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MR. BERNARD SHAW EXPLAINS HIS RELIGION.

HIS REPLY TO OUR ARTICLE ON

“G. B. S.’ AND JESUS CHRIST”

IN THE “FREETHINKER” OF OCTOBER 18.

MY DEAR FOOTE,—

May I explain myself to the younger members of your flock—if you will allow me so to describe the readers of *The Freethinker*—who may otherwise be discouraged in their adventure into Freethought by the taunt that so conspicuous an atheist as myself recanted as soon as he was old enough to know better?

I have never changed my mind about popular religion in this country. I do not claim that this is a merit on my part: on the contrary, a genuine Freethinker should change his mind as often and as carefully as he changes his linen. But as a matter of fact, to be deplored or applauded as the case may be, I loathe the mess of mean superstitions and misunderstood prophecies which is still rammed down the throats of children in this country under the name of Christianity as contemptuously as ever. And in my opinion the blackest spot in English public life is the cowardly dishonor in which our public men leave the Blasphemy Laws unrepealed, and imply, in all their utterances on religious education and imperial organization, that they worship the savage idol in the tale of the bears sent to eat the children who mocked Elisha's baldness; that our Mahometan, Buddhist and Hindu fellow subjects are walking in darkness whilst our Glassites and Agapemonites and Plymouth Brethren and Countess-of-Huntingdonians are bathing in celestial light; and that Mr. Edmund Gosse's father was a more enlightened man than Matthew Arnold. We may congratulate ourselves on the fact that the present Government contains only one man stupid enough to institute a prosecution for blasphemy; but what are we to say to that other fact that though every one of his fellow ministers who is of sufficient importance to make his opinions ascertainable, would, if the Blasphemy Laws were sincerely and impartially carried out, be an ex-prisoner legally incapable of holding his office, they all covered shamelessly before the superstition of that colleague, and virtually committed themselves to the opinion that a man should be ruinously punished with the vilest criminals for refusing to believe that the birth of Jesus was parthenogenetic.

Your younger readers will now ask why, if these are my views, I am regarded by so many Secularists as an apostate. When I spoke on Progress in Freethought at the Hall of Science after the death of Bradlaugh, why was I received with a burst of fury such as no clergyman need have feared there? Why do the congregations of the City Temple and Westbourne Park Chapel, with their famous pastors in the chair, make much of me, whilst the National Secular Society, after two trials, had to drop me as an intolerable blasphemer whose lectures would drive away the old guard on whose subscriptions the Society depended?

The answer is that I am contemptuously and implacably anti-rationalist and anti-materialist, and that the Secularism of the National Secular Society, in spite of your leadership, is crudely rationalistic and materialistic. When I called myself an atheist years ago in order to make it clear that I was on the side of Bradlaugh in his fight with the House of Commons, I meant that I had exactly the same opinion of what his persecutors called God as Mahomet had of the stones which the Arabs worshipped before he converted them. I used a negative term to express a negative position. I repeatedly and publicly repudiated the term Agnostic (logical as it was), because an Agnostic was then understood to declare, with regard to the existence of God (which then meant Jehovah), that he did not know. I said I could not take that position, because I *did* know that there was no such person. When questioners asked how I could prove a negative, I asked them how they could prove that there was not a blue horse with green wings capering at that moment on the roof of St. Paul's Cathedral, and what they would think of my intellect and character if, merely because I had not been to Ludgate Hill to make sure, I hesitated to deny, dogmatically and flatly, that there was such a horse so occupied.

So far, the Secularists regarded me as one of themselves. But neither Secularists nor anyone else can live on negations, any more than vegetarians can live on mere abstention from meat. When the account given in Genesis of the origin of the universe held the field, the man who said “Rubbish!” made an important contribution to Freethought; and our consciousness of that made us all say “Rubbish!” with an earnestness and eloquence which now seem ridiculous. For, very unexpectedly, Genesis fell before us like the walls of Jericho. And from that moment the Freethinkers, instead of being met with angry assertions of the actual existence of the Garden of Eden, found themselves eagerly and respectfully invited to explain the universe by people who quite agreed that the Bible story was impossible. The Agnostic reply, “I don't know,” meant simple extinction of the Freethinker as a leader of thought. It may be a frank answer and a true answer; but so is the answer of the man who says “I don't know” when you ask him the way to Putney. You do not question his honesty; but you take no further interest in him.

When, as Nietzsche-Zarathustra put it, “God is dead,” Atheism dies also. Bible-smashing is tedious to people who have smashed their Bibles. I do not say that there is no work left for atheists and Bible-smashers among people who remain steeped in the crude idolatry that is still all that religion means to large masses of the English people, though I doubt whether the line can be drawn higher now than at what the Roman Catholic Church gives up as Invincible Ignorance. But that is not my job. I prefer positive work; and, indeed, whether we like it or not, we all have to face positive work if we are to retain any hold of the pioneering section of the public. When you said, very penetratingly, in your article on my City Temple sermon that God is in process of manufacture, you put Atheism aside just

as a man puts his gun aside when he has shot the tiger and must set to work with his spade. The clearing away of false solutions is not a clearing away of problems: quite the contrary: it brings you face to face with them. Denial has no further interest: you must begin to affirm.

Under this pressure there arose Neo-Darwinism, or the explanation of all phenomena as the result of Natural Selection. The world, according to this view, is only a purposeless accident, interesting only because of its amazing simulation of design and the ingenuity of its explanation. Opposed to this stands the 1790-1830 theory of Evolution as the struggle of a creative Will or Purpose (called by me the Life Force) towards higher forms of life—God in process of manufacture, as you put it. Neo-Darwinism is a materialistic theory. Evolution is a mystical one.

The Secularists embraced Natural Selection rather because it was the opposite extreme to Jehovah-worship than from any serious grasp of it and its ghastly implications. I took my own side, the mystical side, which at once brings me far nearer to Mr. Campbell, to Dr. Clifford, to the late Samuel Butler, than to any Neo-Darwinian atheist. I cannot force any man to use my term Life Force to denote what he calls God; but if we both mean the same thing, and if the Neo-Darwinian atheist means something profoundly different, I had better be taken to be on the theologian's side against the atheist. Only, I prefer my own term, as it suggests none of the attributes of the ridiculous old *deus ex machina* to whose stuffed shoulders we used to shift all our responsibilities. If you ask me to shew you my "god's" head I shew you my own head (or your's). If you doubt the strength of its hands I tell you that it has no other hands than ours. And I solemnly warn you that if the present failure of our heads and hands to make a higher life possible continues, it will assuredly evolve some creature (it may not be even a Superman: it may be a Supersnake) who will clear us out as ruthlessly and completely as we have cleared the bison out of America, keeping only a few of us in the Zoo for the amusement of its young. That will certainly happen if, by taking to Neo-Darwinism, we all become, what so many Neo-Darwinians already are, a mob of futile cowards, seeking the elixir of life by vivisection because they have not the courage to seek political liberty by dynamite.

No doubt all this is obscure to people who imagine that Darwin invented Evolution, and who conclude, when I say that Mr. Campbell's Christ is, apart from a few inessential survivals of the old legend, as credible and interesting a person as Mr. Keir Hardie, that I am preaching the doctrine of the Atonement. What I said at the City Temple was a simple statement of fact. I have always said that it was obvious to me as a professional expert in literature that the gospels are fictions and the epistles documents. I do not object to the gospels on that account any more than to the dramas of Euripides or Shakespeare; nor do I admit that a fiction is less true than a document—quite the opposite, in fact. There are no lies in *Hamlet*; and our bluebooks are mostly full of lies. But I regarded Jesus as a fictitious character exactly as I regard Shakespeare's Henry V. as a fictitious character. There may have been an actual preacher named Jesus (or seven or eight Jesuses, as Mr. J. M. Robertson once contended) just as there was undoubtedly a king called Henry V.; but there was so much less evidence, and the point was so unimportant in view of the fact that neither the Evangelist nor Shakespeare were engaged in the senseless work of reproducing mere biographical facts, that it was not worth making any reservations. Mr. Campbell, however, has reconstructed a credibly historical Jesus with such success that I am now quite prepared to entertain the proposition that he existed in the Post Office Directory sense, and that some of the most fantastic utterances recorded in the gospels may be accepted as genuine traditions in the light of Mr. Campbell's view of Christianity as a movement that

dates from several centuries before Christ. This no more implies a change in my religious opinions than if Mr. Campbell had convinced me that there actually was once a patriarch who saved his tribe and his farm stock from an inundation by means of a raft and houseboat, and that his name was Noah. You will appreciate the irony of the fact that whereas the religious papers have quite understood this secularist explanation of my position, the Secularist papers persist in taking the old-fashioned evangelical view of it as the return to the fold of a lost sheep.

I have once or twice before been on the point of writing to the *Freethinker* to explain the situation. Dare I say why I refrained? Well, it was because I feared to force you into the position of having either to lose some of your oldest subscribers, or else pretend to be as bigotedly materialistic as some of them are. My conviction that you would not hesitate to speak your mind on that account was only an additional reason for not creating the dilemma. But now I think it better to get the explanation off my mind, leaving it open to you to treat this letter (of which I have kept no copy) as a public or a private one just as you think fit.

Yours faithfully,

19th October, 1908.

G. BERNARD SHAW.

MR. FOOTE'S REJOINER.

THERE is no need for me to answer Mr. Shaw's letter with another letter. It was stated last week that I preferred to treat his letter as public. What I have to say in rejoinder may therefore appear in the present form, without any detriment to our personal relations, which are perfectly cordial.

Let me begin by complimenting Mr. Shaw on his good temper. A smaller and less sensible man might easily have taken offence at some of my criticisms. Mr. Shaw is magnanimous enough to recognise that the personal equation is really the most trifling element in these controversies.

Let me next say that I am delighted to be able to print this letter from Mr. Shaw. It clears up a good many matters which were obscure and perplexing. It leaves some points dubious, but these may be cleared up hereafter. On the whole, I think I had better make out a sort of profit and loss account, and then go on to consider the future of affairs.

On the credit side we may first of all place Mr. Shaw's strong denunciation of the Blasphemy Laws and his intense loathing of popular Christianity. On these matters his attitude is all that could be desired. My only regret is that he did not find an opportunity to tell the nation what he thought of "the blackest spot in English public life" when I was fighting hard to defeat the last "blasphemy" prosecution in the early part of this year. I know very well that Mr. Shaw is no coward; he may have concluded that he could do no good just then; but, in that case, I think he was mistaken.

