

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE

Everything in nature is equally mysterious, and there is no way of escape from the mystery of life and death. But when you endeavor to explain the mystery of the universe by the mystery of God, you do not even exchange mysteries—you simply make one more.

—INGERSOLL.

“Referee”-ism.

THE *Referee* is a sporting paper, and sporting papers always cultivate piety; just as prostitutes (according to Lombroso and other authorities on social pathology) are almost invariably superstitious and devout. We were not exactly surprised, therefore, when the *Referee* once refused to insert an ordinary advertisement of the *Freethinker*. We were, however, a little indignant at the time on account of Mr. G. R. Sims's connection with our contemporary. Mr. Sims started his career as a Radical and a bit of a sceptic. He even lectured on the platform of the Branch of the National Secular Society which held Sunday evening meetings at Claremont Hall, Islington. But gradually, as he got on in the world, he became more “respectable” and conservative, until he developed (or atavised, if we may coin the word) into a full-blown supporter of “Society,” with a capital S, and a friend of everything ancient and conventional. The “classes,” and particularly the stupidest part of the middle class, regard him as a great genius. He accurately reflects their opinions and sentiments, and as they have money he finds his occupation profitable. Curiously enough, he has never made a definite renunciation of the scepticism of his young manhood; he has never, as far as we recollect, committed himself to Christianity or even to Theism. Perhaps a saving grace from his earlier and better days makes him shrink from downright lying. He serves his object in another way. He sneers at those who are honest and courageous enough to champion what, after all, may be still his own beliefs. This is a familiar phenomenon to students of the history of progress; indeed, there is something like a proverb about the rancor of renegades.

Mr. Sims does the light, airy, and suggestive part of the *Referee's* piety. It would never do to turn him on quite seriously, for in a moment of forgetfulness (some would call it a lucid interval) he might be seized with a paroxysm of insane sincerity and fling his cap and bells in the reader's face,—when the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance, for such a blunder could hardly be retrieved, and would very likely damn him and the paper eternally. This terrible danger is guarded against by turning on a heavy man to write what is called “Our Handbook” on the front page. Mr. D. Christie Murray used to write the two columns under that heading, but he joined the majority and knows now—if he knows anything—what truth (or otherwise) there was in the religious fancies which he used to propound weekly as scientific gospel. Mr. Murray wrote over the signature of “Merlin.” His successor calls himself “Vanoc.” For it is a tradition of the *Referee*

that every regular writer in its columns shall masquerade as a distinguished, mysterious personage; which is a trick of journalism that mightily imposes on romantic, ignorant readers,—whose number is legion.

“Vanoc” plays the game as well as “Merlin” did. The game itself is very simple when you see through it. The player must profess an immense respect for science, but he must love religion; he must always recognise that intellect is a great thing, but he must always protest that the something which makes you believe (what you do believe), in spite of all the intellect in the world, is still greater; he must keep himself at least superficially acquainted with the latest discoveries of science, and do his best to show how little they support reason and how much they corroborate faith; he must keep aloof from all churches and denominations, but he must bless and praise them all collectively; he must always put flattering epithets in front of “religion,” and hostile or contemptuous epithets in front of “atheism” or “irreligion” or “materialism,” or whatever is the wicked substantive of the hour; finally, he must pose as one who has wrestled with the dark spectres of doubt, and has still his bad quarters of an hour when he gives his mind a thorough good fling, but who always returns pale and penitent to the holy shelter of the “everlasting arms.” But even there he must not look too docile and submissive; he must nod or smile or wink as who should say that future, and perhaps more interesting, outbursts may be expected.

There was a characteristic specimen of the “Vanoc” product in last week's *Referee*. The sub-headings were “Behind the Veil” and “The Range of Consciousness.” The latter was the pretence of science; the former was a hint of safety and comfort to religious readers. Plenty of excitement and no danger. Which is an excellent bait for the *Referee's* public.

“Vanoc” started with a slap at that bold bad man “Professor Haeckel of Jena” who “said in his heart ‘There is no God.’” We all understand, of course, that the good critic is entitled by his scientific position and attainments to rebuke the naughty philosopher. But the highest and the mightiest should try to be accurate, and we venture to suggest that chapter and verse ought to be given for the statement that Haeckel has underwritten the declaration of the Psalmist's “fool.” It will not do to reply that Haeckel said this “in his heart,” for “Vanoc” cannot possibly know what goes on there, and has to depend, like the rest of us, on the possessor's communications. The truth is that “Vanoc” was playing to the gallery, for he presently stated the actual fact of the case, namely, that Haeckel had “declared that the revelations of science have done away with the idea of a Creator, free will, and immortality of the soul.” This is quite another thing than the dogmatic negative with which Haeckel was first saddled. But even in making this accurate statement the critic felt obliged to tickle the ears of the groundlings by referring to Haeckel as “the German theologian,” which is sheer nonsense, however prosperous in the ears of its patrons; and by saying that Haeckel had made his atheistic declaration “pontifically,” which is a sneer that could only “catch on” with the ignorant mob (of all classes),

for Haeckel's sweetness and modesty of nature assert themselves even in his controversies, and to call a declaration "pontifical" which is the conclusion of long chapters of scientific reasoning, is a downright absurdity. Some people, not making allowance for the exigencies of "Vanoc's" job, might call it vulgar insolence.

A little later on, the statement is repeated that Haeckel said in his heart "There is no God." One would think that the "Handbook" man was proud of it. He supplements it with the statement that Haeckel's saying (which he never said) "reflects the materialism that may yet sound the knell of Germany." Now this is either sheer ignorance on "Vanoc's" part or it is trading on the reader's ignorance. Haeckel disclaims the designation of "materialist." He professes himself a Monist. He affirms that Materialism and Spiritualism (not Spiritism) are two sides of one and the same eternal existence. It is really a pity, since the *Riddle of the Universe* is so cheaply published, and so fascinatingly written, that critics will not take the trouble to read it. And as for Haeckel's apocryphal "materialism" which may be the ruin of Germany, what can one say except to remark with John Morley that the way to answer a prophet is to prophesy the opposite? "Vanoc" is only guessing in the dark, which any other person in the world can do as well as he; and, in this case, the wish is probably the father to the thought, for the political school to which the *Referee* belongs suffers from chronic Germanitis.

