occupy in the twentieth century!

Mr. Williams said further: "The soul knows that God's New Jerusalem is coming down out of heaven, in which there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain." Then the soul is an ass if it does not know that its pretended knowledge is an unmitigated sham. John of the Revelation made the same announcement about the New Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago; and we of to-day know (and our knowledge is not a sham) that such a miraculous city, however long ago it may have started, has never arrived. Death, sorrow, crying, and pain are just as common to-day as they were then. Mr. Williams's "soul" had better try again.

Mr. R. J. Campbell does not believe that a man can be called moral unless there is an equal chance of being immoral. But if the chances are really equal we are at a loss to see how he would become either one or the other. That he is eventually either moral or immoral proves that the chances were not really equal. Then Mr. Campbell goes on to say that God, who is perfect morality, "does not have to struggle to do right"; there is no choice, and no chance of doing wrong so far as he is concerned. Moreover, the final stage of human perfection is when man will do right as God does right—without struggle, and without choice. Which tangle, being straightened out, means that we shall go on improving our morality until we reach a stage where morality is meaningless; and that God, who is morality perfected, lacks the one condition that gives morality existence. And this proves how easy it is, in the pulpit, to gain the reputation of a profound thinker.

There is a little rift within the New Theology lute. Rev. Hugh C. Wallace, Dr. Warschauer's colleague at Anerley, writes to the *Christian World* (not the *Commonwealth*) that he is no longer identified with the "New Theology." He says it is now represented by "a mixed multitude, including Pantheists, Occultists, and Unitarians," and therefore "the situation is materially altered." Mr. Wallace declines to be considered a New Theology man any longer.

How extremely good and kind and impartial is Almighty God! Where harvest-time had fully come, our all-good and all-loving Heavenly Father took it into his Divine head to inflict ruinous weather upon the whole of Great Britain. Continuous rain and cold made harvesting operations impossible; and from different parts of the country comes the sad report of many farmers that their crops have been spoilt. And yet the Churches are getting ready for their annual Harvest Thanksgiving Services!

Two cases of "Providence" were reported in the *Daily Mail* of September 22. Here they are:—

#### "DEATH STROKE IN THE PULPIT.

Dr. Carmichael, Anglican Bishop of Montreal, was stricken with heart weakness while preaching in the cathedral yesterday, and died this morning."

"After pronouncing the Benediction at Lingwood Church, Norfolk, on Sunday, the Rev. F. Taylor, the rector, was prostrated by a paralytic seizure and was removed to his home, where he lies in a critical condition."

Had either of these sudden deaths occurred on a Free-thought platform the *Daily Mail* would have piously improved the occasion and treated it as a divine warning to "infidels."

The Rev. Frank Richards, Wesleyan Methodist, says that eighty per cent. of the children in Methodist Sunday-schools drift away from the Connexion. Our sympathy rests with the less fortunate twenty per cent.

Nonconformists have been conducting a religious census in Liverpool. The result will give very little consolation to Free Churchmen, although it bears further testimony to the slump in religious belief. The figures show that while the population has increased the attendances at Nonconformist places of worship have diminished. They have not, says the report, so strong a membership or are they so well attended as they were even six years ago. Over a still longer period the returns are yet more striking. In 1881, over forty per cent. of the sittings provided; in 1908, this proportion had fallen to twelve and a half per cent. Thus, in spite of the efforts of special missions, blowing of trumpets and beating of drums, Nonconformist churches, like the other Churches, are steadily losing their hold on the population. At all their gatherings, Nonconformist preachers speak of the increasing power and influence of their organisations. When we come to cold facts their power appears to rest largely upon the strength of their lungs, and their influence to be due to the effect of impudent reiteration.

Taking the district of Everton as a specimen, the morning congregations, which amounted to 4,654 in 1881, are only 1,446 in 1908. The evening congregations from 6,662 to 3,252. Mr. T. E. Ruth, commenting on these figures in the *British Weekly*, says, "If we go on declining thus, in another generation we shall have ceased to exist." The significant thing is that Everton is a purely working class district, and, therefore, these figures cast some light on the assurances of Free Church leaders that, not only are the Nonconformists the true friends of the working classes, but the working classes in turn look to them for guidance. Mr. Ruth says the truth is that the Free Churches "for the most part—to our shame be it said—turn their backs upon the slums and set their faces toward the suburbs." As, however, it is pointed out that "there is no compensating strength on the outskirts," the loss in one direction is evidently not made up by gain in another. The bottom truth is that all the Churches are suffering from a species of dry rot, although leading preachers would have us believe the contrary.

The clever little Welsh lawyer who is now Chancellor of the Exchequer opened a Methodist bazaar at Carnarvon the other day, and made a very religious speech, though we are not quite sure how much of it he really meant. His peroration ran as follows:—

"The joys and perils of life are always the same, and when the wise men, who from the altitude of their self-sufficiency shunned the churches, could think of some more effective agency for strengthening their hearts to bear the inevitable sorrows of life, or some idea, or system, or scheme of things that would light up the Valley of the Shadow and swallow Death in victory, as the religion of Christ had done in the experience of untold myriads who put their trust in Him, then we, the simple people of the hills, may give up the building of chapels and churches. But until that new ideal is revealed, we will go on finding a new pride and a new pleasure in making sacrifices for the old cause that served our fathers."

Mr. Lloyd George ought to know that this is more rhetoric. Christians are far more troubled than Freethinkers about "the Valley of the Shadow." The fear of Death is a peculiarly religious weakness. It is practically unknown to Atheists. First, then, Christianity makes death terrible; and, afterwards, it boasts of being the only thing that can help us in the trouble of its own creation.

Mr. Lloyd George, while on the continent, has been observing things. One of the things he noticed was that "men had abandoned the churches. One went to the churches practically to find they were thronged with women and hardly any men there at all." Other observers have pointed out the same thing, and the reason why this should be so is not far to seek. The emotionalism of women is, on the whole, much more powerful than that of men; and they are, in addition, far more susceptible to social censure and public opinion. This, however, we believe will be remedied as women begin to take a larger and healthier part in the intellectual life of the nation to which they belong, and then, if Mr. Lloyd George lives long enough, he will only find the churches occupied by those whose mental infirmities preclude them being interested in anything else.

The Lord gave Immanuel Baptist Church, Southsea, £300 in answer to prayer. But what a roundabout way he took to convey the gift. A special committee was appointed to

consider ways and means, special sermons were preached, special thanksgiving-boxes were issued to wage-earners and others, deacons and senior members promised special help, every member of the Church was privately circularised, and in various other ways special appeals for contributions were made. Truly, the Lord is a most eccentric giver. Blessed be his name!

Rev. Harold Brierley, of the Highbury Quadrant Congregational Church, has just furnished a fine illustration of the rank nonsense talked by the average evangelical parson. He told his congregation the other Sunday evening that he "stands by the supernatural power of Christ to renew or transform the palsied will, and to help with a mighty help from heaven the soul that tries to help itself." According to the New Testament, salvation is conditioned on faith, and faith is an act of the will, of which act a "palsied" will is incapable. A soul with a palsied will cannot even try to help itself, and, according to Mr. Brierley, Christ can do nothing for it. The fact is that, if Christ actually possessed "supernatural power," there would be no "palsied wills," and Mr. Brierley's occupation would be gone.