The credit side also includes the explanation of how Mr. Shaw "found Christ." This part of his letter ought, in common honesty, to be reproduced in the *Christian Commonwealth*. That journal made all the capital it could out of his address at the City Temple. It stuck him up as one of Mr. Campbell's "converts," and paraded him on its very contents-sheet as the "joint" of the bill-of-fare. Well, it now appears that Mr. Shaw only "found Christ" in the sense that he once thought the Gospels pure fiction, whereas he now believes they may contain a little biography. There may have been an actual preacher called Jesus, or seven or eight preachers called Jesus. But this has next to nothing to do with the orthodox theory of the hero of the Four Gospels. It does not even bring Mr. Shaw appreciably nearer Mr. Campbell as a Christ-worshiper—for that is what the oracle of the City Temple really is. Christ is Mr. Campbell's all-in-all. It is only through Christ that he knows anything of God. Take away Christ and his stock-in-trade as a theologian is exhausted. Mr. Shaw's attitude towards

Christ is very different. He is as far off the "deity" of Christ as ever. On this point, as he says himself, there is no change in his religious opinions. And this is the only point that matters to Mr. Campbell and the *Christian Commonwealth*.

We may say, then, that the credit side of the account is fairly satisfactory. And now for the debit side.

In one sense the debit side is complicated; in another sense it is very simple. Behind all Mr. Shaw's explanations, qualifications, and reservations—behind all his curious, and even fantastic, criticism of Freethought and the National Secular Society—lies the fact that he is inclining more and more to a Theistic interpretation of the universe. This is not altered by his still using language which is essentially Atheistic. Such language is a survival from his more iconoclastic past.

When you inquire where a man is going, it is important to know the road he is on. Twenty years ago, when I felt obliged to criticise Mrs. Besant's new-found Theosophy, I explained what the road was which she had entered, and where it led if she went forward. Many of her Secularist friends thought I was too severe, but they were not long in discovering that my severity was merely the expression of unwelcome truth. It gave me no pleasure to indicate where Mrs. Besant was going. It gives me no pleasure to indicate where Mr. Shaw seems to be going. The one consolation I have in his case is the hope that he will pull up in time and cheat the chuckling supernaturalists.

Having disposed substantially of the profit and loss account, I proceed with the rest of my task.

Mr. Shaw still holds that the Gospels are works of fiction. There is history in *Henry V.*, and there may be some biography in the evangelistic narratives, but Shakespeare wrote a drama and the evangelists wrote a religious epic. I take it that this is Mr. Shaw's position. I must regard what he says about Mr. Campbell's reconstruction of a credibly historical Jesus as mainly a personal compliment. Mr. Shaw is probably aware that Mr. Campbell's "Jesus" is one of a hundred modern reconstructions. I venture to pass all that by, and to fix attention on the theory which Mr. Shaw still entertains as a literary expert that the Gospels are works of art. This is what I have been saying all along. The hero of the Gospels is a construction of early Christian imagination through several generations. This is the justification of Freethought iconoclasm, and I am surprised that Mr. Shaw does not see it. We have no quarrel with the Gospels when they are accepted as literature. We oppose them as history and doctrine. They are responsible, as such, for the "mess of mean superstitions" which is "rammed down the throats of children in this country." It is obvious, therefore, that if "Bible-smashing is tedious" it is still necessary. We should have to go in for "Shakespeare-smashing" if *Hamlet* were imposed upon the nation as a work of divine authority.

Mr. Shaw imagines, just as the common-garden Christian does, that Secularists live on negations. It ought to occur to him—for he has a vivid and subtle intelligence—that every negative implies a positive, and every denial an affirmation. Feuerbach well said that he denied the illusions of theology in order to affirm the realities of nature. Those who drop God have a positive substitute in Humanity. If they read the Bible less they read other great literature more. Emerson's poetical way of putting it is that "when the half-gods go, the gods arrive." There is something inexpressibly comical in the idea that the man who regards the Book of Jonah as inspired is in a positive state of mind, while the man who laughs at its inspiration, and much prefers Gulliver's Travels, is in a negative condition.

Mr. Shaw is profoundly right in saying that the clearing away of false solutions brings you face to face with the problems. This is another justification of Freethought iconoclasm. Is it not true throughout the civilised world that the men who grapple with the problems of life are the men who have

dismissed the false solutions? If we are made for heaven, we are lost for earth. In that epigram Ingersoll sums up the whole situation.

Atheists are not negationists because they refuse to utter shibboleths about the Unknown. They have all that really matters, all that is really positive—the Known. When I am "respectfully invited to explain the universe," I reply that I leave that job to greater and more ambitious intellects. They have been engaged on it for thousands of years, and they have not been particularly successful. When they have "land in sight," and are agreed about it, I shall be happy to listen to them.

Atheism simply means "without God," and it does not die when "God is dead." It lives and possesses the field. What dies in the final victory of Atheism is Atheistic propaganda. It is no longer needed.

Mr. Shaw does not use the word "God" yet. But I fear he is on the way to it. He believes in a conscious Life Force, a creative Will or Purpose; and he rightly judges that this places him nearer any Theist than any Atheist. At the same time, he calls it a penetrating remark of mine that "God is in process of manufacture." Without disputing the adjective, I may repeat that the remark is Atheistic. God, as an objective reality, cannot be in process of manufacture; the expression can only apply to a subjective reality, a conception, an ideal. Grant Allen proposed to christen his book *The Evolution of God*; at Spencer's suggestion he christened it *The Evolution of the Idea of God*; it was more words for the same thing.

Everybody considers his "guess about the infinite" as vastly important. Mr. Shaw does. But he must try to pardon me for not accepting it at his own valuation. He does not refer to what most people are far more interested in—a future life. Mr. Shaw has powerfully repudiated this doctrine in the Preface to *Major Barbara*. I agree with all he said there. But I venture to remind him that the doctrine of a future life is the vital essence of every Theistic religion. God is the dot to complete the Theist's "I"—the guarantee of his personal immortality. It seems to me that, at the finish, Mr. Shaw is quite close to the Secularist, without knowing it.

I must point out that Secularism and Atheism do not stand or fall with Darwinism, or any other theory of Evolution. Secularists are certainly not conspicuous among the "mob of futile cowards, seeking the elixir of life by vivisection." No more passionate denouncer of vivisection ever existed than Ingersoll. I have said some warm things about it in my humble way. And the extension of the moral law to the lower animals is one of the objects of the National Secular Society. Those of us who are Darwinians—curious as it may seem to Mr. Shaw—find the Darwinian demonstration of the universal kinship of life a great support to our Humanitarianism.

I do not quite understand what Mr. Shaw means by being "anti-rationalist." Surely he cannot mean that he despises and detests reason. When he says he is "anti-materialist" I beg to tell him that Bradlaugh never called himself a "materialist," neither have I, nor is there any obligation to use that label resting on the members of the National Secular Society. We do not ask our members whether they agree with Berkeley or Hamilton. We are concerned with nearer and more urgent questions.

The work I do in the world I do deliberately—at some cost, and I do not quarrel with Mr. Shaw for doing his own work in his own way; but whether it is more positive than mine is a question on which various people may hold different opinions. But I "solemnly warn" him that calling your own views by nice names, and other people's by nasty ones, is an unworthy policy. A theory is none the worse for being called "materialistic," neither is another theory any better for being called "mystical." Honesty asks which is true. Courage faces the facts.

G. W. FOOTE.

Religion and the Social Sanction.

"WHATEVER becomes of religion, the social bond will always remain the chief factor in life." One would like to keep this sentence, taken from a religious writer in one of the religious weeklies, before the eyes of all those who are constantly expressing fears of what will happen should religion disappear. It is, perhaps inadvertently, a reply to critics, and a counsel of courage to the timid. It assures both that whether religion lives or dies, whether it gains in strength or evinces increasing lassitude, the social bond remains, and that it is the dominant factor in life. Personally, I would go further, and say that the social bond is not only the dominant factor—it is ultimately the only factor of real importance. For man is, as Aristotle defined him to be, a social animal. He comes from society, and all that is best, and worst, in him goes back to society again in the shape of influences that serve to mould the lives of his successors. Apart from the social structure, the individual man is a sheer abstraction. Take away all with which social life endows the individual—language, habits, beliefs, clothing, and a thousand other things—and man as we know him has ceased to exist. Just as it is its presence in the organism that gives to each cell a special meaning and function, so it is the existence of the individual as "cell in the social tissue" that makes him what he is, and in virtue of which his existence admits of rational interpretation.

Even religion itself, except in its beginnings, comes under the same formative influences. The forms that religious beliefs assume, the character of the gods, the character and condition of a future life, can only be thoroughly understood when we refer back to the social medium for explanation. The belief in a God who moulds human nature as a potter moulds clay, and whose decrees it is blasphemy to question, tells us conclusively of a people accustomed to an autocratic government, and a modification in the form of government leads surely enough to a change in the conception. One may say that, whether we take the character of a god or a government, one may, save under exceptional and transitory conditions, argue from one to the other. Man cannot escape the control of the social forces; at the very moment when he imagines that he is escaping their influence, careful analysis shows that he is only illustrating the fact that he is under their domination.

Social forces have moulded, and are moulding, human nature. But their ramifications and expressions are of a most varied and complicated description. There is one set of influences that affect human society as a whole; there is another set that affect sections of society only; and there is yet another division that in ill-regulated natures splits individual life into recognisable strata, each stratum governed by special rules of its own. The most common and universal of human qualities are such as those concerned with the family, and with those feelings without which human society could not exist. The second is exemplified in the existence of a class morality, which applies to the classes within the State. The aristocrat, the merchant, the workman, the sportsman, all have their own special code of morals. To one a "debt of honor," contracted by gambling, must be discharged; the debt due to a tradesman for goods, or a servant for labor, may wait. To the other, business obligations must be met; other claims sink into the background. Even the very criminals amongst us elaborate their own special moral obligations, which are duly discharged with as great a fidelity as are the moral obligations of the "superior" classes.

The third division is concerned with man as an individual. As an individual, man discharges numerous functions, and often discharges them as though he were so many different persons. The considerations that govern his conduct in one direction often do not govern it in others; with the

result that we have a serious, often a fatal, influence cast over conduct as a whole. At any rate, it does not follow that because a man is scrupulous to his word in business he will be equally straightforward elsewhere. It does not follow that because he is full of professions of moral rectitude in church that he will be quite trustworthy outside. His business associations will be governed by one set of considerations, his religious associations by another; and, regrettable as this lack of co-ordination may be, its existence is so patent as to render proof quite unnecessary.

In religious circles we have a practice of morality that is peculiarly its own. Not that the formulas used are different to those used elsewhere, they are simply interpreted differently. There is even considerably greater expression of devotion to certain moral rules, and a corresponding laxity in performance. Comparatively trifling offences, such as robbery or physical violence, of which the law takes full cognisance, are duly avoided; but the much more serious offences that are not, and cannot be, noticed by the law, and which result in a decided lowering of the moral and intellectual tone of life, are probably much more often committed in the religious world than elsewhere. Deliberate misstatement is not unknown in political life, but it is certainly much more common in religious circles. Nor does it meet with the same reprobation in religion as it does in politics. When the lies of the notorious Torrey were completely exposed by the editor of this journal—so completely that no one was able to say a word in his defence—there was not, so far as I am aware, a single clergyman out of Britain's many thousands that had the manliness to say a word in condemnation of this evangelistic liar. In a still more recent case, when Dr. Warschauer and the Rev. Rhondda Williams between them circulated a false statement of Mr. Blatchford's conversion, no Christian deemed it necessary to raise a word of protest against such tactics. In both instances, and in numerous others that might be cited, the practice fell in with the sectional moral code of the churches; and, tried by the standard of religious practice, there was little to condemn.