Against the withering "materialism" of Haeckel, we are told that Sir Oliver Lodge "delivered a message of comfort to the millions" who want to go on believing what they do believe. No doubt this is strictly true. But if "Vanoc" supposes that Sir Oliver Lodge answered Haeckel, in any proper sense of the word, he must be very easily satisfied in the direction of his prepossessions. Haeckel is the greatest living biologist, and biologists do not answer him. They know better. They leave it to physicists and mathematicians like Sir Oliver Lodge and the late Lord Kelvin, who are no greater authorities on the problem of the origin of life (for instance) than any casual man in the street. And the cream of the joke is that Sir Oliver Lodge, who challenges the great biologist's conclusions, takes precious good care not to attempt the demonstration of "God, Freedom, and Immortality" from the science which he himself professes.

Huxley is incidentally referred to by "Vanoc." That lusty controversialist "did not shine in the discussion" with Gladstone over the Gadarene swine affair. No explanation or justification is vouchsafed. The "Handbook" man is simply scoring off an absent antagonist after the fashion of the village wit, who routed *his* antagonist by "calling him all the names I could think of till he couldn't hold his head up any longer." In the next column he fleers at Huxley again:—

"Many years ago Professor Huxley challenged the Evangelical world to prove the efficacy of prayer by concentrating their petitions on the recovery of patients in a particular hospital. The challenge was not accepted, but —"

We will deal with the "but" presently,—after we have corrected "Vanoc" on a matter of fact. Huxley never issued such a challenge. It was Professor Tyndall, who really acted on behalf of the late Sir Henry Thompson. Certainly the challenge was not accepted. The Rev. Dr. Littledale pooh-poohed it, and asked Professor Tyndall if he thought that God Almighty would let himself be made the subject of a scientific experiment. But this brought Mr. Francis (now Sir Francis) Galton into the field, and he was able to "circumvent God," as Hamlet puts it, by means of statistics. He demonstrated, as far as a negative *can* be demonstrated, the absolute inefficacy of prayer.

And now for the "Handbook" man's "but."

"The challenge was not accepted, but for the late George Müller's success in procuring funds for his vast

Bristol Orphanage work there is evidence the validity of which is not gainsaid. Müller never advertised and never asked for money, but in his case prayer was invariably followed by voluntary gifts sufficient to provide for many thousands of desolate orphans, and this over a long course of years."

This sort of thing comes of setting second and third rate novelists and common garden journalists to write on topics requiring sound information and vigilant intelligence. Or does the real explanation lie in the fact that "Vanoc" is just earning his salary? We find it difficult to believe that he does not see through, or at least half way through, that comic-opera illustration of the efficacy of prayer. It is not true that Müller never asked anybody but the Lord for money. Technically he did not, but practically he did. He issued reports and financial statements. Money was not brought to him by perfect strangers to his work who had been inspired by the Lord to convey cash to an unknown recipient. It is quite true that Müller never advertised, but that was in itself a distinction, which would not have been the case if Christian philanthropists were in the habit of confiding their wants to no one but Jesus; and the result was that Müller was advertised all over the kingdom as the man who never advertised. The newspapers, especially the religious weeklies, frequently brought that wonderful proof of the efficacy of prayer to the notice of their readers. It was published from thousands of pulpits and platforms; it was flung at Freethought speakers in public debate. Consciously or unconsciously, Müller achieved a splendid triumph of costless advertising. His success was due to his having the field to himself. Half-a-dozen rivals would have spoiled the game completely. The novelty of it would have disappeared—for ever.

Let a man who wants money tell the Lord, and nobody else, and see how long he is before he gets it. "Vanoc" gives himself away before he finishes. He admits that it is useless to pray against earthquakes, and in general that "human experience is against the efficacy of prayer directed against the operation of natural law." Well, that ends the matter,—for natural law is universal. When people pray, they pray for something. Persuade them that prayer will never bring it, and that its operation is purely subjective on themselves, and they will get off their knees and sing "Never again, Love." "Vanoc" assures his readers that "axe-heads do not float." They do in the Bible though, and in many Christian churches and chapels when sceptics are not known to be listening. The superstitious stuff is still dealt out to children—of all ages. And we really do not see why gentlemen like "Vanoc" should complain. If nothing floats except what floats naturally, if nothing happens against what we know to be the regular course of nature, then the doctrine of prayer is as dead as Queen Anne,—and all the holy mystery-men in the world are rank impostors; for it is historically certain that prayer is essentially the be-all and the end-all of religion. When the gods (or God) cease to be "a present help in time of trouble," they lose the devotion of their worshippers. For the truth is that religion was always a form of selfishness—personal, tribal, or national; man always secretly intended that his worship of the gods should be to his own advantage; he expected to get far more than he gave; and if he offered up a costly sacrifice, such as wife or child, it was because he was in a state of desperation and had to put down a big stake in a game where the issue was life or death. He puts down big stakes no longer; he puts only small sums on the sacred roulette-table, which, like the moon, keeps one side invisible to the human gaze. He begins to suspect that nothing happens in the holy darkness,—that the wheel of destiny revolves, whether in light or shadow, as naturally and as unchangeably as the moon wheels round the earth, day and night, in the august calm of infinite space. He is becoming an Atheist.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Truth About Free Will.—III.

(Continued from p. 19.)

It was Hume's opinion that a few intelligible definitions would put an end to the Free Will controversy. That Hume was over-sanguine as to the power of intelligible definitions is shown by the fact of the question being still in dispute. His own definitions were clear enough and admirable enough for all who care to study them, and they were convincing enough for all who strive to give to words their proper meanings and use them in their legitimate connections. Both conditions are essential, for a close examination of the Free Will position makes it clear that a verbally presentable case is only made by giving to certain words a wider or narrower meaning than they ought to bear, and by using other words that have no legitimate place in the discussion.