The occupants of Coward's Castle have apparently no sense of responsibility for their utterances. Safe from formal contradiction or cross examination, they pour forth the sheerest nonsense and call it the wisdom of God in Christ, not caring a fig what outsiders may think or say of it. The counsels of eternity, they tell us, are immutable, and the purposes of the Lord are never defeated. That is theology. "Still the savage facts of life," admits Canon Scott Holland, "mercilessly contradict the righteousness and goodness of God." That is history. Dr. Scott Holland dares not reject the testimony of history, and yet he has the audacity to teach the dogmas of theology. We too accept the testimony of history, but we repudiate the dogmas of theology. We have nothing but "the savage facts of life" by which to judge; and, thus formed, our judgment, of necessity, is that if there be a God, he is deplorably impotent if all-good, and horribly wicked if all-powerful.

Newspapers report that a syndicate has been established in the United States for supplying gospel-shop pastors with sermons at bargain rates. For £2 a year lazy or incompetent preachers will be able to obtain a constant supply of "strictly up-to-date" sermons "containing allusion to current affairs and matters of national interest." Nothing appears to be said about the good old "fountain filled with blood." But, after all, this is not a novel enterprise. The land of the Stars and Stripes is only copying the land of the Union Jack. "Supplied" sermons have long been common in England. They are cheap, and often better written than the purchaser could do himself. And they do just as well as original matter for preachers of the Dying Faith.

Christianity is the religion of love. At least, we are told so. But what a curious kind of love Christian love is! "Humble Hermogenes, Bishop of Saratoff and Tsaritsyn," addressed Tolstoy in the following manner on the occasion of his eightieth birthday:—

"Oh, thou, cursed and contemptible Russian Judas, who hast strangled in thy spirit all that is sacred, morally pure, and morally noble; who hast hanged thyself, like a fiendish suicide, on the dry branch of thy own haughty mind and corrupted talent; who art now morally putrid to the marrow of thy bones, and art filling the atmosphere of our educated society with thy revolting moral and religious malodor—be anathematised, thou cowardly, crazy seducer, who hast poisoned with the poison of thy passionate and debauched talent and led to eternal perdition many souls of thy hapless and imbecile countrymen."

This is excellent—of its kind.

§ The Rev. J. Stitt Wilson, M.A., one of the heroes of the New Theology, is a bit of a wag, in his way, and, for a Christian, inexcusably blasphemous. The Gospels tell us that Jesus once entered Jerusalem riding upon a jackass. Mr. Wilson, anxious to improve on that, assures us that now "the Messiah Cometh upon the Ass of Economics." Bravo!

The Rev. F. W. Aveling, M.A., B.Sc., says that "Jesus balanced the harmony of the world by his perfectly holy life." We did not know that harmony needed any balancing. At other times we are told that Jesus came to manufacture harmony out of the discords of sin. The truth is that Jesus did neither the one thing nor the other.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." But Science teaches us that our food is pro-

duced by a law that is never changed; therefore why should we pray for it? Very ingeniously does a Wesleyan preacher extricate himself from the dilemma. Natural law, he says, implies mind, mind will, and will a person. Now, then, listen: "Natural law is but the Divine method of action. You say, 'Yes, but natural law changeth not; therefore why pray?'" That is not very promising; but if you will wait a moment the whole thing will be perfectly clear to you. Natural law is the Divine method of action, in saying which "we make the Divine will the basis of the world's order and life." Now, the Divine will is free, and this freedom means that natural law, or the Divine method of action, may change. The prayer for bread, then, comes to this: "Lord, thy will towards us, in the present order of Nature, is good—it means our bread; therefore, continue it." Jesus will be grateful for this new light on his meaning, and we offer our heartiest congratulations to this highly original parson. We understand Divine Providence now.

"Some of the old views of the Atonement were very immoral," says the Rev. F. W. Aveling. Quite so; and we would remind the reverend gentleman that Freethinkers were pointing out their immorality while these old views were the current views. Now that Freethought criticism has made it impossible for preachers to declare these old views, they denounce them with the air of pioneers leading the world towards a moral New Jerusalem. Meanwhile the Freethinker is away in front hammering away at other current views that will one day be denounced from the pulpit as old and immoral. The story of human progress is ever repeating itself.

Mr. Aveling rightly says that punishment for the sake of punishment is barbarous and brutal, thus again re-echoing an old Freethought criticism of Christian teaching. Once upon a time, Christian theology was full of the teaching that "divine justice" demanded the punishment of the wrongdoer to assuage its outraged dignity. This was the conception that found full expression in the penal codes of Christian countries, thus furnishing a good illustration of the manner in which Christian teaching helped to brutalise human nature. We are pleased to see the recognition that Christian teaching has been "barbarous and brutal." All we have to add is that, as many generations were brought up under the influence of these "barbarous and brutal" teachings, we are at a loss to see what reason there is for looking upon Christianity as having, in any degree, furthered the development of civilisation.

A Nonconformist minister advertises through the *Christian Commonwealth* for a "half-empty church." We should not have thought this at all a difficult thing to find. Perhaps, however, the advertisement is intended as a New Theology joke.

"Everywhere and always," excitedly cried a preacher, "the Cross of Christ is the symbol of victory." He knew, of course, that it was a lie, but as he was in the pulpit, addressing a crowd of credulous and uncritical people, that did not matter. It is not truth, but loyalty to the cause, that counts. It is true that Pagan Japan was victorious in the recent war with Christian Russia. But that is an inconvenient, awkward truth, which it is wise to ignore and forget. History abounds in similar truths; but they never by any chance find their way into the pulpit. There, it is not facts, but dogmas touched by maudlin sentimentalism, that are dealt in and relished.

Professor Harnack is quoted by the *Church Times* as opposing the theory of secular education on the ground that "virtuous Agnostics are parasites, living on the faith of others." The learned Professor is mistaken. "Virtuous Agnostics" live, not on faith at all, but on principles inherent in themselves as social beings. It is the Christians who are parasites, because they live, or starve, on the imaginary support of wholly imaginary beings, supposed to reside outside our sphere, certainly not within it.

"Do We Believe in the Devil?" is being discussed in the *Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury*. Some of the letters are pretty warm. There seems to be a lot of scepticism knocking about in the Leeds district.

The *Christian Commonwealth* is rapidly becoming hysterical, and what little reason it ever had is fast disappearing. Amongst other inanities in its last week's issue there was one in reference to the anonymous letter-writers who upset General Luard. "Some ready and effective punishment" for these offenders is "urgently required." That is not so difficult—if they could only be

found. Our pious contemporary overlooks the main difficulty. This is what generally comes of hysteria.

The *C. C.* prints a two-column account of a Suffragette's residence at Holloway. She states that when she was arrested it took "five policemen and an inspector" to remove her. But that was because she was a woman, and they didn't want to hurt her. It wouldn't have taken so many constables to "remove" a man.

Oh what a fall was there! The old Lyceum was the home of Henry Irving and the scene of his greatest triumphs. The new Lyceum is occupied on Sundays by the Rev. J. E. Rattenbury, of the West London Mission. Mr. Rattenbury is a very much inferior actor to Henry Irving.

Mr. Rowland Whitehead, M.P., is a typical Nonconformist "statesman." He will talk by the hour about "religious freedom," but all he means by it is the right of Nonconformists to share in all public privileges with Churchmen. When anything is said about other people's rights he pretends not to understand the question. He was one of those who voted in the House of Commons *against* the Clause in Mr. Birrell's Education Bill, which allowed children, whose parents objected to religious education, not to attend school until the religious education was over. Every man who voted against that Clause is as much an enemy of "religious freedom" as the Pope of Rome himself. Certainly he doesn't go as far on a bad road, but that is merely a question of opportunity.