In a recent leading article in the *Times* the writer remarked that, even though we settled the purely moral problem, this would

"leave another of almost equal importance, and of importance to all classes, the question of how best to teach the necessity or value of intellectual honesty; of a definite recognition that it is morally wrong to believe things which are not true, or, in other words, to hold and act upon demonstrably erroneous opinions..... Hundreds of people possessing a certain amount of literary cultivation have never realised that false opinions, say about matters of science, may, indirectly, be as harmful to the community as false opinions about matters of morals."

Personally, I have no hesitation in saying that the greatest need of to-day is the need for intellectual honesty. But this is precisely the quality that the sectarian ethic of religion cares least about. The charges brought by Christian preachers against each other would be alone sufficient to prove this. And whatever may be the amount of credence we give to specific charges against selected individuals, there can scarcely be an escape from the conclusion that the churches and chapels are plentifully sprinkled with men who neither say all they believe nor believe all they say. It is really straining credulity to breaking point to put before people the proposition that the majority of the clergy are not quite well aware that the larger part of their teaching is simply untrue. No body of educated men could be so completely outside the influence of modern thought as not to know this. It may, of course, be said that the power of self-deception would explain a deal. Probably; but then self-deception itself implies no small degree of moral obliquity.

The only instances in which Christianity has taught that it is morally wrong to believe things that are not true are when people have accepted as true things which it has arbitrarily branded as false.

Otherwise the value of intellectual honesty, the duty of discovering truth and rejecting error, are the very last things that historic Christianity has insisted on. Nor does it emphasise these teachings to-day. The dishonest believer is still preferable to the honest sceptic. The deliberate misrepresentation of distasteful opinions, the slandering of opponents, their suppression by the agencies of force or trickery, are still characteristics of contemporary Christianity. The professional retailer of pious lies about infidels is not so openly praised as of old, but this is because the practice is recognised as rather risky; he is still supported on the quiet. Christians are not yet humanised enough to openly and honestly discourage the work.

The truth is, as I have indicated, the morality that obtains in other spheres loses its force in the sphere of religion. Just as morality is modified by the conditions of various countries, just as we have developed within the nation a special code governing special classes, so we have the religious world governed more or less by rules of its own. And our lives are so poorly co-ordinated that people have one moral rule for business, another for private life, and yet another for religion. Conduct that meets with approval in the churches would, in social life, saddle one with a criminal indictment for libel. A recklessness of statement that, in science, would bring upon one well-deserved contempt, is in religion hailed as profound spiritual zeal. And it is because this conduct is sanctioned by an institution, and endorsed by most in connection therewith, that something in the nature of a social sanction is given to teachings and practices that are inimical to the best life of that larger social organism of which the Church is a part.

C. COHEN.

The Inevitable Trend.

DURING the recent meeting of the Church Congress at Manchester, the subject of "Secularist Propaganda" came under discussion. One speaker expressed the opinion that they were not required by their religion to "label the Secularist movement as utterly godless, however much disposed the Secularists themselves may be to adopt such labelling." He was also convinced that "the movement does, on the whole, stand for freedom of thought," and that "in many ways the times are favorable for this propaganda. Mild doubts are the fashion, and un-dogmatism the predominant dogma. The unscrupulous criticisms of Mr. J. M. Robertson, and the scrupulous criticisms of Mr. McCabe, are widely read." Having made such admissions, the reverend gentleman proceeded to show that, "in spite of all, the Secularist propaganda languishes, its Societies do not flourish, and on all sides there are complaints of slackness." Another speaker expressed a totally different opinion on the last point. He "emphasised the enormous increase of the Secularist propaganda," and frankly admitted that many associated with it are "brilliant men of science." "The movement was serious, intellectual, and sincere," and had for its main cause "the spread of education." The Church "had lost grip of the inquiring mind of the age," and "the clergy were, for the most part, far inferior speakers to their opponents." A third speaker lamented the fact that "in East London, according to the Bishop of London, they could only find one man in a hundred in a place of worship Sunday by Sunday." For so deplorable a state of things he held the supposed failure to reconcile science and religion, the unwise statements of the Higher Criticism, and the social conditions under which millions of men and women were living to-day, responsible. The remedy, according to him, was more and stronger preaching of what he called "the living message" of the Church. Taking the discussion as a whole, its only apparent object was to convince the Church that Secularism is an enemy worthy of its best steel. Its success is such that

nothing less than the Church's united action is calculated to counteract and eventually suppress it.

Now, what can the Church do to put down Freethought that it is not already doing, and has not been doing ever since Freethought began? Persecution can never accomplish the task. Indeed, persecution is rather a help than a hindrance to a weak cause. It is the best possible fosterer of true heroism and dauntless loyalty. The burning of heretics has ever eventuated in the glorification of the heresies. This is a fact of which the Church cannot possibly be ignorant. The Rev. Mr. Watts Ditchfield, of Bethnal Green, recommends preaching as the most effectual antidote. He says that the Church "must proclaim a living message for to-day, must preach, preach, preach." Well, is there not preaching enough already, in all conscience? Preaching is the one thing we cannot possibly get away from. Though we stay away from churches and chapels it pursues us into the streets, the parks, and even into the privacy of our homes. There never was so much preaching as there is at present. And yet Freethought is more prevalent to-day than at any former period. It is in the air. There is no getting away from it. It is the very *zeit geist*, against which the Holy Ghost cannot prevail. The fact that stares us in the face is that the Church is powerless to cope with this the most persisting and unyielding of all her opponents; that, in fact, she has already exhausted all her resources. Secularism is clearly in the ascendant everywhere. This is how the Rev. Rhondda Williams expresses himself:—

"Large numbers to-day leave the thought of God aside, and devote themselves to the service of man, meaning by that his temporal welfare and mental improvement. We have had instances of men like Charles Bradlaugh, in revolt against all organised religion, and denying the existence of the God his neighbors believed in, working hard for the recognition of human rights, and in many ways standing for a higher moral standard than many who profess religion. We have people to-day who deny all the Christian doctrines, yet stand out as champions of human liberty and of economic justice. The two men who stood up in the House of Commons in one of its debates to defend native races against injustice were two men who do not profess Christianity, and they spoke without effect to many who would be horrified at their religious denials, and who would claim to love God and worship a crucified Savior."

Mr. Williams, being a New Theologian, may be suspected by some people of being unduly biassed against the orthodox Church; but at the Liverpool meeting of the Congregational Union last week a prominent minister, whose orthodoxy has never been challenged, spoke thus:—

"That which we should have mastered is threatening to master us. The salt is in danger of losing its savor. If I were asked to state in a single sentence what I sincerely believe to be the threatening peril in the life of our Church to-day, the answer would be, the want of realisation of the unseen. There are in that life many pleasant and excellent features, but the distinctive note of the Christian life—communion with and dependence upon the Unseen, has become less and less clear."

On the assumption that the Church is a Divine institution, indwelt and controlled by the Holy Spirit, that testimony is most damaging. If true, and of that there can be no doubt, it proves that the assumption is wholly groundless. The confessed decay of spiritual life in the Church is an evidence of the most conclusive character that the spiritual life does not signify real intercourse with an objectively real Supreme Being, clothed with ideally perfect attributes, but is an unnatural, morbid development of human emotions. That this is so is beyond doubt even in the light of this further quotation from the same minister:—

"There are many—very many—in the Christian Churches, whom you can carry with you—in sentiment, if not in actual service—so long as you are dealing with the concrete, and what they are kind enough to call the practical. For hospitals, for medical missions, for

various philanthropies, we can get their approval, though the approval does not always express itself in subscriptions.....But if Christians are only concerned with that which is the common and general sentiment of the land, is not the great question of our Lord still to be asked, 'What do ye more than others?' It is the 'something more,' the recognition and service of certain great spiritual obligations, the 'proving of the unseen,' that is the distinctive Christian element, and it is just that which is too often very faint and feeble in the life of our Churches."

That "something more," that "distinctive Christian element," that "distinctive note of the Christian life—communion with and dependence upon the Unseen,"—that is the very thing that is admittedly dying out throughout the length and breadth of Christendom. The trend of the times is against it. Knowledge is strangling it out of being. It was born in the night, and the advancing light of day is killing it. But the decease of supernatural religion does not imply the disappearance of morality from human relationships. Divinity departs, but humanity abides, and is uninjured. Communion with and dependence upon infinite and invisible beings ceases, but the "reign of sympathy and service among men" is being steadily established.

Yes, the inevitable trend is towards Secularism. Theology is out of date. Religious experience-meetings have lost their popularity, because religious experience is itself becoming obsolete. God is being bowed out of the very Universe which the Church declares to be his own creation and under his own control. The kingdom of heaven is receding to make room for the kingdom of earth, with man at its head. As yet, man has never had a chance to prove his quality, has never been given his innings in the game of life which he is called upon to play. In every supernatural religion man's place and mission are unreal and impossible, with the result that he has been kept in a state of miserable bondage. In a religious book published less than five years ago a doctor of divinity defines man as "a self-governing and self-determining unit in a community of units like himself, all related to and all under the gracious control of a supreme God." Is it possible even to imagine "a self-governing and self-determining unit" who is yet "under the gracious control of a supreme God"? A free agent under control! A self-determining creature in the hands of a predestinating Deity! The inevitable trend of this scientific age is away from such ineffably absurd teaching. As long as man was ignorant he was submissive and believed whatever he was told by those who pretended to be the earthly representatives of the Higher Powers, but now that he is slowly acquiring knowledge and discovering his true place in Nature, he is beginning to see through the false claims of the priests, and to judge for himself by the help of the knowledge placed at his disposal. Religious faith and natural knowledge are sworn enemies, and the one of necessity shuts out the other. The day of faith is past; the day of knowledge is coming in. This is the explanation of the heavy loss of members complained by the Churches, and of the decay of the spiritual life within themselves; and we have the authority of a prominent minister for saying that the dissolution of spiritual religion does not carry with it the destruction or even the weakening of the social and philanthropic virtues.

J. T. LLOYD.

Young Calvinism has less reverence and more love of novelty than its forefathers. It wants change, and it loves young blood. Polyandry is getting to be the normal condition of the Church; and about the time a man is becoming a little over-ripe for the livelier human sentiments, he may be pretty sure the women are looking round to find him a colleague.—*Oliver Wendell Holmes.*

Belief is involuntary; nothing involuntary is meritorious or reprehensible. A man ought not to be considered worse or better for his belief.—*Shelley.*

Acid Drops.