Let us take, first of all, the important word "freedom," and the kindred expression "liberty." Curiously enough, advocates of Free Will do not usually trouble to define these words, but the whole of their argument makes "freedom" the equivalent of an *absence of determining conditions*. But to speak of an absence of determining conditions in scientific matters is to utter absolute nonsense. In this sense atoms of matter are not *free* to move in any direction, the planets are not *free* to move in any orbit, the blood is not *free* to circulate, the muscles are not *free* to contract, the brain is not *free* to function. Anything that does take place is, scientifically, the only thing that could take place, and is the expression of all the conditions that determined its being. If the word "free" is ever used at all here, it is as a mere figure of speech, as when one speaks of the blood not being free to circulate owing to a constricted artery. Freedom, in this sense, is in scientific matters simply unthinkable; and the moment a new and non-understood phenomena is brought under notice, the whole attention of scientific men is given to discover what are the determining conditions, the existence of which no one has the slightest doubt.

The word "freedom" thus belongs to a different region altogether. It is a sociological word, and does not stand for a scientific conception. Its use in philosophy dates from the time of the Greeks, among whom the Stoics were the first to apply it. They called the vicious man a slave, the virtuous man free; and it was a compliment or a slur by way of metaphor drawn directly from social and political conditions. For in sociology it has a definite and useful meaning. When we speak of a free State we mean a community governing itself according to the desires of its members. When we speak of a free man we also mean one who may exercise his bodily energies within the limits laid down by the laws of the State of which he is a member. "The plain and obvious meaning of the words 'freedom' and 'liberty,'" says Jonathan Edwards, "is power, and opportunity, or advantage, that anyone has to do as he pleases."* Apart from this general sense the words are meaningless. A free man, a free State, a free country, are thus intelligible and legitimate expressions. But in what other sense is a man free? Surely not in the sense that any action of his body is not due to conditions that are as truly determining as those that result in the sweep of the earth round the sun? In what sense is man's "will" (I pass this word without examination for the moment) free? As Hume says:—

"We cannot surely mean that actions have so little connection with motives, inclinations, and circumstances, that one does not follow with a certain degree of uniformity from the other, and that one affords no inference by which we can conclude the existence of the other. For these are plain and acknowledged matters of fact. By liberty, then, we can only mean a power of acting or not acting according to the determination of the will; that if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may."†

All, therefore, that can be meant by "freedom" or "liberty" in this connection is that one is permitted to act in accordance with the dictates of his nature. Personally, I agree with Bain (*Emotions and the Will*, p. 545) that the word has no proper place at all in the dispute. It is a metaphor borrowed from the political world, and then mistaken for scientific language. To ask, "Is a man free?" is an intelligible question. To ask, "Is a man's will free?" is to ask whether human actions are without connection with antecedents, with organisation and environment. And to a sanely-balanced mind the absurdity of the question is patent in the framing.

There is an equally striking confession in the use of the word "will." And once again we have to note the fact that most upholders use the word without troubling to say what they really mean by it. Professor James says that "Desire, wish, and will are states of mind which everyone knows, and which no definition can make plainer."* This may be true of the first two; it is certainly not true of the last. Indeed, the question really turns upon a more extended and more intelligible definition of will. That it is a state of mind, I believe; and if Professor James carried out his definition thoroughly he would conclude as a thorough-going determinist, instead of pronouncing the question insoluble, and using a manufactured mystery as the ground for a professed belief in "free-will."

Let us see what is really invoked in an act of volition. According to James—and this is yet another blow at the indeterminist position—voluntary movements are secondary, not primary, functions of the organism. Reflex, instinctive, and emotional movements are all, as such, primary movements. With these movements the action follows on the stimulus without any intervention of consciousness. Of course, volition *may* at one time accompany actions that at others are performed quite automatically. I may close my eye because I will to do so, but the closing of my eyelid on the approach of a foreign object is a purely automatic action. A voluntary action, however, pre-supposes a conception of an end. This brings into play the intellectual factor; for, as this requires an idea of the end to be realised, every voluntary action is really dependent upon an act of memory. Only when experience has supplied us with an idea of what may be done do we *will* that it shall be done.† This simple consideration is alone enough to show how completely dependent is the will upon determining conditions.

If we analyse any simple act of volition, the above will be made quite clear. I am sitting in a room, and will to open a window. But before I do this I must be able to represent to myself the window as being opened. I also have some *desire* prompting me to open the window. It may be the desire for fresh air, or to look out, or for some other reason. We have, then, first the desire that the window should be opened, next the representation of the window as opened, and finally the muscular exertion necessary to satisfy the desire. If, instead of opening the window, I remained perfectly passive, my desire would remain a mere wish. I *will* that a thing shall be done when allied to the element of feeling there is that of the idea of *how* it is to be done, and a conception of the means to be employed.

Now at no stage of this process is there room for the intervention of any power or faculty not expressed in a strictly sequential process. The physiologist points out that at the basis of all our feelings and ideas there lie, clearly marked, physiological processes. The whole thought process, resting also upon physiological processes, and dependent upon the experience of both the individual and the species, presents us with a chain of events leaving not a single gap for "free will" to interpose. From the moment that any stimulus arouses in the organism a desire to the time that that desire expresses itself

* *Principles of Psychology*, ii., 486.

† I continue to use the word "will" at this stage of the argument, but, as will be seen presently it may be dispensed with.

* *Inquiry Respecting Freedom of Will*, sec. v., pt. i.
† *Of Liberty and Necessity*.

in action there is not a single break in the process. Want of knowledge may prevent our tracing all the stages of this process, but ignorance is surely a poor and inadequate ground upon which to affirm the existence of a power at variance with our whole knowledge of nature.

Now in this description of an act of volition, have we been describing anything more than the operation of motives? If we have, I quite fail to see it. Remove all feeling, all sensation—in a word, all motives, and the "will" disappears. Arouse sensation and emotion, and they supply the condition for a display of voluntary effort. We are not dealing with two distinct things when we deal with motive and will, but the same thing under different aspects. The "will" is not something that decides or chooses between motives; the "will" is nothing more than the name given to that motive, or cluster of motives, which are sufficiently strong to overcome all resistance and to find expression in action. I wish the reader to mark the expression, "overcome all resistance," because without competing motives there is no clear sense of volition. If only one motive were present in the mind, action would follow the sensation without a break. It is the break, the sense of conflict, which is, as we shall see, all important. But whether I say a motive led me to write this article, or my will led me to do so, I am saying substantially the same thing. As Spencer puts it, "Will is no more an existence apart from the predominant feeling than a king is an existence apart from the man occupying the throne."