Mr. Whitehead went down to Rayleigh lately and unveiled a memorial to two Protestant martyrs, Thomas Causton and John Ardeley, who were burnt alive in 1555. The Nonconformist orator—but he isn't really an orator—talked as though Protestants were the only people who ever suffered martyrdom, and as though they were the most harmless innocents that ever existed. But the truth is that Protestants burnt Catholics (and other unbelievers) and boasted of it; and we shall be happy, if challenged, to give chapter and verse for the statement. Moreover, we beg to remind Mr. Whitehead that the penal laws upheld by Protestant England against Catholics, particularly in Ireland, are positively without a parallel in the history of the world.

We smiled as we read the report of Mr. Whitehead's peroration. Of course it was all about "religious freedom." That is the endless theme of these pious hypocrites. He spoke of "the abiding need of toleration and the duty of regard for the beliefs even of those whom they were convinced were wrong." Now we, at any rate, beg to assure this gentleman that we are perfectly indifferent to his respect, or want of respect, for our "beliefs." What we demand is respect for our *rights*. We are as much convinced that Mr. Whitehead's beliefs are wrong as he is convinced that ours are wrong, and we claim exactly the same right to differ from him as he claims to differ from us. We have never heard, however, that he has uttered a word in reprobation of the penal laws against Freethinkers; and we do know that he voted against the only wise and just portion of Mr. Birrell's Education Bill.

According to an article in the September number of the *Lady's Realm*, Father Bernard Vaughan—the celibate priest who has "sex" on the brain—is "very much loved and very much hated by the women of England." This is a statement which we venture to doubt. We don't believe "the women of England" care a straw about Father Vaughan, one way or the other. Some silly women may love him, some silly women may hate him. Those who do care about him, this article says, carry on like anything over the dear man. "They have his photograph," we are told, "on their dressing-tables, they read the bound volumes of his *Sins of Society* in bed, they send picture-postcards of him to their friends from Biarritz or Monte Carlo and other haunts of brilliant iniquity; and if they were asked to vote for their greatest living hero Father Bernard Vaughan would take an easy first, with Seymour Hicks and Lewis Waller as second and third." The only thing below this is a lady's lapdog.

Dublin Corporation is frankly Catholic. It hold a special meeting to discuss Mr. Asquith's "insult to the Catholics of the United Kingdom." Just like these people! Where Catholics are in a majority they think themselves everybody.

The *Church Times* informs a correspondent that the Bible stories of Creation are "poetical or mythical." Men

have been persecuted, imprisoned, and even done to death—by Christians—for saying as much in former years. Perhaps it is better late than never, but our pious contemporary arrives as the clock is striking twelve.

"Providence" is going strong. Crowds of people are dying of cholera in Russia, and other Christian nations are trying all they know to keep the divine pestilence out of their borders.

The number of people killed by "snakes" in India during 1907 was 21,418. How beautifully, as the late Mr. Gladstone said, has "Providence" fitted up the earth for man's habitation!

The *Abolitionist* for September was up to its old tricks. It carefully emphasised the Christianity of the Christians who had opposed Vivisection, and as carefully concealed the Freethought of the Freethinkers who had fought against it. Surely the names of Shakespeare, Wagner, and Hugo are more important, after all, than those of Lord Shaftesbury and Frances Power Cobbe.

A beautiful girl, of Schwarzenau, near Bromberg, bought a can of petroleum, went out to a roadside crucifix, knelt in front of it, poured the oil over herself, set fire to her clothing, and was burnt to death with outstretched arms before "their carrion crucified"—as Swinburne calls it.

Religious people can hardly touch anything without spoiling it. In the "Children's Hymn" by Evelyn Martinego Cesaresco, of the Lombard Association for the Protection of Animals, reference is made to "The ass Our Savior stooped to ride." But how did he stoop to ride the ass? He might have stooped if the ass had ridden him.

How those Atheists (as Talmage and Torrey teach) will rush into suicides' graves! Here is another case in point. Rev. Clement Todd Davies, vicar of Northop, near Mold, shot himself dead in his garden. He suffered from insomnia.

Rev. Canon Fleming, vicar of St. Michael's, Chester-square, London, left £7,215. Not a great fortune, but riches beyond the dreams of avarice to the first Salvation Army, whose Cashier sold its General for £3 15s.—money down.

#### UNESSENTIAL.

The thing that troubles me most, begad,  
Says I to myself, says I;  
The thing that I think about most, my lad,  
Is why—why—why?  
Why are we born to die?  
And why do we fight and lie  
For a little space in a useless place  
That we cannot keep and we may disgrace?—  
Says I to myself, says I.

I needn't trouble you then, my lad,  
So answered myself to me;  
The "why" don't cut any ice, begad—  
The "how" is the thing, you see;  
For the "why" in the case, maybe,  
Will be plain when your soul's set free;  
But if you wait for your final fate  
To learn the "how" it will be too late—  
So answered myself to me.

And it's good advice that you givo, begad,  
Says I to myself, says I;  
For a fellow has got to live, my lad,  
As sure as he's got to die.  
So it's up to you to try  
Your best, as the days slip by;  
To do your task till the years unmask  
The secret at last—and then you can ask,  
And perhaps they'll tell you why.

#### SPIRITED JOKE.

In making a sharp turn, the rear end of a street car struck an express wagon laden with jugs of whiskey. Nearly all the jugs were precipitated to the pavement, with the natural disastrous result. The driver of the wagon alighted, and, pointing to the pile of demolished earthenware, said to a bystander, "That's hell, ain't it?"

The spectator, who happened to be a minister, replied, "Well, my friend, I don't know that I would say that, but it's at least the abode of departed spirits."



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, October 4, Secular Hall, Brunswick-street, Glasgow: at 12 (noon), "Socialism and the Church"; at 6.30, "The Present Position of God."

October 11, Leicester; 18, Manchester; 25, Stanley Hall, London.  
November 15, Birmingham.