There is going to be a "National Passive Resistance Day" at Whitefield's Tabernacle on Friday, November 6. All the big guns of the movement will speak, including Dr. Clifford, Rev. A. T. Guttery, Dr. Rendel Harris, Rev. Silvester Horne, and Rev. F. B. Meyer. We have not heard of any of these "leaders" going to prison yet. Their word to their followers is "Go!" not "Come!" In the Passive Resistance battle the officers are safe at the rear.

It is "authoritatively" stated that the Government mean to push forward the old hung-up Education Bill this year. They will have to be very quick to do so. We wish them joy of their experiment. Their hinted proposal of the "right of entry" has been denounced with the last grain of emphasis by fighting Nonconformists like Dr. Clifford. On the other hand, their suggestion that "contracting out" shall be extremely limited, will raise the bitter opposition of Catholics and High Churchmen. It appears to us that the Liberal Government has never understood the passionate earnestness of people of all parties with real convictions on the subject of religious education. For, after all, it is religious education, and religious education only, that every Education Bill deals with.

The *Daily Chronicle*, which is gloating over a fool's paradise, blandly suggests that if the moderate men of all Christian denominations (never mind others!) can be brought into a common agreement, the "extremists" may safely be ignored. This simply means that all men and women of principle may be excluded from the settlement. Fortunately, the "if" in this case is a very stiff one. We do not see how peace is possible while religion is taught in the schools at all. When half a dozen dogs want the same bone, and it cannot possibly be divided, there must be "ructions"—until the bone of contention is taken away, by Secular Education.

The *Daily Chronicle* declares that Nonconformists are the backbone of the Liberal party. Our contemporary might now tell us who are its head. We know who are its tail.

Mr. Thomas White, J.P., of Bromsgrove, who died in September, aged eighty-three, left estate valued at £68,000. On the death of his only surviving sister the bulk of the estate will accrue to the British and Foreign Bible Society; so that, if fewer and fewer people believe the Bible, more and more will be able to read it—which the deceased gentleman evidently thought was something. Meanwhile, the Society receives a cash legacy of £500, and a similar sum goes to the Church Missionary Society. A further legacy of £500 goes to the Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews—which "speaks volumes" for the sanguine temperament of the testator. We understand that £500 is about equal to 5 per cent. of the cost of converting one Jew.

Rev. A. M. Mitchell, vicar of Burton Wood, by way of a thanksgiving service, told his congregation to show their gratitude to the Almighty for the first fruits of the earth by making an offering of money for some struggling agriculturalist. A collection was taken up, and it realised one shilling and three-halfpence. A rare fortune for the struggling agriculturalist!

The *Gladiator* cost the Admiralty £288,090 to build, and it has cost over £50,000 to raise her from where she sank off the Isle of Wight. Yet we read that she is now to be sold to shipbreakers, because sailors are too superstitious to man her again in the circumstances.

The *Daily Telegraph* admits that in the Turkish Empire "the real difficulty for the Reformers will not be to induce Mohammedans to be tolerant, but to get Armenian, Roman Catholic, Bulgarian, and Greek Christians to lay aside their ecclesiastical livery when they enter the Council Chamber of the nation."

Dr. Wardlaw Thompson told the Congregational Union a lot of nonsense about Mohammedanism, and it was all greedily swallowed by the clerical gentlemen present. He quoted from a number of Christians to prove that Mohammedanism is immensely inferior to Christianity; and he and his audience (so strange are the tricks of partisanship!) apparently thought that these quotations settled it. Quotations from the same Christians were given to prove that Mohammedan countries were never, and never could be, progressive. This is in face of the fact that at one time the only civilisation in Europe worth talking about was in

Mohammedan Spain; and also in face of the more recent fact that Turkey accomplished by a bloodless revolution in a few weeks what Christian countries took centuries to accomplish, with infinite tumult and bloodshed. The real truth is that the friends of Christian Missions are getting quite alarmed at the spirit and success of Mohammedan missionaries in Asia and Africa; and, as usual, these people say anything to raise the wind. They know very well—at least a good many of them do, including the Rev. Dr. Wardlaw Thompson—that they are feeding their credulous public with falsehoods. But what does that matter, if it keeps the pot boiling?

The *Monitor* of San Francisco reckons that of the eighty million inhabitants of the United States fifteen million are Catholics, thirty million Protestants, and thirty-five million who go to no church and profess no creed. The No-Church party is the biggest of the lot. Yet the Church parties rule the roost, because they have unlimited "cheek." There is no other reason.

According to the *Catholic Times* the state of things is as bad, if not worse, in our own country. "Out of every hundred of the British public," our contemporary says, "ten are Catholics, perhaps forty Protestants, and fifty Indifferentists."

Lord Ripon is a Catholic. The *Catholic Times* says that his career "will stand out for all time amongst the brightest landmarks of British statesmanship." Dear, dear! What large drafts some people make upon the future. There was a French poet called Rousseau (not Jean Jacques) who wrote an Ode to Posterity. He ventured to inflict it on the great Voltaire, who doubted if it would ever reach its address.

The late F. W. H. Myers, the author of a big expensive book on *Human Personality*, in which a future life was supposed to be established, has been claimed to be in communication with certain Spiritist "meejums" who have been trying to pass along messages from him in the "spirit-world." Some of these have been very loudly trumpeted, but they do not make much impression on the surviving members of the Myers' family. The following statement was made in a letter from Mrs. Myers to the *Times* (Oct. 23):—

"For some time papers and periodicals have been drawing the attention of the public to various spiritualistic messages purporting to come from my husband, the late F. W. H. Myers. My son and I wish to state in reply to many inquiries we have received that, after a very careful study of all the messages, we have found nothing which we can consider of the smallest evidential value."

Mrs. Myers writes from Richmond-terrace, Whitehall. Her letter is plain and decisive.

A year or two ago Gipsy Smith converted the United States of America. Never had such marvellous scenes been witnessed before. Christ was victorious all along the line. The Gipsy is back again in the land of the setting sun, re-converting it. From his own account we learn that his "mission in Baltimore has created more stir than anything previously known in the city." The people are being converted in batches of a thousand each at every meeting. Gipsy Smith is the Lord's favorite ambassador. The local ministers Heaven ignores, and showers all its honors on the Gipsy's head. And yet Christians never see the joke.

The Rev. David Pughe, of Sunderland, has just furnished an impressive instance of how to exemplify the spirit of compassionate and forgiving love so much insisted upon in the pulpit. When Mr. Pughe was not in the pulpit, he detected a begging impostor. The man ran away. Mr. Pughe pursued and captured him, holding him in spite of resistance until the police arrived. The magistrate committed the beggar to a month's imprisonment. That is how Mr. Pughe preaches the Gospel of free pardon when off duty. That is what evangelical obedience to Christ means in practice.

Of course, "J. B.," of the *Christian World*, is a parson, and looks at every question from the parsonic point of view. He is regarded as an exceptionally liberal-minded theologian, but his liberal-mindedness in theology does not prevent him from grossly misrepresenting the non-religious. In his article on "The Church as Social," he seems to think that the only alternative to organising society on a religious or supernatural basis is to organise it "on a basis of football or Sunday sing-songs." Is not "J. B." aware that all intelligent Freethinkers are in full agreement with when he says a society resting on the latter basis "cannot come to much"? If not, he ought to be. His treatment of his sub-

ject not only is lamentably inadequate, it is also wickedly inaccurate and misleading.

To divorce man from eternity—that is, from belief in a life after death—is, according to "J. B.," to effect an "immediate shrinkage of his being on all its nobler sides." That is merely a dogmatic assertion. Will "J. B." be good enough to prove it from history? That such is the reverend gentleman's opinion may be true enough; but he states it not as an *opinion*, but as a *fact*. We emphatically deny that it is a fact, and are prepared to verify our denial from history. We can point to many men who did not believe in the theological eternity, but whose being did *not* suffer shrinkage, immediate or ultimate, on any of its "nobler sides": will the *Christian World's* clever essayist first substantiate his bald assertion?

The Bishop of Derry might have adorned the Dark Ages; but he is an anachronism in the twentieth century. He calls man "a fallen, disgraced creature," who is yet "conscious of his kinship with the Divine." Were Dr. Chadwick to condescend to face the facts, he would see that both the Fall and the so-called consciousness of God are theologically manufactured articles, and that the material is so perishable that they must be manufactured afresh for each individual doomed to be their depository. Nature knows nothing of either. A naturally brought up man is as ignorant of God as the dog that follows him.

But Dr. Chadwick's puerilities are by no means exhausted. He says: A man "will laugh in your face if you advise him to rival Shakespeare." Of course he will; but where is there a man who is fool enough to tender such a silly advice? Has Dr. Chadwick himself ever given it? "But," the right reverend sky-pilot continues, "he does not laugh when you propose that he should become partaker of the Divine nature." Well, if he doesn't, there is something amiss with his risibles, for the one advice is as ridiculous as the other. When in church, however, a Gospel-hardened hearer can stand a lot: he is so accustomed to nonsensical utterances that he takes no notice.

Rev. T. Rhondda Williams, in the *Christian Commonwealth*, admits that Atheists are "standing in many ways for a higher moral standard than many who profess religion." Also that "the two men who stood up in the House of Commons in one of its debates to defend native races against injustice, were two men who do not profess Christianity, and they spoke without effect to many who would be horrified at their religious denials, and who would claim to love God and worship a crucified Savior." This ought to make Christians squirm. But it won't. They are too used to it.

Because Tacitus (xv. 44) speaks of the detestation in which Christians were held at Rome "for their evil practices," Mr. R. J. Campbell declares that thereby this Latin writer "shows how little he really knew either about Jesus or his followers." How does the oracle of the City Temple know that the Christians of Rome were not guilty of "evil practices"? Will he adduce evidence that the accusations levelled against them were false? Bald assertions are worthless against the testimonies of contemporaries.

Mr. Campbell takes it for granted that the Chrestus referred to by Suetonius, as inciting the Jews to rebel at Rome, is the Jesus Christ of the four Gospels. This is a perfectly arbitrary assumption. Chrestus was a common name enough then, and Jesus Christ was never at Rome. Christian scholars are not in agreement with Mr. Campbell on this matter. His references to Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny show that he has never given the alleged "evidence" of these writers serious attention. His reference to Josephus points in the same direction.

The biggest and hottest discussion at the Congregational Conference was over "Immanence or Incarnation"—or Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee.

"There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow." We suppose the same must be said of the fall of a clergyman. Rev. Frank Toone, pastor of the Union Baptist Church, High Wycombe, met with a cycling accident while returning home from a village appointment, and died shortly afterwards without regaining consciousness. The reverend gentleman was "called" to the ministry, and apparently "called" out of it.