We may, then, if we choose, and without any loss, drop the word "will" altogether. Another word might be used, equally expressive, and free from misleading connotations. At any rate, we are quite warranted in rejecting the "will" as either an independent entity or as a faculty imposing its decisions upon the mind. In the words of Professor Sully, "Modern scientific psychology knows nothing of such an entity. As a science of phenomena and their laws, it confines itself to a consideration of the processes of volition, and wholly discards the hypothesis of a substantial will as unnecessary and unscientific."

(To be continued.)

C. COHEN.

"Is There a God?"

THIS is one of the questions which cannot be answered by a simple Yes or No. It is true that thousands of people do answer it, without a moment's hesitation, in the affirmative, but such a reply is based not upon knowledge, but upon blind belief; and blind belief is only another name for total ignorance. There are multitudes of others, however, who, while unable to hold such a belief, and yet not prepared to deny the alleged existence of a personal Deity, are thoroughly convinced that there are no adequate grounds on which to return the affirmative answer. In itself, Atheism is simply the absence of Theism; and it is only when called upon to justify itself as such that it condescends to make any definite attack on Theism. In other words, Atheism is not against God, of whom it has absolutely no knowledge, but simply against the belief in God. Therefore, whenever a fresh attempt is made by theologians to establish the existence of God, Atheists proceed forthwith to examine it with the utmost care, in order to ascertain whether it is a success or not. Such an attempt has just been made by Arthur S. Peake, D.D., Professor of Biblical Exegesis in the University of Manchester, with the object of defending his hostile attitude to Materialism, which was criticised in these columns last week. We shall now inquire whether or not Dr. Peake has succeeded in accomplishing the stupendous task.

Dr. Peake is not a Materialist, because he is an Idealist; and he is an Idealist because he has adopted a spiritual interpretation of the Universe. He maintains that since "we find everywhere in

human history the presence of religion, there must be a spiritual Universe," and that to deny the existence of this spiritual Universe "is to except religion from the great law of correspondence to environment by denying that the environment really exists." Here, surely, the Professor has fallen into a grave error. It is the belief in a spiritual Universe, and not necessarily the spiritual Universe itself, that has exerted such a powerful influence in the history of man. Apart from this belief there is, and can be, no supernatural religion. Had the spiritual Universe not been a veritable portion of our environment, argues Dr. Peake, religion would have quickly ceased to be; but is he not aware that the moment the belief in such a Universe vanishes religion *does* cease to exist? Or does he mean to tell us that the spiritual Universe acts only on those who believe in its existence? Martin Luther believed intensely in the Devil, with the result that the great reformer and his Satanic Majesty frequently came into violent collision. To-day, the belief in the Devil has practically died out, and the consequence is that he has ceased to annoy the children of men. Are we not, then, justified in saying that it was not the Devil who worried Luther, but merely Luther's vivid belief in him? Now, "in view of the rationality which is man's outstanding distinction," we ask Dr. Peake to account for the fact that those who do not believe in a spiritual Universe are not in the least conscious of its existence. We agree with him that the "precise forms which religion has assumed" are of comparatively little importance, but we think he is entirely mistaken when he states that they "all imply the existence of unknown powers with whom man may have relations." We hold that if such unknown, supreme powers really existed, they would see to it that every man everywhere lived in active relations with them, and that the fact that this is not the case is a strong argument against their existence.

If the spiritual Universe does not exist, it follows that there is no God, who is represented as the Head of that Universe. After offering the presence of religion everywhere in human history as a proof of the existence of "unknown powers with whom man may have relations," Dr. Peake goes on to consider "several lines of argument by which philosophers and theologians have sought to establish the existence of God." He frankly admits that "several of these so-called proofs have lost the force that they once seemed to possess," but he still believes in them and employs them. He believes that all the phenomena with which we are familiar are under the law of cause and effect. But he believes, further, that these phenomena have had a beginning in a great First Cause—"a cause, therefore, not itself the effect of a preceding cause." He asserts that "it is a logical necessity by which we think of a First Cause." That may be theologically sound, but it is flatly contradicted by present-day Science. A beginning is scientifically unthinkable.

Dr. Peake himself finds "the conception of an unoriginated First Cause very difficult to grasp," and then trots out the familiar argument from design. This argument, he maintains, so far from being destroyed or even weakened by modern discoveries, stands to-day on a firmer basis than ever. Of all arguments, he regards it as "the one most fitted to impress and convince the average mind." He says:—

"We see everywhere in Nature contrivances, adjustments, adaptations which seem to be the outcome of deliberate design. No one who has ever considered his own body can fail to be filled with wonder at the marvels of it. If we think of the structure of the eye or the ear, even apart from any special investigation, we cannot but be astonished at it. But our astonishment passes into something like awe when we change our vague impression into exact knowledge."

There is much substantial truth in those words; but it is only a partial, one-sided truth. Nature does exhibit marvellous contrivances, adjustments, adaptations, but she also teems with imperfections, disharmonies, and failures. Wonderful as it is, the

human body is by no means a perfect organism. Dr. Metchnikoff has prepared a long list of its defects, blemishes, faults, and misfits, many of them being relics of former stages of evolution; but are we to infer that these also "seem to be the outcome of deliberate design"? If the good things were designed, why not the bad ones as well? If "these adjustments seem to speak of purpose on a scale so vast, and betokening an intelligence so profound, as to suggest very strongly that they are due to a personal Creator of the wisest wisdom," what about the sad discords and painful incongruities which are quite as numerous? But Science supplies us with an entirely different account of even these "exquisite adaptations." According to the theory of evolution, they were not given to the organism by "a Creator of wisest wisdom," but were developed by it in its desperate struggle for existence. They are the winnings of ferocious conflict; and once the organism has gained them, Natural Selection preserves them by its law of transmission, known as the Survival of the Fittest.