### To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—241 High-road, Leyton.—October 4 and 11, Stanley Hall, North London; 18, Glasgow. November 15, Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society; 22, Fails-worth; 29, Birmingham.
- THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Previously acknowledged. Annual Subscriptions, £248 1s. 6d. Received since.—E. H. Charlton, £1 1s.; John Sumner, 10s. 6d.; W. R. Angell, 2s. 6d.; W. P. Murray (2nd sub.), 2s. 6d.; James Preston, 10s.; Nottingham (2 months'), 10s.; Aero, 10s.; C. Heaton (2nd sub.), 2s. 6d.; D. McLean, 5s.
- J. McVIE (Edinburgh).—We have your Glasgow friend's address, but we did not keep your's, as we thought your friend would know it and write you direct. A sixpenny telegram to our office, with just your full address on it, will bring you the address by return.
- R. J. HENDERSON.—Sorry to miss you when you were in London, but we live some forty miles out of London now, for reasons of health, and are only in town when business necessitates. Even when we lived in London we always did most of our writing at home, with our books about us. We don't like City of London air.
- JOSEPH BRYCE.—We note the facts, though obviously we cannot use them. The dear good Christians would be astonished if they knew what a keen eye to business these men of God possess. We remember that the late Rev. C. Berry, of Wolverhampton, a famous Nonconformist preacher, called us a "professional infidel." We replied that he was a professional Christian; also that we would undertake to prove, if he would honestly state his full income, that he got more per annum for preaching the gospel of the poor carpenter of Nazareth than all the Freethought lecturers in Great Britain put together got for preaching the gospel of "infidelity." The reverend gentleman did not rise to the occasion.
- J. SUMNER hopes the President's Honorarium Fund "will total up to considerably more than the suggested figure."
- A. WHELEY.—There is a Branch of the National Secular Society, in Birmingham. The secretary's address is—J. Partridge, 183 Vauxhall-road. Mr. Foote and Mr. Cohen both lecture in the Birmingham Town Hall in November. We note that you have just read the *Freethinker* for the first time and are "very highly pleased with it." Our difficulty is in finding those who would be pleased with this journal if they only knew of it. This is a matter in which our friends could help us by pushing the paper through the circles of their personal acquaintance.
- H. SLINGER.—A very good letter—right to the point. We wish the "saints" would make more use of their local newspapers. People read a freethinking letter who would never read a freethinking paper.
- W. P. MURRAY.—Thanks for appreciation and good wishes. The *Freethinker* is not likely to die yet. It would pay in twelve months if all its friends would help to advertise it, by talking about it, and introducing it to people they know or people they meet in the business and pleasures of life. If half our present readers could get us a fresh reader each we should be free from anxiety.
- W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.
- B. H. BAYFIELD.—Mr. Lloyd George is not a thinker, neither can he save Christianity from extinction. His reference to "sensationalists" is a common display of Christian "charity." But he is not dangerous.
- J. BROUGH.—A Socialist or ethical lecture on Sunday, with a charge for admission, would probably come under the head of "entertainment" in the old Act of George III. But it is not our duty or inclination to play the part of policeman; though the case might be altered if Freethought meetings were interfered with again. Thanks for cuttings.
- H. SCHOFIELD.—We saw in the newspapers at the time that the late Dr. Barnardo left estate valued at some £10,000.
- ANGUS LESLIE.—Scarcely suitable.
- H. G. FARMER.—See paragraph. Thanks.
- CYMO.—Books on that subject are all very expensive. We know of nothing at a popular price.
- JAMES NEATE.—Sorry your lecturer was not available on Sunday in Victoria Park, but glad that Mr. Heaford, who happened to be present, was pressed into service and saved a large audience from disappointment.
- D. McLEAN says: "I hope Freethinkers will try and make up that £80 at once, and so give you the means of undertaking your fresh responsibilities."
- H. COOPER.—Your correspondence with the Rev. J. Weller shows that discretion is far the better part of his valor. He is as

cautious as a tortoise when he is in danger of being found out. He retreats into his shell, and "Mum's" the word.

NORMAN MURRAY.—Neither the priests nor the mob can be cheated by plausible terminology into smiling on Freethinkers. The "Atheist" by any other name would "smell as sweet"—or otherwise.

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.

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*.

THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

### Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote lectures in the Secular Hall, Brunswick-street, Glasgow, to-day (Oct. 4), and his subjects are likely to attract large audiences. Those who want to secure seats, at night especially, should take care to be in good time.

Mr. Foote's audience at Queen's Hall on Sunday evening included a gratifying number of ladies and a large proportion of strangers. The lecture on "The Atheism of Shelley" was followed with very close attention and often rapturously applauded. Several questions were asked and answered. The chairman, Mr. Maclaren, said the last time he took the chair at a Freethought meeting was twelve years ago, at Sydney, and the lecturer was Joseph Symes.

We spent some hours on Monday with Mr. Cohen—both of us acting on behalf of the N. S. S. Executive—at the International Moral Education Congress. There was no opportunity of our speaking, as the Chairman had too many names already in hand. We were glad to see, however, that Mrs. Bridges Adams, as a Trade Union representative, was able to remind the Congress that the organised working classes of England were overwhelmingly in favor of Secular Education. Quite a crowd of clergymen, both Anglican and Catholic, were on the platform talking about the virtues and necessity of religious education. We could not discover what this had to do with moral education, but a good many "Ethicists" seemed to be able to discern what escaped our vision. The strongest pronouncements in favor of Secular Education came from the foreign representatives, particularly from the French delegates, and most particularly from M. Buisson, who was warmly applauded. On the whole, we found it difficult to understand how the discussions we listened to could do very much good. There was so much wobbling, and so many people, who had obviously no real religious belief, kept using the word "religious," and thus played into the hands of the clericals, who must have enjoyed themselves.

Another course of Sunday evening lectures, under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd., has been arranged for Stanley Hall, near the "Boston," North London, during October. The place is easy of access in various ways, and we hope there will be good meetings. Mr. Cohen opens the course to-night (Oct. 4), and will lecture again on October 11. Mr. Lloyd delivers the third lecture, and Mr. Foote winds up the course.

Courses of Sunday evening lectures this side of Christmas are also being arranged at Woolwich and Stratford. Particulars of these will appear in our next issue.

The N. S. S. Executive organised some successful meetings at the Woolwich Town Hall—with the co-operation, of course, of the local Branch—during the past two winters. Evidently they were *too* successful, for the bigots have put pressure upon the Council and a fresh application for the Hall has been refused point blank. On Sunday evening the Branch held a protest meeting in Beresford-square and passed a resolution against the Council's action. We understand that a deputation will wait upon the Council to state reasons why Freethought and Christian ratepayers should be treated as possessing equal rights.

We are pleased to hear that Mr. A. Allison, the Chairman of the Woolwich Branch, acquitted himself so competently

in a debate last Sunday with Mr. A. Moise, of the C. E. S., on the Existence of God.

Mr. Lloyd had highly appreciative audiences at Manchester on Sunday, and a very interesting discussion followed the evening lecture.

The Liverpool Branch begins work at its new quarters to-day (Oct. 4). The hall is at Central Buildings, 113 Islington. Mr. Sydney Woollen lectures at 3 on "The Formation and Biography of God" and Abdullah Quilliam Bey lectures at 7 on "The Recent Reforms in Turkey."

London Freethinkers will note that another social gathering is to take place at Anderton's Hotel on Thursday evening, October 22. There should be a big attendance on this occasion. Mr. Foote will be present, of course, with Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, and other well-known Freethinkers. The detailed arrangements are in the hands of Miss Vance. We may add that this gathering is under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive; that there is no charge whatever for admission; that N. S. S. members may introduce a friend; that any non-members who cannot be so introduced, but are wishful to attend, should apply to the Secretary for a ticket; and that any N. S. S. provincial members who may be in London on October 22 are strongly invited to attend and will be made very welcome.

We are naturally interested in the case of Mr. Joseph Bates. His summons for "obstruction" came up at the Boston Police-court on September 25, and he was fined (with costs) nearly £4, which he refused to pay, and the alternative was a fortnight's imprisonment. A Socialist speaker named Catlin went to prison for the same offence at the same time. Unfortunately, no one took the trouble to send us a local newspaper, neither did Mr. Bates reply to the letter we sent him asking for fuller particulars. Wise action, of course, is impossible without a knowledge of all the facts; and therefore the N. S. S. secretary, Miss Vance, has gone down to Boston to ascertain the exact situation. She has authority to summon Mr. Wishart over by telegram if the case is clearly one of sheer persecution. We assure the Freethought party that the National Secular Society will do all that is necessary or advisable in this matter.

There was an ugly blunder in last week's *Freethinker*. The fine motto on the front page, from a distinguished American writer and Freethinker, was credited to "Ethel Hubbard," which is a woman's name. The writer is a man, and his name is Elbert Hubbard.