The settlement of the Dreyfus case did exorcise the evil spirit of the Church-and-Army tribe. A member of the

Chamber of Deputies had to be ordered out of the place by the President for calling the Supreme Court judges who declared Dreyfus's innocence "forgers and prevaricators." These reactionists have the manners of their principles.

We clip the following from the *Westminster Gazette* :—

"The controlling interest in the *Academy* has been acquired by Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas, who will continue to edit the paper as heretofore. Lord Alfred's editorship dates from June, 1907."

This gentleman, who edits the *Academy* in such a violently pious manner, is, we presume, a son of the late Marquis of Queensberry, who was a professed Agnostic. Lord Queensberry was responsible for the hunting down of Oscar Wilde. We understand that Lord Alfred Douglas was one of Oscar Wilde's bosom friends. He appears to belong to the religion that Oscar Wilde died in.

"Old Nick" is dead. He was an odd-job man who stood outside the Theistic Church in Swallow-street for many years. He was knocked down by a cab and killed. Nobody knew his other name. The original "Old Nick" was knocked down and killed by Reason.

General Booth having set sail from South Africa for England, the London papers were carefully set to work puffing him before his arrival. He was expected to arrive on October 31, and on October 22 the *Daily News* (for instance) started celebrating the great success of his South African tour. We are told that it has been "a truly great campaign," and that the position of the "Army" is stronger than ever. This sort of stuff is obviously inspired. The British public are told what the Salvation Army officials want them to believe. Such is the value of "religious" news in the "glorious free press" of old England. Not a word is said, of course, about the hostile criticism of William Booth and his doings in the South African press.

Special regulations are made for the "Suffragette" prisoners to relieve the discomfort and monotony of their incarceration. They are luckier than the "Blasphemy" prisoners ever were—even when they were women, like Mrs. Carlile (Richard's brave wife) or Matilda Roalfe.

We suggest that all "political" prisoners should be lodged in future, the men at the Cecil and the women at the Carlton. "Freethought" prisoners will go to Holloway and Wormwood Scrubs.

Catholic liars or Protestant liars—which are the worst? We hesitate to award the biscuit. We may say, however, that, speaking generally, Christian liars are the most proficient and industrious on earth. We have exposed a good many of them at various times, but the liar-crop is perennial. Here is a fresh sample from a recent number of the *Catholic Times* (Oct. 16). Reference is made to the great Positivist and French Dictionary maker, M. Littré, and the following pretty yarn is told about his "latter end":—

"It was the false simplicity of Monism which had seduced his reason, and made it prisoner to error. But it could not imprison his soul, and make it forget its hunger and thirst for the infinite. At the end of an austere and laborious life, Littré found tears for the faults of his youth: 'I weep,' he said, 'because I have sinned, and now know not of whom I can ask forgiveness.' On his death-bed he learnt, and came back to Christianity like an exile returning to his country."

There is not a word of truth in this. It is sheer pious invention from beginning to end.

We dealt with this matter more than twenty years ago, and all the facts of the case may be found in our *Infidel Death-Beds*. Littré was a Positivist; he had no belief in God or a future life. In the last article he ever wrote, called "For the Last Time," only a year before his death at the advanced age of eighty-one, he said: "I find it impossible to accept the theory of the world which Catholicism prescribes to all true believers; but I do not regret being without such doctrines, and I cannot discover in myself any wish to return to them." Littré never whined about his "sins" and longed for "forgiveness." Neither did he ever come back to Christianity. What happened was this. His wife was an ardent Catholic, and while he was in a state of stupor, on the morning of the very day of his death, she herself administered to him the sacrament of baptism. She had sent for a priest, but he had not arrived. She had excluded his own friends from his sick room, he was helpless in her hands, and she betrayed him into the hands of his intellectual enemies. Very likely she meant well—in

her way, as a good Catholic; perhaps she thought what she was doing would make it easier for his soul in Kingdom-Come. But, judging from a human standpoint, she acted with shocking treachery.

If it were true that Littré whined about his "sins" and longed for "forgiveness," if he really "came back to Christianity" at last, would he have been baptised so very late, in such a hurry, and by Mde. Littré herself? Would the rite not have been administered in the regular way by a priest? The Abbé Huvelin, Mde. Littré's confessor, was allowed access to him by her "as a friend" during his last illness, which was of long duration. Would he not have been only too glad to baptise Littré himself, and gain the honor and *éclat* of introducing such a famous heretic to Holy Mother Church? The fact is that Littré was "converted" by a trick. And now, after the lapse of all those years, the simple story of his death-bed baptism, by his religious wife, in a state of unconsciousness, has developed into the beautiful story in the *Catholic Times*. "Lies—lies again—and still they lie!"

Some men of God are at times truthful and honest. One of them is the Rev. T. E. Ruth, of Liverpool, who frankly admits that Christ "does not see of the travail of his soul, and is not satisfied"; that "the Free Churches are losing hold"; that "Christianity is not in possession"; or, in other words, that the ministry of the Holy Ghost is a failure. Why, then, does Mr. Ruth remain in the Church when its impotence is so patent to all whose eyes are open? Why does he still preach a Savior who has so signally belied his name? Since Christianity is not an efficacious remedy for the world's dreadful maladies, why not try something else? Why not throw the ministry overboard as a bad job, and take to secular lecturing?

Rev. Dr. Garvie, preaching the Congregational Union sermon at Liverpool, made at once a strange admission and an irrational claim. "He thanked God that the attitude of the Christian Church to other religions had changed. He believed that God was with the great teachers of other faiths." Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Mohammedanism are all from God. But if they are from God, they ought to be the very best possible religions for the people who cherish them. Hence, the foreign missions of Christianity are so many insults to the Deity. It is as if the Christians said to their Heavenly Father, "Thou gavest such and such religions to China, but we deem them sources of degradation and misery to that great nation, and out of sheer pity we urge upon it the religion thou gavest us."

Now comes Dr. Garvie's irrational claim: "Yet dealing as generously as they could with these religions, were they to say that Jesus must step down from his pre-eminence?" Most certainly not; for we, the highest specimens of human nature on the globe, are surely in possession of the very best religion; and, to show our vast superiority, we must force our religion and our culture upon the rest of the world. How lucky God is to have us Christians to set his Universe right, and to demonstrate to the wretched heathen how much kinder he has been to us than to them, and how he has loaded us with priceless gifts which, out of our marvellous generosity, we are prepared to share with them. Such is the intolerable self-conceit of Christian nations!

At the Liverpool meeting of the Congregational Union, prominent divines disputed and wrangled most vehemently about God for the space of two hours. They all professed to believe that God himself was present and heard the whole controversy; and yet he never said, although in one word he could have settled the quarrel forever. How inexplicable a behavior on his part.

Rev. Dr. Wardlaw Thompson, speaking from the Chair of the Congregational Union at Liverpool, said that "Christianity is on its trial." We declare, on the other hand, that Christianity was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to annihilation long ago, and that it has been in the process of passing away ever since. That Dr. Thompson is himself aware of this is fairly clear from more than one sentence in his address; and it follows that the case for missions, as stated by him, is extremely flimsy and unconvincing. Fancy an ordained servant of heaven saying that "the question of our Lord's ability to cope with the conditions of the new times is premature"; which is equivalent to, "Give him yet another chance." What black blasphemy, from the religious point of view, and, from that of the Secularist, what wicked trifling with the situation!

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, November 1, Town Hall, Birmingham: at 3, "Jesus Christ: Who and What?" at 7, "The Present Position of God."

November 8, Nelson; 22, Stratford Town Hall; 29, Liverpool.

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—241 High-road, Leyton.—November 15, Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society; 22, Fails-worth; 29, Birmingham.
- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—November 15, Stratford Town Hall.
- THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Previously acknowledged. Annual Subscriptions, £272 19s. 2d. Received since.—Dr. E. B. Foote (New York), £4; J. S. Hutchinson (S. Africa), £1; C. T. Saldanha (India), 10s.
- ROBERT YATES.—(1) Charles Bradlaugh never "refused" to take the Oath in the House of Commons. That is a pious tradition, without the slightest foundation in truth. (2) He was never a local preacher. (3) Any member of Parliament can affirm now, and a good many do, by claiming the right under the Oaths Act introduced and carried through by Charles Bradlaugh—and under that Act only. (4) No thanks whatever for this are due to John Morley. (5) We do not know of any Atheist in history, unless it be the great Julius Cæsar "the foremost man of all this world"—but that was before the Christian era. Frederick the Great was a Freethinker, and all religions, or no-religions, enjoyed perfect toleration under his rule. Akbar, perhaps the greatest of all the modern rulers of India, was also a Freethinker, and he likewise extended equal toleration to all religious opinions.
- R. J. HENDERSON writes: "I wish to thank Mr. Mann very much for his most interesting article on China and the Taeping rebellion. I never knew before what the real origin of that rebellion was, though I have been several times in China. Gordon got the *kudos*, but the other men did the hard work. It does happen so in this world very often."
- G. EHRMANN.—Thanks for cuttings.
- F. J. VOISEY.—Too many demands on our space this week.
- C. T. SALDANHA (India) subscribes to the President's Honorarium Fund as "a small mark of the immense gratitude he owes to the editor of the *Freethinker*."
- T. S. EALES.—No room till next week. Thanks.
- G. NEWMAN.—We will look into the matter. Glad you are so interested in our *Reminiscences of Charles Bradlaugh*, especially as your memory goes back over the whole period it covers. You wish we would enlarge it into a Life of Bradlaugh. Others have expressed the same wish. But how are we to get the requisite leisure?
- N. J. EVANS.—Pleased to hear you were "delighted" to be at the "social" at Anderton's Hotel; also that the Wood Green Branch is going to surprise us. We are always cheerfully ready for shocks of that kind.
- W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always very welcome.
- J. S. HUTCHINSON (S. Africa).—On the whole, you had better order the *Freethinker* through the common trade channels. The paper gets better known, and a better chance, that way. We are glad to hear that you read this journal "with unabated interest and enjoyment," and that of all your mail papers it is the one you turn to first.
- A. Fagg.—May find it useful. Thanks.
- H. J. WILLIAMS.—Shall be dealt with next week.
- W. OWEN.—Pleased to hear Mr. Wishart had "well attended and most appreciative" audiences at Glasgow.
- ELIZABETH LECHMERE.—Always glad to receive cuttings.
- THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- PERSONS remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send *halfpenny stamps*.
- 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.
- SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS: Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote delivers two lectures to-day (Nov. 1) in the great Birmingham Town Hall. For half an hour before each lecture, afternoon and evening, a military band of thirty performers will render an excellent selection of music. Admission to all parts of the hall is free at both meetings. The local "saints" should therefore try to bring along as many of their more orthodox acquaintances as possible. Friends attending the lectures from places beyond Birmingham are informed that tea will be provided in the large anteroom of the Town Hall between the afternoon and evening meetings.