Let us glance for a moment at the great Kingdom of Life. Is it worthy of infinite intelligence and wisest wisdom? Think of the feeding of it. Can you conceive of an infinitely wise and good God bringing into existence, whether through the process of evolution or by special acts of creation, countless myriads of living things which subsist by devouring one another? Even the Survival of the Fittest is an atrociously cruel law, if ordained by a loving Heavenly Father. Nature is steeped in cruelty and carnage, and witnessing her horrible butcheries, who can believe that she was created and is ruled by a being of boundless benevolence? If the whole process of evolution was designed and superintended by an Almighty, it is he who must be held responsible for all that has ever characterised it. If he is to be glorified for the life-giving and life-sustaining sunshine, must he not be blamed for the life-destroying earthquake? If he deserves credit for the Survival of the Fittest, should he not receive censure for the unfitness of the non-surviving? If they are all his creatures, why has he made so much difference between them?

The God in whom Dr. Peake believes is said to be endowed with holiness and love. Nature is described as his creation, and yet, according to the Professor's teaching, Nature is neither holy nor loving. She is not decisively on the side of virtue and against vice. On the whole she favors virtue, but "the view that Nature is morally indifferent is capable of defence. Indeed, we might say that Nature speaks with an ambiguous voice." This is unquestionably true; but how could a holy and loving God produce an unmoral and non-loving Nature, a Nature that contradicts her own Maker, being "red in tooth and claw"? And yet we are assured that in the human world there is "a Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness." If there be such a Power why should it not pervade the whole of Nature? Why should its operations be confined to humanity? But does such a Power manifest itself in human life? Dr. Peake provides us with no evidence whatever of its active existence. Assyria and Babylon, Persia and Rome fell, not because there was a Power not themselves making for righteousness, but because they failed to comply with the natural conditions of national continuance. Their fall is intelligible on purely natural grounds. The power to distinguish between right and wrong is one of the products of evolution, and is possessed, in varying degrees, by all animals who live in flocks or herds or communities. Professor Peake's account of conscience is radically unscientific in that it totally ignores its long history and treats its regal authority as a gift from above. If its history were only consulted it would be seen that its authority is nothing but the fruit of countless ages of experience.

We have no hesitation whatever in declaring that all the facts known to us testify that God and Nature are mutually destructive terms, and that Dr. Peake has utterly failed to reconcile them. The

study of Nature inevitably leads to Atheism, and Dr. Peake practically admits it, in spite of the fact that he reads Nature through highly-colored theological spectacles. The theologian silences the critic, though we are aware that the critic is still there, and is not convinced by the theological deliverances.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Bible as Literature.

WHEN one studies the Bible as literature, one sees that though it occupies a special place on account of its religious character, it has no claims to unchallenged supremacy. Its literary characteristics are not, in reality, different from other similar works. It is the work of Orientals, and, further, it is not a single book but a collection of books. It is a very far cry from the simple, artless stories of a savage people to the passionate romance of the "Song of Songs." There is an immense gulf between the plain, unvarnished stories of the patriarchs and the involved, artful, transcendental romances of the Gospels. The books of the Hebrew Old Testament cover a period of many centuries, and are saturated with Assyrian, Babylonian, and Egyptian ideas. In the New Testament we come to books which were written in a comparatively modern language, when Rome held the sceptre over the world. Thus in point of time the work ranges from 1000 B.C. to at least as late as 200 A.D. In material there is a corresponding variety. There are scraps of folk-songs of war, early legends, mythical history, fragments of laws, schemes of ecclesiastical law, collections of proverbs, psalms of pious meditation, chronologies, the euphemistic ingenuities of the Apocalypse, the elaborate romances of the Gospels, and the dialectics of Paul.

The whole atmosphere is Oriental, and springs from the same fertile source as the *Arabian Nights*. In the New Testament, side by side with the riotous Eastern imagination, there is a new element in the attempts to graft philosophy upon the elementary fictions of the Old Testament.

If one remembers that the only other work with which English-speaking peoples are familiar, which comes from the same Oriental background as the Bible, is the *Arabian Nights*, one will realise better the enormous distance from us of this Biblical literature. Stevenson has pointed out that the characters of the *Arabian Nights* are mere puppets, and their stories are a mere succession of incident and event, unbroken by any attempt to characterise the people.

This is as true of the Bible as of the *Arabian Nights*. When the clergy speak of the unparalleled literary value of the Bible it is well to remember this fact and to enter a strenuous and, if possible, a serious protest. Compared to the great masters of literature—Shakespeare, Dante, and Goethe—the anonymous authors of the Bible are poor of resource, limited of range, timid and commonplace in execution. These Orientals mostly pour out floods of lust and anger and pietism; largely utter hoarse cries of fear, revenge, and worship. Wit and humor were a closed book to them. From the first error in Genesis to the final absurdity in Revelation there is not a spark of humor. Much of their best work is only so much mellifluous prurience, presented in exotic forms of verse. At other times their verse is filled with the turmoil of battle, the champing of horses, the flashing and bickering of spears. Only on rare occasions does the still, sad voice of humanity make itself heard. Thus, in the last analysis, the Bible simply contains the ordinary stock-in-trade of almost all Eastern writers. Compare the elementary barbarisms of the Bible with the opulent originality of the great masters of speech. Compare Isaiah with the *Divina Commedia* of Dante. Compare the Song of Songs with Shakespeare's *Othello*. Compare the story of Jonah with Goethe's *Faust*. Confronted with the work of the masters of human song, the

books of the Bible are merely the works of minor writers.

While preachers and proselytes were content to point to the Bible as the Church's one foundation, they could claim at least attention. But when they impudently assert that the Bible is the greatest piece of literature in the whole world it is time to remind them that their pretended revelation from the Almighty is but a Salmagundi of unrestrained and riotous Oriental imagination. Compared with the deathless dreams of the great masters of human speech, the so-called sacred volume is of small importance. If it had not been associated with an endowed system of superstition, it would centuries ago have been consumed to nothingness in the echoless Temple of Universal Silence.

M.

Respect for Error.

No Obligation Rests on Freethinkers to Defer to any False Opinion.

BY AUSTIN BIERBOWER.

WE may think that indifference to our opinions constitutes liberality; but while it is proper not to dispute over minor matters, or always over fundamentals, we should yet ever assert our opinions, and to do so we cannot treat conflicting ones with the same respect as if we held them.