Last week's *Freethinker* ran out of print. Any reader who failed to obtain his weekly copy can renew his order through his agent, as there are always "returns" sufficient for such purposes.

We could have wished a readier response to the financial appeal we made a few weeks ago. We explained that we had been obliged to incur fresh responsibilities, having taken into our own hands the *Freethinker* and its adjuncts, together with all the outstanding liabilities of the old Company. These liabilities are being met, and must all be met in a very early future. Moreover, until a complete reorganisation can be effected (at least) the whole business has to be carried on at a weekly loss; we mean an absolute out-of-pocket loss, and not merely a lack of payment for our own services. It would be a real help to us, in the circumstances, if the £80 balance of our Honorarium Fund had been made up promptly; but quite £50 of that balance is still unsubscribed. We are bearing this burden in the interest of the *Freethinker*, which is dearer to us than life itself. Nor do we complain of having to bear it. We only suggest that it would be fairer if the burden were spread over a wider area. By-and-bye, when the *Freethinker* improves enough in circulation, the burden may disappear altogether.

He who aims high must dread an easy home and popular manners. If there is any great and good thing in store for you, it will not come at the first or second call, nor in the shape of fashion, ease, and city drawing-rooms.—*Emerson*.

Practical life is a rule-of-three sum, in which your duty multiplied into your capacity, and divided by your circumstances, gives you the fourth term in the proportion, which is your deserts, with great accuracy.—*Huxley*.

## Robert G. Ingersoll.

A REVIEW OF THE LIFE OF THE ELOQUENT AGNOSTIC.

By WILLIAM JACKSON ARMSTRONG.

(From the Los Angeles "Times Magazine.")

I SHALL speak chiefly of Robert G. Ingersoll, not in the character in which he is best popularly known, as the champion of unbelief and the *bete noir* of religion, but of his genial personality and his intellectual splendor.

An aristocrat mentally, which is to say that he was too superior intellectually to recognise conventional pretensions, he was a democrat socially, as in opinions, and the most easily accessible of men. He was fond of quoting La Rochefoucauld's saying that "Dignity is a mysterious habit of the body assumed to cover a vacancy of mind." He was a defender of the weak and the champion of downtrodden causes. My acquaintance with him began through my having quoted in a lecture in Cooper Institute on the Nihilists, after the assassination of Czar Alexander II., one of his own famous sentences relating to that event: "I shed my tears not in St. Petersburg, but in Siberia." I had also familiarly known in Washington his brother, Eben Ingersoll, as a Representative in Congress, the brother over whose body he delivered the famous and pathetic funeral discourse. But I had not yet personally met the orator. I being in Denver three years later, the colonel coming there to speak, and learning that I was in the city, temporarily invalided in my hotel, sent me a carriage and a ticket for a box in the Tabor Operahouse to accommodate me in hearing his lecture. Seeing me in the box, he, at the close of the lecture, beckoned to me to follow him, which I accordingly did, to his hotel across the street. His rooms were already filled with the crowd of friends and visitors, men and women, accustomed to overtake and congratulate him at the close of his performances. He intimated that I should remain after the others were gone. As a result, the night proved to me a memorable one, the colonel detaining me until 5 o'clock in the morning with an almost continuous conversational monologue on Shakespeare. On this topic he was always eloquent to the point of extravagance, placing the writings of Shakespeare, as he did, above all other literature ancient or modern, ranking the dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles in a far inferior class; quoting freely and comparing their most famous passages, this night, with corresponding utterances of the English bard.

Though not a critical writer on the subject, as did not suit his purpose to be, he was perhaps as learned a student of Shakespearean literature as the English-speaking countries contained, his own poetical imagination carrying his admiration of the dramas beyond the limit of refined analysis of the professional sort. His keen appreciation of their substance, however, and the superb color of his diction in its expression more than compensated for any such defect. His formal lecture on Shakespeare appearing in the volumes of his printed works will continue to have value only from the point of view of a splendid panegyric. His own imagination was finely akin to that of his subject. All this was poured out upon me in spontaneous luxuriance, on this first occasion of my meeting him, the night in question. On taking my leave of him in the morning dawn, his secretary, his constant attendant and companion, said to me: "You have had a mountainous night!"

Referring to Shakespeare, it may be said that Ingersoll was an absolute contemner, or repudiator, of the Baconian, or Donnelly, theory of authorship.

From the night in Denver to his latter day, I was in frequent personal communication with the orator, often meeting him socially and hearing him speak publicly.

Against his usual rule on such matters, he engaged with me in Denver to preside at the lecture on the Nihilists, which I had been invited by the leading members of Congress to deliver in Washington, at that time the city of his residence. *Appropos* of this engagement with me I mentioned to him jocosely an amusing incident which just then had recently occurred and been currently reported in the country—of his having presided for another lecturer, a scholarly clergyman who had come to Washington with a manuscript lecture on Shakespeare, and who had solicited the famous orator to act in the way of advertisement, as a sounding-board on the occasion of its delivery in the National Theatre. Attracted by the theme, Ingersoll had consented. Promptly on hand, the evening of the lecture, he advanced to the front of the stage to introduce his learned friend with a few appropriate sentences. But carried away with the enthusiasm of his favorite subject, he continued his remarks for more than half an hour, entrancing the large assembled audience with his glowing periods, each one of which as it ended was caught with an echo of applause urging the speaker to further statement. Suddenly recovering himself, the orator paused

and, apologising for his forgetfulness, introduced the lecturer of the evening. The venerable Shakespearean expert arose, advanced in turn to an arranged desk and wiping his spectacles, began in a monotonous tone reading his laborious essay. The spell of eloquence was broken! Slowly at first, one by one, but then more rapidly, the great audience dissolved, emptying the seats and leaving the lone reader to wrestle with his "Shakespeare" in a vacant theatre!

On the platform, the stum or in the forum, Ingersoll was more than princely; he was a monarch. He was kingly in person, and possessed all the mental powers and passion that attract and hold human admiration and interest. He was an orator, employing, seemingly without artifice, all the arts of eloquence, although undoubtedly a careful student of all its requirements. Behind all was the man, bold, powerful, intensely and dramatically passionate. These were the elements that made him, so to speak, a part of his audience objectively, rather than a factor, or performer, standing aloof; the audience again participating in the orator's work as in the movement of a play. Webster was once characterized as a "steam engine in breeches." Ingersoll even more fitly filled the description. But as in the case of the powerful engine, it was, in its effects, in the energy felt, rather than consciously noted, his audience being wholly and intensely absorbed. His delivery was as smooth as the rendition of the dramatic passages of an opera oratorio. There was nothing of ranting or boisterous extravagance.

He was an artist in elocution as in words; and his art was consummate in both provinces, or respects, since it concealed art. His lectures and orations, delivered with the apparent ease and spontaneity of a stump speech, were carefully prepared and memorised to a comma. This fact would seem marvelous to those hearing them. But his speeches had a significantly marked difference from offhand eloquence. The efforts of spontaneous oratory in its most effective fights, rarely, if ever, bear the test of the types. Having in their delivery all the fervor and glow popularly believed to be confined to such productions, Ingersoll's speeches when reported read like copy plate. Webster's orations as spoken bear no such reproduction. Go into the retired upper gallery of the Senate's archives at Washington and examine the report of his "Reply to Hayne," as taken from his lips on the Senate floor and compare it with the classic production read by the American schoolboy, and you will not recognise the celebrated effort, which, as now seen, was the result of much painful revision. Ingersoll took no such chances with his reputation. Precisely as they were heard, his speeches were read with the same admiration as that to which they were listened. This was the marvel of his eloquence—that it was equally effective with the auditor and reader. He never was a purist in speech, in words as in sentences. He never for the sake of effect descended to slang or commonplace phrases to accommodate the supposed defect of taste with his hearers. Nor with his rhetorical abundance was it necessary.