Mr. Foote had a capital audience at Stanley Hall on Sunday evening. His lecture on "The Other Side of Death" was listened to for a good deal over an hour with the closest attention and very warmly applauded. Miss Vance, who occupied the chair, appealed for questions and discussion, but none was forthcoming. A fair amount of business, however, was done at the bookstall.

One gentleman who spoke to Mr. Foote after the Stanley Hall lecture stated he was booked for entering the Congregational ministry when a chance copy of the *Freethinker* turned the current of his life. A fact like this should encourage the "saints" in that private missionary work which we have so often urged them to undertake.

Mr. Foote visits Nelson, in Lancashire, next Sunday (Nov. 8) and delivers two lectures, afternoon and evening, in the Alhambra Picture Hall (North-street, Scotland-road), which has lately been reconstructed and beautified. Large audiences are expected from the populous district in which Nelson is situated; and to provide for the physical wants of friends attending from a distance, a tea is being arranged for by Mr. Holroyd, at the Grand Café, 20 Market-street, opposite the Town Hall. The cost of the tea will be eightpence per head, but a postcard must be sent by intending visitors to Mr. Holroyd not later than Thursday, Nov. 5. There will be a number of reserved seats at the lectures, at 1s., 6d., and 3d., which may be obtained of Mr. V. Page, 44 Leeds-road, Nelson. Doors will be open to non-ticketholders a quarter of an hour before each lecture, and a collection made as they enter.

The New Wood Green Branch of the National Secular Society means business. Mr. J. T. Lloyd has been engaged to open the winter campaign with a lecture at 7 o'clock this evening (Nov. 1) in the Alma Hall, 385 High-road. We do not know the subject of Mr. Lloyd's address, but whatever he says will be worth listening to. Admission is free. The Branch hopes to be able to get a larger hall for Mr. Foote to lecture in later on in the season. We hope all the local Freethinkers will rally round the Wood Green Branch.

We see by the New York *Truthseeker* that Mr. Mangasarian is back in Chicago and lecturing again on Sundays for the Independent Religious Society (Rationalist). On Sunday, October 18, his subject was "New Movements of Life and Thought in Europe." We hope to see a report of this lecture in one or other of our American exchanges.

The same number of the *Truthseeker* gives a report of Mr. Eugene Macdonald, the editor, who is still seeking recovery from lung trouble through the open-air cure. He appears to be making a little progress. We hope in time to hear of his being back in the editorial chair, which is ably occupied at present by his brother George.

Dr. E. B. Foote, who so worthily sustains the family tradition inaugurated by his noble-minded father, writes to us from New York under date of October 16, enclosing a subscription in response to our recent appeal. "You do so well," he says, "as a writer, talker, and publisher, that it is a pity you have to spend any time, thought, or worry and effort as a financier and money-getter." We appreciate the compliment, and hope the good wish may some day be realised.

Mr. A. R. Orage, editor of the *New Age*, one of the best written and most intellectual of the Socialist organs, asks in last week's issue whether his paper is to die. He says it is

not afraid to die, but it would prefer to live. During the past eighteen months, under Mr. Orage's editorship, it has had the advantage of contributions by many brilliant writers, including Mr. Bernard Shaw, yet it has "been accumulating an average weekly loss of close upon £20." Some of this, of course, has been capital expenditure, but the rest is due to want of circulation, although the position of the *New Age* is, from that point of view, far better than it was eighteen months ago. "Intellectual pioneering," Mr. Orage remarks, "was never a profitable enterprise." With this melancholy, but most true, statement he appeals to his readers for help in the shape of shares in a registered Company. For our part, we wish him success. We have nothing to do with Socialism in the *Freethinker*, but all sorts of sociological and intellectual questions have been discussed in the *New Age*, and, considering what the English press generally is, a paper with any real mental life in it fulfils a useful function and ought not to perish for want of mere provender.

While we have been keeping the flag of the *Freethinker* flying, during more than a quarter of a century, we have seen many papers—some of them worthy of a better fate—come and go. Plenty of money has been sunk in some of them, but it did not avert their doom, although it may have prolonged their agony. Our own task has been a heavy one. We know, as well as anybody, and better than most, that "intellectual pioneering is never a profitable enterprise." We have lately had to step into the breach again and personally assume the entire responsibility of carrying on the *Freethinker*. We had already paid money out of our own pocket for some months to secure the continuity of its existence. That money, of course, came out of the Honorarium Fund subscribed for our own personal use; and more money from the same Fund has since gone the same way. We are doing our utmost to arrange matters so that the weekly loss shall be minimised, and reduced, if possible, to nothing. But in the meantime our friends will see how necessary it is that the Honorarium Fund should be sustained.

Many of our friends might help us to promote our circulation more rapidly—for it is improving, slowly yet surely, and is considerably larger now than it was three years ago. It would be a great assistance to us if we could get advertisements, as other journals do, but the bigotry against us is still too great for that, and we have to trust almost entirely to our circulation; which is one reason why it is not feasible to reduce the price of the *Freethinker* to one penny. It is our circulation, then, that we want to see continuously progressing. Some of our friends can send us the names and addresses of persons who might become regular readers of the paper if we posted them free copies (as we are always happy to do) for six consecutive weeks. Other friends could order an extra copy, or even more, for judicious distribution amongst their friends and acquaintances. Others could put pressure upon Smith and Son's and other railway bookstall keepers. If all these bookstall keepers supplied the *Freethinker* freely, it would make a good deal of difference. If they would only display it on the bookstalls as they do other papers, we believe our financial troubles would cease and never return.

Under the heading of "A Curious Will" the *Westminster Gazette* announces that Miss Jane Kerr Davies, of Farquhar House, Richmond Hill-road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, who died on September 17, and whose estate has just been proved at £89,243 gross, directed that her body should be cremated with no religious service, and her ashes scattered in the garden of her residence. We wonder if this direction was carried out. Can any of our Birmingham readers inform us? The deceased lady seems to have had Freethought tendencies.

The *Hereford Times* is liberal enough to print a long letter from Mr. F. Bonte on "The 'Real Presence.'" The letter is perfectly polite but thorough-going in its criticism of Catholic—that is, Christian—doctrines.

Just as we are going to press a letter reaches us from Mr. Joseph Bates stating that there is trouble again at Boston. The Corn Exchange had been engaged for Sunday evening meetings during the winter, but "several prominent members of the Church" put pressure upon the lessee and induced him to refuse to carry out the contract. It was only in consequence of threats that he allowed the lecture which had been advertised to take place on Sunday evening. Such is "Christian charity" after nearly two thousand years' practice. We have written Mr. Bates for particulars of the contract.

The God of Wrath.

A Merciful Christ the Christian's Apology or Erratum for the Vengeful Jehovah.

BY DR. JOHN EMERSON ROBERTS.

EACH one of the great religions has had its own god or gods. As many religions, so many gods. These have differed from each other in many ways. These gods have inspired different Bibles, required different sacrifices and ceremonies, and established different priesthoods. But in one thing they have been similar. Each has been a God of wrath. Each has been subject to spells of anger, jealousy and vindictiveness. No religion of mankind has ever imagined or devised a god that was uniformly kind, loving, good-natured and just.

The origin of the gods grew primarily out of the ignorance and fear of mankind. The theory of the existence of a Supreme Being was not based upon any philosophy, nor upon any revelation, nor upon any discovery, nor upon moral necessity. It was the ignorant world's attempt to account for things. Perhaps man in his childhood no more than in his maturity was able to think of anything without imagining some cause for it. When, therefore, man saw the storm, he thought of some being producing the storm; when he saw the lightning fly athwart the sky, he imagined that God was the cause of it, and said it was Jupiter hurling the thunderbolt; when he saw the sea rise and fall in perpetual motion, rush daily upon the shores and daily recede, he said: "It is a god; Poseidon, the deity of the sea, is doing this thing."

When he saw the storm and heard the wind, he said "there must be another god for that, it is Boreas that has unloosed the 'sightless couriers of the wind'"; when he saw, night by night, the stars come up and go down, he said that each one was attended by a deity or spirit that pushed it across the sky; when he saw the fountain rising and flowing away, sometimes leaping above its apparent source, he said, "there is a deity resident in the fountain." When he walked in the forest and listened to the viewless wind and heard it moaning through the tree tops, he said, "the grove is the residence of some spirit." But the aspect of nature was more terrible than kind. There was everywhere about him the marks of disaster; disease, pestilence and famine lay in wait for him. Sickness came upon him and he spent his terrified life in the perpetual presence of death. All these things were caused by gods. There was so much more of suffering and terror than there was of happiness and repose that his idea of God came to be one of a Being of terror, of vindictiveness, of wrath. And, thus, through all the early conceptions of mankind, God was a being of terror. They thought of his wrath. He was powerful, and they stood in fear of him.

They fashioned, from necessity of thought, their gods like themselves. No man can imagine a Being wholly different from himself or his experience. Men always made their gods in the image of themselves. The oriental people, whose dream of happiness was one of perfect rest, who seek oblivion, the people who think that life with its activities and its toils is an affliction and whose utmost dream of eternal bliss is the being absorbed into unthinking existence—these peoples pictured their god as a being of infinite repose—the silent, the oblivious one.

On the other hand, the people who were stirred with the dream of conquest, who loved war and its spoils and plunder, pictured their god as a conqueror, as a consuming fire, as one perpetually in conflict with his enemies, and whose ultimate triumph would result in the overthrow of all that opposed him and his people. But all of the modern gods have been simply imitations. It has been thousands of years since any religion has given to the world a new conception of God. The Christian religion has nothing whatever about it that is original. In all of its

ceremonies and in all of its idea and conception of God it is but an imitation. Here, as everywhere, the old law holds that the imitator will copy more nearly the defects and imperfections of his model than he will of its excellences and virtues. The Christian religion took the old conception of God, and in order to improve it began the process of elimination. It reduced the number of gods to one and made that one three. The Christian religion copied all of its festivals and ceremonies. It was a blend between the pagan religions, the Jewish religion and the humane and practical religion that was taught by the prophet of Galilee.