While men should be allowed their views unaffected by authority, there is no such exemption from private contempt. We should not treat every vagary as honorable. Good men may have foolish notions; and we should say they are foolish. Respect for our fellows does not imply respect for their opinions. To say or imply that false views may be true is to be faithless to one's own. We need not, for example, treat the Mormon theology with respect. If Mormons hold some views that we do we should speak well only of them, while condemning the rest.

It is important to be candid, expressing our real thoughts and expressing them freely. Customs which make us suppress our opinions are bad. Progress in truth is possible only if the mind is free to think what seems true, and to express it. It is as bad to have customs suppress our opinions as to have laws to do so. We are often scyophantic, letting other opinions alone, however unwarranted. It is not polite to do so, and charity to others does not require it. We should try to set them right. If we are prevented from correcting false opinions, we do not hold our own in their natural strength. One property of Freethought is to be able to assert it, and so to make it prevail generally. In our respect so for hostile opinions, we are apt to defer to them, and to have none of our own. There is no virtue in treating them as if right. Where we regard them as wrong, we should treat them so. Not by violence in suppressing them or discriminating against them in politics, but by saying and doing what we can in a friendly way to change them.

There is too much conciliation. Recognising the rights of others to their views we may think them true, however different from ours, so we are inactive in making our views prevail. Liberals leave propagating to their opponents. Those who have narrow and foolish opinions are more apt to spread them than Rationalists. Their churches are small, and decaying rather than spreading. One with views different from the general public often conceals them for popularity, or as an appearance of liberality. They would show that they do not care what others think. People have a right to be fools; and, while we should recognise this, we should not approve of it, or refrain from condemning it. When men are wrong we should say so, and wherein wrong, insisting on the truth, and the whole truth, we need not fear the clash of opinions. There is no reason for saying a fool may be wise or one in error right. On all important subjects we should have opinions, and try

to make conflicting opinions give way. We may be friendly with the holder of false opinions without in any respect yielding to them.

No indifference to the right should characterise us, or show of indifference. The narrow-minded should respect our views instead of our respecting his. He is apt to say that those who differ from him are in error, and that their religion is heterodox, or no religion at all. Narrowness is generally for erroneous views, and the more one is in error the more bigoted he is. We should not admit that we may be wrong and he right. When we have no doubt of our position, and are as sure of his error as he of his correctness, we should say so. The right ought to be given a chance to prevail, and should be bolder and freer.

Our only fealty should be to truth. Charity is a matter of feeling. We cannot be charitable in our thoughts. We should not consider what views are most beneficial or most pleasant, but what are true, and should hold them irrespective of their results. Some true things are unpleasant, but we should seek the truth by evidence, not by our attitude toward others feelings. If compelled to believe them in error, or foolish, we should be true to our conviction, and reserve our charity for our feelings. We can be kind without yielding to others mistakes. Liberality should be tolerance for all views, not respect for them.

We should not in any way compromise either our investigation or our opinion of what is true. The truth should be made to prevail without our deferring to any power in our recognition of this. We ought not to be complacent to those in error. We have nothing to do with their opinions, but to antagonise them wherein wrong; and while we may not think it always profitable to note their errors, we should do so when called to express our views. If a thing is foolish or if we disapprove of one's religion, we should say so without fear of bigotry. The age needs candor and energy in propagating truth. This is a time of silence on adverse opinions. Respect for men does not require this. Correct views have a right to be stated, and Liberals should be more positive than hitherto. So only shall we get men to hold something like correct views. There are as many arguments against error as against folly, and we should apply them. The lover of truth should be militant. It is one of our greatest privileges to say exactly what we think, whether it displease our neighbor or not. There is no advantage to him or to us in conceding what is false.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Among the causes which tend to promote the growth of such wide-spread immorality, we may perhaps reckon the geographical position and political condition of the country [Brazil], and the peculiar state of civilisation in which it now exists. To a native, a tropical climate certainly offers fewer pleasures, pursuits, and occupations than a temperate one. The heat in the day, and the moisture in the rainy season do not admit of the outdoor exercise and amusements, in which the inhabitants of a temperate zone can almost certainly indulge. The short twilights afford but a few moments between the glare of the descending sun and the darkness of night. Nature itself, dressed in an eternal and almost unchangeable garb of verdure, presents but a monotonous scene to him who has beheld it from childhood. In the interior of the country there is not a road or path out of the towns, along which a person can walk with comfort or pleasure; all is dense forest, or more impassable clearings. Here are no flower-bespangled meadows, no turfy glades, or smooth shady walks to tempt the lover of nature; here are no dry, gravelled roads, where, even in the intervals of rain, we may find healthy and agreeable exercise; here are no field-side paths among golden corn or luxuriant clover. Here are no long summer evenings, to wander in at leisure, and admire the slowly changing glories of the sunset, nor long winter nights, with a blazing hearth, which, by drawing all the members of a family into close contact, promote a social intercourse and domestic enjoyment, which the inhabitants of a tropical clime can but faintly realise.—*Alfred Russel Wallace*, "Travels on the Amazon," June, 1852.

Acid Drops.

We congratulate General Booth (as a man) on passing successfully through his operation for cataract. He will be able to see better presently. We wonder if he will be able to see that Mr. Manson's criticisms of the Salvation Army require an answer.

A Church Pageant is to take place at Fulham Palace in June. It is to be a big affair. There will be living pictures of important episodes in Church history. We understand that the burning of heretics will be omitted in deference to the susceptibilities of this weakly humanitarian age.

Sir William Ramsey, D.C.L., was persuaded to send a new year's message to the Aberdeen Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Service. It was a very pessimistic message. He saw "only danger and darkness" before him; the old contest between good and evil seemed to be going on (at least in Scotland) in favor of the evil. The only hope lay in this fact, that "Light comes from the east." We suppose this was a delicate allusion to the Star of Bethlehem. But it was rather an unfortunate metaphor. Light comes from the east; yes, and darkness begins there too. It depends on which end of the day you are dealing with. We are now at the end of the day of Christ, and the result is, "Darkness there, and nothing more."