With sentences as correct and clean as English could make them he held his audiences bound with increasing interest for hours. Grave and severe Churchmen, whom his radical Agnosticism affronted, coming covertly to hear him, were frequently seen with faces aglow with admiring astonishment bending lower and lower over the rim of the upper galleries to catch every syllable of his pointed utterances. Moved by an instinctive perception of oratorical effects he had conceived and introduced a new theory of eloquence. Departing from the old-time ponderous methods of conventional phrasing and sentence-building for rhetorical climaxes, such as were employed in the era of Burke or Webster, he aimed for direct and immediate relations and effects with his audience. It was a modern theory, vindicating itself in his practice, eliminating, as it did, the "dead intervals" of the antique style, during which the audience patiently waited for occasional gleams, or great bursts, of the speaker's effort. Not for a minute would he wait for an elaborate effect. With him every sentence was a climax, carrying its meaning sharply defined. In our personal conversations, he frequently explained his views on this point. A speaker's hold on his audience, he rightly held, was weakened by any diminution of interest for a single instant. Every sentence must clinch and tell. Pausing for a sip of water, or even for the use of a handkerchief, contributed to the same end. Standing for applause, striding the stage or any other diversion of attention from the immediate business of the speech had a similar result. All of these inhibitions he rigidly observed in his own practice.

He came on the rostrum without introduction; there was no exordium, no explanations. From beginning to end there was a rush of words, of telling sentences, without a break. He usually held his audiences for two hours with increasing interest, his listeners eagerly waiting for more, and feeling, when he had finished, that they had assisted at a great performance as at a theatre or circus. There was never a dull word. This has been a rare feat with other orators, even

the greatest. Save in exceptional instances, neither Webster nor Beecher nor Clay ever accomplished it in extended discourse. Saying nothing of his imagination, his brilliant pathos, the quick turn and explosion of his satire, Ingersoll's sententious diction contributed largely to the realisation in practice of his theory of eloquence. He had caught, or discovered, a new and modern style of public speaking, a style "up to date," so to speak, with modern methods of business and the appliances of electricity—the style of short sentences, the only rational style of spoken eloquence, where unlike the case in reading, sentences, to maintain interest, are uttered for immediate comprehension. He was a student of literature and a purist in his tastes. Examining his diction, you were impressed that he had caught its form from the very greatest masters of the literary art, such as Emerson and Hugo. He condemned Macaulay for his monotonous style in striving after effect, his methodical, worked-up "purple patches." "He is a fiddler with one string; his music becomes tiresome," he often said to me in the discussion of such matters. His own style was superb, and inimitable, especially for oratorical uses. It went directly and startlingly to the mark. It held interest. For literary purposes, I should not speak of it so unqualifiedly. It was perfect in broad, clear and strong argument, but it was apt to lack the refinements of analysis and artistic shading, the taste that restrains and shames the professional literary worker to more guarded and moderate expression. This came from his lack of early discipline and practice in this especial field. He was highly educated, but not academically. He was prone to mistake sentimentality for sentiment, the gush for the delicacy of emotion. There was too much of this in his work. It was good for the platform or stump, but offended in the closet. He could not be sensitive to this, believing as was natural, and as was true in the main, that his spoken utterances would bear æsthetic tests. Hardly any other oratory has done this so nearly.

Knowing my admiration for his eloquence and general intellectual powers, his brother-in-law, Farrell, his literary agent and executor, more than once offered me as gifts certain volumes of his works, with the thought that I might favorably review them. But my personal relations with the orator and regard for his feeling restrained me from such review containing the strictures I have here made in qualification of his literary style, and which in conscience would have been necessary from a professional standpoint.

I have spoken of the minute care with which the orator prepared all of his platform and public efforts, the addresses which he memorised and delivered with all the power and apparent freedom of the trained actor. In the effective delivery of words, certainly no actor or elocutionist ever excelled him, although there was with him, as with Beecher, and other great orators, no suggestion of the elocutionist.

Ingersoll became known to the general American public only in the year 1876, when at the National Republican Convention at Cincinnati he delivered his memorable speech in the nomination of Blaine; his celebrity from that event inducing the famous lecture impresario, James Redpath, to place him on the lecture rostrum, where he continued with unprecedented success for years—to the end of his life, in fact. Before that period, he frequently gave his afterward most noted lectures to audiences numbering less than a hundred persons, his reputation being only local and confined to his home State of Illinois. A little later than the Cincinnati event, however, his vogue became national and even world-wide, his funeral oration over his brother's remains having everywhere made its necessarily powerful impression.

As a successful lawyer and brilliant political speaker, he had long been known in Illinois, but his agnostic views had kept him from political preferment. Many well-founded stories are told of him in this connection. Debating the religious question with a witty woman, his Peoria neighbor, he is said to have asked the question: "What practical good has Christianity done the world, anyhow?" To which his fair friend immediately answered: "One thing, at least, Colonel; it has kept you from being the Governor of Illinois."

For years Ingersoll and his interesting and devoted family, consisting of his wife and two daughters, took up their residence in Washington. His family relations, as was well known, were nearly ideal. Both daughters were intellectual and cultivated. Their home at the capital was a centre of attraction in the intellectual life of the city. Once a week, on Thursday evenings, their "at homes" were crowded with the most distinguished public and national characters, all of whom were attracted by the great orator's talents and fame, or by their social relations with him. At the end of these receptions some sort of a general talk or address was generally demanded from the brilliant host; and here were witnessed some of the most remarkable displays of his genius. At these entertainments it was often my good fortune, when in the city, to be present. He never posed, like many

historic great men, as a monologist, but, conversationally, Ingersoll was as original and pungent as on the platform. His range of topics was not limited. He was a brilliant political orator as well as platform speaker; he was a skilled practicing lawyer, engaged in some of the most famous cases, the "Star Route" and many others; James Woolworth, the well-known writer of law books and practitioner before the United States Supreme Court, characterising him in my hearing as "one of the most learned and accomplished lawyers at the American bar." He was a student of metaphysics and of general literature, although he had inferior interest in history, which he believed, as he said, to have been incorrectly "reported," or, like Napoleon, a "fable agreed upon."

These things, with his genial and exuberant personality, made him a most interesting literary host. All of these accomplishments, however, were secondary to his interest and reputation as a poet-orator, his fame as a masterful artist in language, brilliantly imaginative at times almost as Shakespeare himself. Those who doubt this may well read his lecture essay on the great dramatist. Even those whom he offended with his views of religion were not inclined, on hearing him, to question his great intellectual power. It was common to accuse him of not being "logical"! Save before a court or a jury he did not employ the academic, or syllogistic mode of argument, his general method of reasoning, even there, being often of that deadlier kind, the *reductio ad absurdum*—the fatal logical weapon which leaves the proposition of an opponent an object of ridicule. Reasoned in pictures and object lessons, frequently the most vivid, admitting no answer. He was charged with disbelief in the doctrine of immortality. Such was not the fact. On this point he was simply agnostic. He had doubts like many others, and hopes with most others. He was in love with life, the enjoyment of the senses and intellect, and would have gladly believed. His doubt and hope were both expressed in his pathetic oration at the grave of his brother. His intellectual attitude toward a future existence was told in his familiar query, "Is Death a door or a wall?" On all other matters pertaining to religious faith he demanded rigid, if not scientific, evidence. The fundamental teachings of Christianity, of love and goodwill toward his fellowmen, he not only believed in, but practised.