The being from which the Christian religion copied its god was the Jehovah of the ancient barbaric Jewish people. These people were essentially barbarians. They did not belong even with the civilised peoples of that day. They had neither art nor manufactures, nor even agriculture. We know them chiefly as they went from their bondage in Egypt, a great company of slaves, with all of the degradation and ignorance that are incident to four centuries of bondage. But they were stern monotheists. They had a vigorous conception of God, and we, as a Christian religion, have copied it exactly. The character of the Jehovah of that ancient people is seen most clearly in the story of the Jewish people of ancient times. The conduct of Jehovah in the garden of Eden is an index of his character. The god that was the author of the scheme was subtle, cunning and unprincipled. Think of a beautiful garden with everything that nature can produce to awaken the desire, the lust, the thought of pleasure in the breast of man, and two beings, innocent and inexperienced, placed there, and a command given them, without any apparent reason for it, an arbitrary prohibition. There may have been some excuse for it, but the poor innocent pair were not acquainted with the excuse. Simply this, there was the prohibition of a certain tree; of its fruit they were not to eat, and if they ate of it they should die. Into the garden a subtle tempter was put. He began an argument with the innocents, and said: "There's no reason for that prohibition; it's arbitrary; it is the misguided notion of some over-zealous reformer; the garden's yours, and the fruit of every tree is yours; eat it and be wise." And they ate it and were driven out. If that Jehovah had been a being of principle he would have sat down in the shade with the innocents and explained to them the reason for his prohibition. He made a pair of people, endowed them presumably with reason, and then the first act of that God was to ignore their reason and violate their own intellectual independence and self-respect. Religion has been doing that ever since. From that day until this, one of the primal requirements has been to blind the eyes of reason, stifle inquiry, ask no questions, but believe, blindly believe and be saved. Question, doubt, and die.

The character of this Jehovah is further illustrated in the sacrifices that he required. Simply blood—blood—blood, slain beasts, altars dripping with gore, every sacred place like the shambles of a slaughterhouse. And that was our ancient Jehovah. They used to count the sacrifices—so many hundreds or so many thousands of cattle and sheep. But when Solomon dedicated his temple, rich king that he was, and being the king and having the property of all of his subjects at his command, not being under the necessity of working himself, never knowing the ardent toil necessary to care for a herd and have it multiply and increase in value, ignorant of all that, he sacrificed sheep and oxen until they tired of counting, and the sacred record says that their sacrifices of sheep and oxen could not be counted or numbered. All of this to please Jehovah.

Could anything be more obnoxious to a just and proper God? Could the people possibly have acquired any other idea than that he was a bloody deity, and delighted in slaughter and in slaying things? And when he made war he carried out the same idea of slaughter. He said to them: "When

you go up against a town, offer it terms of peace; and, if it accepts the offer, then all of its people shall be subject unto you." That is, they were to give up their city for slavery; they were to become bondmen for ever. "But if the city will not accept the offers of peace, then make siege against it, and I, the Lord, will deliver it into your hands, and ye shall put every male inhabitant to the sword, but the women and the little ones and the cattle, the silver and the gold, and the spoils thereof, ye shall take with you for your possession; and when I, the Lord, have given the city into your hands, thou shalt suffer nothing that breatheth to remain alive." That was the command that Jehovah gave his people.

After Joshua had made a successful campaign in the land of Canaan, and had destroyed one city after another and subjugated or exterminated one tribe after another, he gathered the people together and recounted to them not what he had done, but what the Lord had done for them. And in that marvellous address he reviewed all their history and spoke not for himself, but distinctly said: "I, the Lord thy God"—and then he went on to tell what Jehovah had done. "You were in Egypt," he said, "and you know what I did in Egypt, how I brought plague and pestilence and death upon your masters until they let you go; and when they followed you, you know how I drowned Pharaoh and his chariots and his horsemen in the sea, and then lest they should follow you, I placed a cloud of darkness between you and them by day and fire by night that they should not come upon you; and when they sought Balaam, a priest of another god, to curse you, I would not hear his curse, and caused him to bless you. And when you came to the land of the Amorites and the Hittites I sent the hornet before you to drive out the people." And after he had recounted all that the Lord had done in the way of war and extermination, he said in his peroration: "And the land for which ye did not labor and the cities that ye did not build ye dwell in and possess, and of the olive yards and of the vineyards that ye planted not do ye eat." That was Jehovah, the god of our Old Testament, the God that we have copied, the God whom they say we must worship and are Infidel or Atheist if we deny that he is God.

The later God is a modification of the ancient Jehovah. I have wondered if there were not reasons for the doctrine of the trinity to be found in the abhorrent character of the ancient God that the Christian religion has never been able to throw aside or deny. If he is a being of wrath and anger and vindictiveness then there surely came a time when the longing heart of man wished another God, a different and a better God. But they were not yet sufficiently strong of intellect and daring to reject the old entirely and make a new one. So they kept the old God, and by way of apology for his harshness, his cruelty, they added the second person of the trinity, the Christ, and I think that the God Christ is the Christian apology for the God Jehovah. But there is on the part of the first God the same thirst for blood, the lust for sacrifice, but now all the sheep and oxen of Solomon could not satisfy that thirst for blood. It must be the blood of his own son.

This has been represented as the glory of the Christian religion. Could anything be more abhorrent? Is it not a time that Infidelity—nay, against such a being Atheism—be given the place of reverence and sanctity, and the religion that exalts and holds forth such a God as the object for our love, our homage and our reverence—that that worship be Atheism and Infidelity? Has not the time come when it is an act of worship to deny that such a being is the God of this universe and all mankind are his children?

But even the Christ they could not quite separate from wrath, for the time will come when he will change; they will transform that gentle, loving Nazarene into a besom of destruction, a consuming fire, a destroying angel, a swift and remorseless judge.

And so they had to conceive the idea of an eternal penitentiary, of a place of endless confinement, where God's enemies might be, and thus came the idea of Hell. Men did not want their enemies to be reconciled with God. The subjects and favorites of a king did not want their king to make terms with their enemies save the terms which brought them into captivity and bondage. Men that professed to love and serve God did not want those that did not to be reconciled with God. They wanted them to be crushed into the frightful eternal imprisonment in Hell. That is where the old doctrine came from. They put the same limitations on their God of wrath that they found within themselves.

The only way to save God to this world is to abandon the gods of the past. There never was an age, never a generation, never a civilisation on the globe that was capable of forming an idea and conception of God that is worthy and adequate for the generation that now lives. We know more of the world, we know more of justice, we have wider knowledge than any age that ever lived. We do not go back thousands of years for our idea of political economy or the science of agriculture, or steam navigation; we go to the scientists, the discoverers and the inventors of to-day. We do not think the wooden ploughs our fathers used are good enough for us. We take the modern product. Only in religion we think that the older the gods the better; the more barbaric the people that produced theology, the more holy, sacred, and civilised it is. We must outgrow the old gods just as we outgrew the wooden plough and the two-wheeled ox-cart and the prairie schooner. We must have a modern God—a God without wrath or anger. Men have juggled with the name of God, and people are afraid, because of that single word, to think, to reason, to speak. The Bible is held as the Word of God, and its pages have been let alone for a great many generations; and if a thing there is ascribed to God, it must be believed, and if it seems horrible, and out of all harmony with right and justice and goodness, then we must simply say that God's ways are not our ways, they are higher above us than the heavens are higher above the earth; but they are not.

Men are persuaded that it is better to have no God at all than to have a God of wrath and blood. Better to have no God at all than to have one who has to be reconciled. There is a lack of manliness about our religion. The thought of the necessity of mediation is the thought of the coward. To say a ceremony, whatever it may be, is demanded of the Infinite, to say that a priesthood, however ancient it may be, is necessary for a mediatory service, to say that the Church has within its keeping and for its administration saving sacraments, is absurd. It makes God little, it shrivels him and reduces him until there is no longer within him attributes of dignity or grandeur or nobility. Under the present dispensation of religion God is a secondary thing. The priest, the ceremony, the Church, they are the chief things. They hold the keys of heaven and hell. They are the keepers of the door that leads to life. They are the possessors of the only knowledge of the way of salvation, and while the Church and priesthood and the creeds are doing all this, God is somewhere, absent, waiting to see how well they will succeed. He is an absent God administering the affairs of the earth through his agents, his viceroy, his representatives.

We are advancing. The pathway of mankind is ascending. It does not go down. The time will come when we shall be so religious that we shall no longer need the priests. We shall be independent and superior to all the theologies. We shall not need the Church as a means of grace, nor its sacraments, nor its ceremonies, nor its salvation. Science will be the revelation of the new God. The priests will be the teachers of the world, and all that will be required to secure the favor of that universal god will be honor, honesty, and service to the world of man.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Whimshurst.

II.—PSYCHICAL RESEARCH.

"WONDERFUL!" ejaculated Mr. Ezra Pukes.

"What's that?" said the Rev. Dridge, starting up out of his dozing by the library fireplace.

"Why, according to the 'Daily Sensation,' we are on the eve of a tremendous discovery. Some amazing *séances* have been given by Madame Dubbblicité in London at a hall rented by the spiritualists. It seems to be beyond a doubt that communication with the dead has really been effected."

"Dear me," said the Rev. Dridge, rubbing his drowsy eyes, "what a marvellous age we are living in. What with the Higher Criticism, wireless telegraphy, submarine boats, aeroplanes and hydroplanes, and the other wonderful contrivances of man's ingenuity, we must be nearing a consummation. And now we have communication with the dead! We must see farther into this, Pukes."

Mr. Pukes enthusiastically seconded his friend's proposition.

"I'll write to Madame Dubbblicité at once," he said, "and invite her to Whimshurst. We'll make up a party, Dridge. I'll invite Professor Steptoe, the physicist; the Honorable Frederick and Mrs. Chawday; my immediate neighbor and good friend, Herr Boodelblitz; and my cousins, Sir Joshua and Lady Wampkins. We ought to have a very interesting time, eh?"

"I hope we shall," answered the Rev. Dridge somewhat hesitatingly, "but Lady Wampkins is rather unsympathetic towards the Church of England and its representatives. You know, Pukes, she acts as if only those of the Baptist persuasion are of any importance in this or the world to come."

"She is rather difficult, I grant you," replied Mr. Pukes, "but my object in inviting her here is for the benefit of the party. My cook, as you know, is a Tartar when the fit takes her, and the other servants are afraid of her; but Lady Wampkins is very much more than a match for the cook. So long as we get satisfactory meals, Dridge, we'll put up with Lady Wampkins and her big notions of the importance of Baptists."

"Well, well," said the Rev. Dridge, assuming an air of comic resignation, "I suppose we shall have to regard ourselves as being afflicted for our good."

"That's about it," replied Mr. Pukes, who had begun to draft out his letters of invitation, "but we musn't let Lady Wampkins gather that impression from us. She is, I fear, already inclined to militant suffragism, and Amazonian heroics would be decidedly out of place at Whimshurst."

"At any rate, Pukes," said the Rev. Dridge, merrily, "we have a secure place of refuge. I don't think Lady Wampkins would brave the perils of your menagerie."

"That she wouldn't," replied Mr. Pukes, chucklingly; "on several occasions she has told me I must be somewhat mad to maintain such a horrid collection of animals."

They laughed.