The *Glasgow Herald* classes Sir William Ramsey's message among "the croakings of well-meaning ravens." How sad for a prophet to be treated like that in his own country! We hope "Providence" will give him the strength to bear it, or the spirit (not bottled) to stand it.

In the same number of the *Glasgow Herald* reference was made to the "byway of atheistical anarchism down which the people are crowding in sheer despair." There is no such byway. Our contemporary is mistaken. Atheism has always been the sanest influence in political and social affairs. Bacon noticed this in his essay on Superstition. Atheists cannot escape their own consciences by throwing responsibility on Christ or some other imaginary Savior; and, not having anybody to think for them, they think for themselves; and it is not thought, but emotion without thought, which upsets the world for nothing.

They got Mr. Joseph McCabe to lecture on Science and Religion at the City Temple on Thursday evening, January 7, with the Rev. R. J. Campbell in the chair. The dear *Daily News* gave one line to Mr. McCabe's lecture, and did not even mention its subject. All the rest of the report was about the City Temple oracle, who, it appears had been asked to clear out of the Christian Evidence Society, because it was alleged that "no sooner were the Society's lecturers well started with their discourse in Hyde Park or Finsbury Park than some rascal in the crowd would jump up and, taking out one of Mr. Campbell's books, shout out: 'Stop a minute; I've got you.'" The latter part of the story looks probable. But we did not know that Mr. Campbell was ever connected with the C. E. S. If he was, he is lucky to be free from such a disreputable organisation.

James Thomson, in the *City of Dreadful Night*, makes a man sneer savagely at God for creating men when he needn't have done it. We thought of this the other evening when turning over the pages of a penny evening paper. Two bits of news were in the same column; in fact, one followed the other. The first related to the "coming out" of Mrs. George Gould's daughter Marjorie at New York, which took place at a cost of £20,000 in a £2,000,000 hotel. The second was a murder case on the Franco-German frontier. A drunken wood-cutter turned his wife out stark naked by night in a temperature of 27 degrees below freezing point. In the morning he took her in, and kicked, bit, and cut pieces out of her during the day, and finally drove a wood-splitting wedge into her skull. Vile luxury at one extreme, and vile brutality at the other; and God, as creator, responsible for both. Isn't it enough to make millions of Atheists?

The dear *Daily News* doesn't give the prominence it did to "The Churches." The gentleman who wrote that column must surely be turned on to the matutinal "London Letter," which winds up with "To-Day's Story," under which heading appear the frowsiest collection of "chestnuts" ever seen or heard of.

Mr. Harry Boulter writes us: "Pack is correct. I was 'in' for three days and one night; longer than J. C., though

not so long as Jonah." The night was the night of his arrest by the police, before he was bailed out, and the three days are those on which he appeared at Bow-street Police Station and the Central Criminal Court. Mr. Boulter was not sentenced for blasphemy; he elected to apologise and promise not to offend again. He had a perfect right to do so; but it is amazing that he should call himself, and back up his friends in calling him, the "last prisoner for blasphemy" on this basis. He ought to know that he could not possibly be a prisoner for blasphemy until the jury had found him guilty, because they had to decide whether he had committed blasphemy or not.

Cleveland, Ohio, seems an original place. A religious meeting there resolved to live for two weeks exactly as Christ would do if he were on earth to-day. It was truly American to limit the resolution to two weeks. That is about as long as the real followers of Christ would be able to keep out of the prison, the lunatic asylum, or the poorhouse.

John Frederick Spencer, tradesman, Sunday-school teacher, and burglar, of Leicester, was sentenced to twelve years' penal servitude for a long series of extraordinary and abominable crimes. Being in prison he "peached" on his associates and got three of them put away. For this heroic performance the Home Office has knocked two years off his sentence, and will very likely do him further favors presently. John Frederick Spencer is almost an Old Testament worthy.

The *British Medical Journal* says that certain anti-vivisectioners are using prayer as a lethal weapon against vivisectioners. They supplicate the Lord to remove some leading vivisectioner, and soon afterwards you hear of his death in the newspapers. We don't suppose, however, that our medical contemporary quite believes this nonsense.

Rev. Thomas Bowen has our sympathy. He is rector of Little Leighs, Essex, and the people who attend the parish church are too ill-mannered for his liking. In the first place, they cough too much, especially during the sermon. This must be very trying, but perhaps there is something to be said for the congregation. This is the time of the year for coughs, and it is well-known that a cough is always worse when its possessor (or victim) tries hard to keep it quiet. Then again, a skilfully conceived and executed cough is the listener's only critical defence against a bad sermon. But coughing is not all that the reverend gentleman complains of. Some of his auditors openly yawn, and others go to sleep. This must be more trying still to the poor preacher. But the congregation may ask why he doesn't try to keep them awake. Which is really a pertinent question—for you never see people yawning or asleep at a Freethought meeting.

According to the Paris correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, a man arrested near Bordeaux for most brutally murdering his mother-in-law, had been "happy and contented in mind for six months after the crime. He said that he had confessed to a priest, who gave him absolution, after which his conscience was at rest." Good old religion!

Hindus and Mohanmedans have been carrying on a religious quarrel in India. The police have had to keep them from exterminating each other. Good old religion again!

There was a fierce fight in the Adair Methodist Church, Michigan, between the Rev. J. Carmichael and Gideon Browning, a carpenter. They fought in the chancel, using brass-bound Bibles and keener weapons of steel. Both men have disappeared since that night, but the dismembered and charred body of a man has been found in a furnace beneath the church. Which of the two men it belonged to is difficult to decide, and America is divided on the interesting question. It is equally unknown what the two men fought about. Probably a woman knows. We dare say it is another case of *Cherchez la femme*.

"Kissing the Book" is dying out even in Wales. Lord Tredegar moved at the Monmouthshire Quarter Sessions that notices should be posted through the county advising witnesses that they could take the oath in any form they pleased. By-and-bye the oath itself will go. Men will promise to tell the truth simply as citizens, and not as persons who fear an angry God.

A funny thing occurred in last year's *Whitaker's Almanack*. The paragraph headed "Religious Creeds of Prisoners" wound up with the following announcement: "The religious

convictions of one prisoner could not be ascertained as he was unfortunately suffering from delirium tremens." Note the quiet (natural) assumption that he had *some* religious convictions.