Referring to his oratory, I have noted that his lectures and other public addresses were carefully written out by him and memorised. This he did for the sake of compactness and literary form and accuracy. But that he could speak freely and effectively without notes was abundantly evident from his eloquence before juries and from other facts. During his residence in Washington he kept his promise made me in Denver, to preside on the occasion of my lecture on the Nihilists, given at the request of the body of the Representatives in Congress. Coming to me in the dressing-room of the lecture hall, he asked, "What shall I say in my introduction of you on this Russian question?" My reply was that it was an absurdity for him to ask anyone what he should say on any subject! He then repeated to me briefly what he had thought of as pertinent in the way of preface to my address, submitting his proposed remarks for my approval. I again replied, and to the effect that I trusted that, when he began, he would be prompted to give a whole lecture on that just then important subject, as my object was to influence Congressional action against the extradition of the Russian refugees in America, and that he need have no apprehension of offence on my part, if he forgot himself as in the instance of the clerical lecturer on Shakespeare! We then went on the platform, where in an extemporaneous address of three minutes, in which he did not employ a single sentence or phrase of his just-proposed remarks, he roused the assembled audience to enthusiasm. In my own lecture succeeding him, I spoke largely from notes as was then still my custom, and received from him at the end, in addition to his commendation, his valuable suggestions as to the advantage of platform work without the use of manuscript, and his views of other matters incidental to effective public speaking—as I have above recorded them.

I saw much of Colonel Ingersoll socially before his departure from Washington to take up his final residence in New York. Six years later, I met him in Bute, Mont., where he was making one of his periodical visits on business connected with the celebrated Davis will case, in which he was employed as counsel for certain of the heirs, for whom he was finally successful; I being there giving a series of lectures. Calling one evening at his rooms, where I found him with his daughter, who, in her mother's inability, invariably accompanied him in his expeditions from home, he said to me: "They tell me that you are making some good speeches here." I replied that I had adopted his method; that since the occasion in Washington, six years before, I had taken his advice and had never used a scrap of paper in my work before an audience. "Funny enough,"

he said, "I, who gave you that cheerful advice, have taken to notes. I now speak from paper." Such was the case. The great orator had had his day of glory, the days and nights of thrilled applauding thousands, giving back their electric thrill. In his advancing years with their declining vigor—though he was not yet old—he no longer cared to endure the terrific strain of dramatic speaking. He had, besides, entered again more seriously on the practice of law in New York, where he had become intimately associated professionally and socially with Conkling, of whom, in depreciation of his extravagantly praised eloquence, he had once said: "He has never added a line to literature," but in whose memory he delivered one of his own characteristic eulogies, a genuine contribution to literature, his funeral orations being generally larger than their subjects. Fifty thousand dollars a year would not cover the fees received by either of these distinguished legal advocates, a sum not exceeding, if equalling, the previous revenue of the great agnostic from the lecture rostrum.

I had proposed in Montana to publicly denounce a well-known Federal judge who had sentenced to prison certain appellants for contempt of court. I did not do this! Submitting my intention to Ingersoll, he had said: "It is never well to attack rattlesnakes in your bare feet."

I again and again heard Ingersoll on the platform. It was as he had told me. He spoke, or read, largely from notes. The result vindicated his early theory and practice of public speaking. His brain had undiminished vigor; his voice was still melodious and clear, his elocution flawless. But it was no longer the ancient Ingersoll of fire and force, the orator who surpassed in delivery, as in diction, the traditions of American eloquence, the actor who transformed the platform into a veritable arena. His name and fame still drew audiences, but no longer the eager crowds that overflowed the capacity of lecture auditoriums. Once in San Francisco I gave a copy of his off-hand introductory remarks at my Washington lecture to a celebrated actor, to be committed to memory and delivery in preface to this lecture in the western city. It was passably delivered, but the contrast was pitiable. The sentences which had fallen upon the former assembly like electric strokes, dropped with leaden response upon the audience. The art of elocution could not reproduce the soul of genius.

After Ingersoll's death, the familiar story concerning great unbelievers was told of him—that he had recanted! Under the circumstances of the case, such fact was impossible. He died unexpectedly and suddenly, after conversing cheerfully a few minutes before with the members of his family.

Since the eloquent unbeliever's death, the memory of his great humanity and his stainless personal career, as well as the recognition of his actual service to the Church itself in compelling a softer interpretation of its conventional creeds, has increasingly mellowed the judgment of the great agnostic even with those whom he in life chiefly offended with his opinions; and the twelve volumes of his collected works, posthumously published, are being read with an admiring tolerance that during his life could not have been anticipated.

#### ON SEEING GHOSTS.

Whenever a real ghost appears,—by which I mean some man or woman dressed up to frighten another,—if the supernatural character of the apparition has been for a moment believed, the effects on the spectator have always been most terrible,—convulsion, idiocy, madness, or even death on the spot.....But in our common ghost stories, you will always find that the seer, after a most appalling apparition, as you are to believe, is quite well the next day. Perhaps, he may have a headache; but that is the outside of the effect produced. Alston, a man of genius, and the best painter yet produced by America, when he was in England, told me an anecdote which confirms what I have been saying. It was, I think, in the University of Cambridge, near Boston, that a certain youth took it into his wise head to endeavor to convert a Tom-Painish companion of his by appearing as a ghost before him. He accordingly dressed himself up in the usual way, having previously extracted the ball from the pistol which always lay near the head of his friend's bed. Upon first awaking, and seeing the apparition, the youth who was to be frightened, A, very coolly looked his companion the ghost in the face, and said, "I know you. This is a good joke; but you see I am not frightened. Now you may vanish!" The ghost stood still. "Come," said A, "that is enough. I shall get angry. Away!" Still the ghost moved not. "By —," ejaculated A, "if you do not in three minutes go away, I'll shoot you." He waited the time, deliberately levelled the pistol, fired, and, with a scream at the immobility of the figure, became convulsed, and afterwards died. The very instant he believed it to be a ghost, his human nature fell before it.—Coleridge, "Table Talk."

## The World of Books.

Of making books there is no end. And the bad habit grows upon "civilised" mankind. New ways of supplying the book-market are invented in every generation. There are all sorts of little books—and sometimes big ones—about great writers; so that people may chatter about the poets, and novelists, and even the historians, without having read a dozen pages of any one of them. Perhaps the most insufferable books of all are the Lives of men and women who are still with the minority. It really ought to be a sacred rule that nobody's biography should be written until he (or she) is dead, and not within ten years of "the fatal event." So many insignificant things drop out of sight by that time, and so much dust of passing controversy settles down for ever. But we despair of seeing any wisdom brought into these matters. The fools love to have it as it is. And there are nearly forty millions of them, as Carlyle said, in this country alone.