So Mr. Pukes posted his letters of invitation, and all were accepted. The first to arrive were Sir Joshua and his wife, and the resulting unusual energy displayed by the Whimshurst domestics was eloquent testimony to the house-managing capabilities of Lady Wampkins. Sir Joshua was rather a podgy sort of knight who, in spite of his efforts to cultivate a pomposity of manner which he considered was necessary to his recently-acquired dignity, still retained the yes-madam-what-can-I-do-for-you kind of style which had been his daily attitude for so many years in the provision trade. On the other hand, Lady Wampkins was a woman of very liberal proportions, who swept along with the air of an empress.

Later in the day the others, with the exception of Madame Dubbblicité, arrived in their motor-cars. Madame came from London by a late train, and was met at the station by Mr. Pukes and the Rev. Dridge in the former gentleman's splendid automobile. She was accompanied by a woman of about her own age, but who, unlike herself, was fair and somewhat shrinking in her manner, whereas Madame was dark-haired and dark-eyed, with a boldness of demeanor which was somewhat disconcerting at first acquaintance.

And while Madame was speeding through the night-shrouded lanes which led windingly from the distant railway-station to Whimshurst, the other guests were eagerly awaiting her arrival. Herr Boodelblitz had just unloaded his mind of some ponderous observations which were transcendently incomprehensible, and these observations he had addressed in particular to Professor Steptoe. The Professor coughed slightly to clear his throat. "Outer space, I believe, is full of immense psychic possibilities," he said; "but the great difficulty is to get in touch with these."

"Do you think there is any danger in trying?" asked Mrs. Chawday, simperingly.

"Who knows," replied the Professor.

"Und if dhere is," interposed Herr Boodelblitz, "we must prave id. We learn nodding in diss world vidout we try in udder scorn of gonsquence."

"Hear, hear," said Professor Steptoe.

"First class," interjected Sir Joshua.

"Our prison of clay prevents us from realising, except in the feeblest manner, the grandeur and glory of those who regard us from the immensity of outer space," said Professor Steptoe with the air of one who considers he knows very much more than anybody else.

"Yes, Pwofessah," drawled the honorable Frederick Chawday, "and it is because the world lacks the poetic instinct that that wealisation is so difficult of attainment. But, you know, in the words of the poet, 'Walls do not a pwison make, naw i'on babs a cage,' and man for ever stwiving will fnally get that which he is stwiving for."

"Nothing like application," broke in Sir Joshua; "that was always my motto in business. Application all the time. I should never have heard His Majesty say 'Rise, Sir Joshua,' but for application." Sir Joshua was about to add something else, when, at this moment, Madame arrived. She was hurriedly presented to them all, retiring immediately afterwards, for the long ride from London and the lateness of the hour had made her feel thoroughly weary.

For several days she gave but sparing display of her occult powers, but on the Saturday she announced that she had become sufficiently imbued with the "atmosphere" of Whimshurst to be able to communicate with those who had lived there in the past.

Saturday had dawned, and had remained gloomy and threatening, with a wind that skurried gustily from the west, bringing with it occasional showers of rain. Overhead huge clouds of ever-changing fantastic shapes whirled along furiously. Nothing seemed to be afield, and only a few crows ventured a tossing flight through the greatly-disturbed air. The wind somewhat abated towards night-fall, but this did not prevent the day closing more depressingly than it had opened.

It had been decided that the culminating *séance* should be held in Mr. Pukes' spacious library, and thither, after dinner, the guests were conducted by the Rev. Dridge. And quite informally, but very skilfully, Madame Dubhclité commenced the conversation. Madame spoke English excellently, notwithstanding a Frenchified pronunciation of certain words which seemed rather affected than natural. Indeed, at the Spiritualists' hall in London a gentleman had expressed the opinion that she had learned English of an East Anglian teacher, and Madame, with some confusion, had told him that his surmial was correct.

Professor Stoptoe was questioning Madame.

"Are you ever conscious of what is happening when you are in your state of trance?" he queried.

"At times I am," replied Madame, in the manner of one who feels that the questioner can ask nothing but what can be easily answered.

"Can you compare the effort to communicate to anything earthly?" said the Professor.

"Yes, I can," answered Madame, "but only approximately, you must understand. I appear to be in a long, very dark tunnel, the opening of which shows as a tiny bright point immensely distant. Sometimes the bright, small point remains distant; at other times I seem to be carried swiftly towards it, and it grows larger and brighter, and I think I see glorious shapes. However, when I seem to have passed through the tunnel into the grand refulgence of the other world, I lose personality—it is then that I write on the slate the messages of those who, formerly, have lived on the earth."

"Vevvy intwesting," murmured the Honorable Frederick.

"My frioud will perform something on her violin," said Madame, in a dreamy tone of voice; whereupon her fair, shy companion proceeded to play a soft-toned, sweetly-sad composition which produced a drowsy effect on the listeners. At the conclusion of the music the Rev. Dridge startled everyone into wakefulness by standing and saying that he must offer up a prayer before any communication with the dead was attempted. "It is breaking into God's silence," he said. A shade of annoyance passed across the face of Madame, but, in the same dreamy tone of voice, she expressed approval of the reverend gentleman's proposal; whereupon he let himself go in the most fervently prayerful manner imaginable, even almost to the point of perspiration. When he resumed his chair the fair companion placed slate and pencil before Madame, and all drew up to the table.

Madame was now leaning back rigidly in her chair, and her lips were moving as though she were talking to someone. The lamps had been lowered to a glimmer, and everyone endeavored to keep the strictest silence. But outside the wind moaned and shrilled about the old mansion, and the hummed mournfully through the neighboring pine wood. It made the fir-trees near the house sway to and fro with a

swishing sound, and, at intervals, the end of a branch would tap-tap at one of the library windows, to the no small perturbation of those of the guests who were unaware of the cause of it. The fall of a wind-loosened piece of brick down the chimney almost brought a scream to the lips of Mrs. Chawday, but she prevented herself becoming hysterical by concentrating her attention on the slow, solemn ticking of a grandfather clock which stood in a corner.

At this moment Madame's hand began to move spasmodically across the slate, and continued to do so for nearly a minute. Then something was written slowly and carefully, to be followed by more spasmodic movements. Again something was deliberately written, after which Madame sighed and sat up, looking pale and exhausted. Mr. Pukes turned up the lamps and took the slate from the proffering hand of Madame. Intently he gazed at it; then he began to tremble.

"Look, Dridge!" he exclaimed, in a tone of voice which made the listeners experience that peculiar sensation of the skin familiarly known as "goose-quill." On the slate, amidst a lot of childish scrawl, were the words ".....Ezratribes of....."

"It is a message from your father," said the Rev. Dridge, very solemnly, "much interrupted, it is true, but still a message. And, as I was telling all of you only yesterday, almost everybody for miles around here knows that Mr. Pukes, senior, held the opinion that the English are a branch of the lost tribes of Israel."

JAMES H. WATERS.

N. S. S. Social Gathering.

ONE of the most successful of our social meetings took place at Anderton's Hotel on Thursday evening last.

Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Heaford, Moss, Davies, and many other prominent members of the Freethought party were present, and a large number of visitors; also several applications for membership were made.

Miss Helen Foote obliged the company with some piano-forte selections, and Miss Florence Foote recited from *Enoch Arden* admirably. Mr. Will E. Edwards contributed two humorous songs in his inimitable manner. The crowning feature of the evening was the magnificent rendering given by our President of Mark Antony's Oration. To those in the audience who had not previously heard Mr. Foote deliver Shakespeare's beautiful lines the recital was a revelation. The older members again renewed the pleasure they too rarely experience nowadays, and expressed the hope that the rapturous applause with which this elocutionary treat was received will induce our President to let them enjoy more interpretations of the great master at our future gatherings.

EDITH M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

School Beagles.

CHINESE MISSION TO ETON COLLEGE.

THE following letter has been addressed to the Headmaster of Eton by a Chinese gentleman now visiting England:—

"HONORED SIR,—I have read with deep interest, and no little surprise, your recent letter in the *Times* on the proposed establishment of an Eton Mission in my native town of Chentu, for the purpose of giving to China 'an opportunity of the best education and of learning Christianity.' It may interest you no less to hear that with the aid of some fellow-citizens who, like myself, are conversant with English manners, I have determined to return the compliment by bringing a Chinese Mission to Eton, in order to give the boys some elementary lessons in the duty of humanness to animals.

I would remind you of that ancient British proverb, 'Charity begins at home.' It being notorious, even as far as Chentu, that one of the recognised amusements of Eton boys is the 'blooding' of hounds and the 'breaking up' of hares—practices which would be regarded in any Chinese school as utterly wicked and immoral—it is evident that we Orientals may, without presumption, send a message of humanity and civilisation to your young barbarians of the West, of whom it has been said by a well-known writer that 'they begin their education in brutality when they ought to be learning to say their prayers.'

I feel confident, sir, that you yourself, as a fellow-vegetarian, whose personal tastes, if I may say so, are much more akin to those of Chinamen than of Etonians, will welcome this Mission which I hope shortly to introduce. My opening address will be entitled 'The Sin of Cruelty: a Sermon preached to Christian Eton by a Heathen from Chentu.'—I remain, Sir, yours most respectfully,

October, 1908.

CHING PING."

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.

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Alma Hall, 335 High-road, N., three doors from Commerce-road): 7, J. T. Lloyd, "The Christian Religion."

OUTDOOR.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S.: Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, 7, W. J. Ramsey, "The Atonement."

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.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Town Hall): G. W. Foote, 3, "Jesus Christ: Who and What?" 7, "The Present Position of God." Tea at 4.45.

BOSTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Corn Exchange, Market-place): 7.30, Joseph Bates, "Man's Soul and the Great Beyond."

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S. (Rationalists' Club, 12 Hill-square): H. S. Wishart, 3, "Good God, God Knows"; 7, "Christianism, Socialism, and the Triumph of Secularism." Members' meeting after lecture.

FALLSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, H. P. Ward, "Theism Impeached and Atheism Vindicated."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): J. M. Robertson, M.P., 12 noon, "The Ethics of Tariff Reform"; 6.30, "The Philosophy of Charles Bradlaugh."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Central-buildings, 113 Islington): 3, A. S. Easley, "The Sanity of Art"; 7, Sidney Wollen, "God, the Priest, and the Child." Committee meeting after evening lecture. Debating Society: Thursday, October 29, at 8, S. Wollen, "Victor Grayson and his Conduct." Thursday, November 5, Allan Tracy.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, M. Baritz, "Judaism a Curse."

NEWCASTLE (Rationalist Literary and Debating Society, Lockhart's Cathedral Café): Thursday, November 29, at 8, R. Chapman, "Shakespeare in the Twentieth Century."

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (above Tram Hotel, Market-place): 7.30, Important Business Meeting.

OUTDOOR.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S.: The foot of Leith-walk, October 29, at 8, H. S. Wishart, "Fatalism, Determinism, and the Rev. Dr. Warschauer's Ignorance"; The Mound, October 30, at 8, "The Salvation Army Exposed"; October 31, at 8, "Why Does the Salvation Army Fail?"

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