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The bedrock of this scripturient folly seems to be reached in a book entitled *G. K. Chesterton: a Criticism*, by an anonymous writer, published by Alston Rivers, Ltd., at the extravagant price of five shillings. Mr. Chesterton is "not much over thirty" and, as his biographical critic or critical biographer remarks, it is probable that "much of his best work lies before him," that his opinions "may undergo a considerable change before he dies," and that even "his style may develop." We devoutly hope that all these things are probable. But until they are realised a book about Mr. Chesterton and his books is nothing but book-making. There is no need for it, no use for it; and, therefore, to use the language of paradox, the better it is done the worse it is. We cannot advise anyone to read this book. We trust the writer will put his talents to a better employment. He says of Mr. Chesterton that he "is not always an entirely coherent thinker; but he could think." This seems to us equally true of Mr. Chesterton's critic, who, we hope, is as much under thirty as "G. K. C." is over it. What he says of Mr. Blatchford's "Determinism" shows that he can think. Well, that is something; and a good many other things may follow.

\* \* \*

Talking about conversions, we were looking through the early numbers of the *Secularist* the other day—a weekly journal we started and edited in 1876—and we came across something that we had quite forgotten. It was a statement in the *Christian World* of January 7 of that year to the effect that Mr. Swinburne, who was politely called "the poet-apostle of the Fleshly School," was "said to have become a member of the Church of England, mainly through the instrumentality of Prof. Jowett." This falsehood was as circumstantial as such falsehoods are apt to be. Mr. Swinburne still lives, crowned with age and honor, and is still outside all Churches—including the Church of England. Unluckily for the poor *Christian World*, the *Athenæum* of the very same week contained Mr. Swinburne's splendid sonnets on "Two Leaders"—evidently Newman and Carlyle. Both were praised to the skies for the virtues which they possessed, but they wore of the night, not of the day:—

"Honor not hate we give you, love not fear,  
Last prophets of past kind, who fill the dome  
Of great dead gods with wrath and wail, nor hear  
Time's dead and man's, 'Go honored hence, go home,  
Night's childless children, here your hour is done,  
Pass with the stars and leave us in the sun.'"

It was really too cruel on the poor Christian paper.

\* \* \*

This is the age of novels. They swarm from the press in countless crowds, and it is surprising how good (up to a point) many of them are. But the leading novelists, perhaps we should say the great ones, still keep their places securely. And it is noticeable what a big proportion of them are Freethinkers. Mr. Swinburne himself may be said to occupy a place in the list by virtue of his remarkable study, of which a new edition was brought out a year or two ago under the title of *Love's Cross-Currents*. That this master of verse and prose is a Freethinker almost goes without saying. There is Mr. George Meredith, who is still with us, and occasionally active with his pen in spite of his eighty years. It is admitted by all who have written careful criticisms of Mr. Meredith (including Mr. G. M. Trevelyan) that he is a pure and simple Naturalist, with no other religion than Humanity, and no other hope than the increasing progress of the race. Mr. Thomas Hardy is beyond all question a Freethinker. His poems prove it as well as his novels. Of the newer generation there is Mr. Eden Phillpotts, whose work gets better and better, and who has nearly done for Dartmoor what Mr. Hardy has done for Wessex. Mr. Phillpotts also is a Freethinker. Nor is there anything strange

in all this. Christianity falls more and more into intellectual and moral disrepute, and it is natural that the best work in most directions should be done by Freethinkers. This may be disputed, we know; anything can be disputed; but Swinburne, Meredith, and Hardy are unchallengeably the three greatest living masters of English literature, and the Freethought of the whole trinity is "gross as a mountain, open, palpable."

## Correspondence.

### THE DATE OF PAUL.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I was pleased to see in last week's issue of the *Freethinker* a number of what appear to be excellent reasons advanced, by Mr. W. P. Ball, against the late date I had suggested for Paul and a historical Jesus.

It will not do, however, to draw conclusions hastily. I will take time to consider the arguments seriatim, and will then make a brief statement of all evidence I can find bearing on the subject—both for and against.

ABRACADABRA.

### MIDDLE-CLASS RELIGION.

The religion of this vast English middle-class ruling the land is Comfort. It is their central thought; their idea of necessity; their sole aim. Whatsoever ministers to Comfort—seems to belong to it—pretends to support it, they yield their passive worship to. Whatsoever alarms it they join to crush. There you get at their point of unity. They will pay for the security of Comfort, calling it national worship, or national defence, if too much money is not subtracted from the means of individual comfort: if too much foresight is not demanded for the comfort of their brains.—*Dr. Shrapnel, in George Meredith's "Beauchamp's Career."*

### ANCIENT HINDU SCEPTICISM.

Did God exist, omniscient, kind,  
And never speak his will in vain,  
'Twould cost him but a word, and then  
His suppliants all they wish would find.  
If God to men allotted woe  
Although that woe the fruit must be  
Of men's own actions, then were he  
Without a cause his creatures' foe,  
More cruel thus than men who ne'er  
To others causeless malice bear.

—Muir's "Religious and Moral Sentiments from Sanscrit Writers."

### FREE WILL.

Men deceive themselves in this, that they think themselves free. Now, in what consists such opinion? Solely in this, that they are conscious of their actions, and ignore the causes that determine them. The idea that men have of their liberty comes, then, from this, that they know not the cause of their actions, for to say that these depend on the will is to use words to which no meaning is attached.—*Spinoza.*

### THINK AND LET THINK.

Do you know that every man has a religious belief peculiar to himself? Smith is always a Smithee. He takes in exactly Smith's worth of knowledge—Smith's worth of truth, of beauty, of divinity. And Brown has, from time immemorial, been trying to burn him, to excommunicate him, because he didn't take in Brown's worth of knowledge, truth, beauty, divinity. He cannot do it, any more than a pint-pot can hold a quart—or a quart be filled by a pint. Iron is essentially the same everywhere and always, but the sulphate of iron is never the same as the carbonate of iron. Truth is invariable, but the Smithate of truth must always differ from the Brownate of truth.—*Oliver Wendell Holmes.*

### OLD AND NEW FAITH.

Faith in a divine power, devout obedience to its supposed will, hope of ecstatic unspeakable reward, these were the springs of the old movement. Undivided love of our fellows, steadfast faith in human nature, steadfast search after justice, firm aspiration towards improvement, and generous contentment in the hope that others may reap whatever reward may be, these are the springs of the new.—*John Morley.*

**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.**

STANLEY HALL (Junction-road, N., opposite Tufnell Park "Tube" Station): 7.30, C. Cohen, "The Vices of Christian Virtues."

**OUTDOOR.**

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S.: Station-road, 11.30, W. J. Ramsey, a Lecture. Brockwell Park, 3.15, W. J. Ramsey, a Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S.: Ridley-road, 11.30, Miss Kough, "Does Christianity Degrade Woman?"

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

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S.: Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, 7, F. A. Davies, 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.**

FAILSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, Concert by Failsworth String Band.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): G. W. Foote, 12 noon, "Socialism and the Church"; 6.30, "The Present Position of God."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Central Buildings, 113 Islington): 3, Sydney Wollen, "The Formation and Biography of God"; 7, Abdullah Quilliam Bey, "The Recent Reforms in Turkey."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.33, W. A. Rogerson, "Possibilities for Social Improvements."

**OUTDOOR.**

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

LEEDS: Woodhouse Moor, 3, Mr. Sollet, a Lecture.

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

LEEDS: Friday, October 2, Town Hall Square, at 7.30, "Who was the First Man?" Saturday, October 3, at 7.30, "The 'Devil' the Hero of Progress."

WIGAN: Sunday, October 4, Market Steps, at 11, "Trading on the Spiritual"; 3, "Why the Salvation Army Fails"; 7, "New Gods for Old: the Triumph of Freethought."

BOLTON: Monday, October 5, Town Hall Square, at 7.30, "Christianism, Socialism, and Secularism."

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