Glorious free press! After the Burns-Johnson fight came the Italian earthquake. That was a godsend for a whole week. Then came the silly business of the disappearing young lady and the motor-car, and the still sillier business of the ghost of the Rev. Dr. Astley. And all this in Christian newspapers, in a Christian country, nearly two thousand years after Christ. Good old religion! Grand old Christianity! How *would* the world get on without it?

Miss Violet Charlesworth, we see, was brought up a strict Wesleyan, and was able to reel off Scripture by the yard. This enables us to see what would be the awful effects of Secular Education.

Dr. Hugh B. Seddon, Yew Lodge, Burnt Ash-Jane, Bromley, Kent, committed suicide by poison, and left a pencilled note in which he exclaimed, "God forgive me!" Not an Atheist, anyhow.

Joseph Cole, a writer in his Majesty's Dockyard at Pembroke, committed suicide by cutting his throat. According to the evidence at the inquest, he was "highly religious and sensitive," and the "language" of the naval men around him "preyed on his mind." This one was not an Atheist, either.

Heine remarked on the way in which comedy and farce are mixed up with tragedy in human life. Brutus perhaps "nosed" the knife with which he was to stab Cæsar to see if it smelt of onions. If you have an eye for it, you will perceive the fun running in and out of the most serious affairs. In our leading article last week on "The Providential Hand" we referred to the case of Mr. Constantine Doresa, a British subject of Greek extraction, who was saved at Messina where the earthquake killed so many thousands of others. He attributed his escape "simply to the mercy of God." And we asked him *why* he thought that *he* was spared while all that multitude perished. Well, we know now, without his telling us. "Providence" wanted him to come over to England. It appears that he was wanted by the police for furious driving in a motor-car at Shooters Hill in November. The case had been several times adjourned because Mr. Doresa was in Sicily. But when he rushed back to London after pulling through the earthquake, and the story of his escape was in all the newspapers, the police had their man. They promptly brought him before the "beak" at Greenwich, and got him fined £7 and costs; moreover, as he had been fined twice before for exceeding the speed limit, the magistrates ordered his license to be endorsed. Mr. Doresa knows now, as well as we do, why he enjoyed the "mercy of God" at Messina. "Providence" meant him to face the music of that summons. Indeed, it would be perfectly good theology to say that this was the real object of the earthquake.

Mr. Doresa may look at the matter in another light. He may still recognise "God's mercy" in his luck at Messina and wonder where it comes in with regard to his luck in London. But that is both egotistic and illogical. If it is "Providence" once, it is "Providence" always.

What a sanguinary sarcasm! About the only building in Messina that escaped destruction was the lunatic asylum. No less than 1,400 lunatics got loose, but are fast perishing of hunger and thirst. "Providence" did its best for them, —if they had only stayed where they were. Perhaps a few angels might have been stationed outside to keep them in.

Was it not the Bishop of Exeter who confirmed thirty-eight lunatics, and stated that he found such people peculiarly susceptible to religious impressions? "Providence" seems to have the same high opinion of them. In the East it is the common belief that lunatics are inspired. In the West a good many inspired people have certainly been lunatics.

A butcher was rescued at Messina after being buried for fourteen days without food. He had seen his wife and four children slowly perish of wounds and starvation. What a hell! It is really too horrible for words. Yet we are asked to believe in an all-merciful God!

At the Dome Mission Service, Brighton, the Rev. E. P. Aldom French discoursed on "The God of the earthquake," and said that "in the earthquake was revealed God's love."

It is a pity that the reverend gentleman did not personally feel the full force of God's love—at Messina. But some people are born unlucky, and nearly always miss good things when they are going.

"Heaven's Message to Messina" was the reverend mountebank Carlile's topic at St. Mary-at-Hill, Monument, London, E.C., on Sunday evening. We wish he had been at Messina to receive it. This is not wishing him any harm, of course; it is what trombone Carlile himself wishes when he plays "Nearer, my God, to thee."

"Providence" paid no respect to God's houses at Messina. Here is a passage from the *Daily News* correspondent's letter dated January 2:—

"The old Norman cathedral, which had preserved through many vicissitudes and repairs its original character, has fallen in enormous blocks, one over the other. One cross is hanging between two leaning columns of Egyptian granite. On the cross you can see a beautiful Byzantine Christ. Here and there some parts of a statue or pieces of an artistically carved choir emerge. Almost all the other churches, that of Annunziata, the Immacolata, San Filippo, the Spirito Santo, have been utterly destroyed."

What a picture! That beautiful figure of Christ hanging helpless amidst the ruins! Yet in the face of all this the faithful Catholics go on praying to Christ for the repose of the souls of the dead. Such prayers were offered up at a special service in the Catholic Cathedral at Westminster, which was attended by the Lord Mayor of London. Just as though God, if there be a God, would deal any gentler with the poor victims' souls than he had dealt with their bodies!

"Providence" is becoming quite a joke. After the destruction of all God's houses at Messina by the earthquake, the vaulted roof of the old church at Nax, in Switzerland, falls in during divine service at ten o'clock on Sunday morning while the floor is crowded with worshippers. Twenty-eight dead bodies were found under the debris, all terribly mutilated, and thirty living persons seriously injured. What is it the Scripture says? "He doeth all things well." It was really a 'cute idea of "Providence" to wait till the church was crowded before beginning business.

Religious people take no notice of the vagaries of "Providence." Their faith seems proof against anything. So nothing is said uncomplimentary to "the One Above" in relation to these catastrophes. But what babbling there would be in religious circles if the roof of a Freethought meeting-place fell in and buried half the audience. Pious heads would be shaken, with whatever was in them. Pious tongues would wag over "God's judgment on unbelievers." Pious pens would fly over countless reams of paper, setting forth that the "Act of God" was a plain warning to the surviving "infidels" of the nation. Yes, the good Christians would have a high old time *then*. As it is, they say to each other, "Mum's the word." The least said the soonest mended.

More "Providence." A heat wave spread over New South Wales, the shade temperature ranging from 105 to 125 degrees. Fierce bush fires raged along the Southern railway line and in the Blue Mountains, doing much damage.

Chicago and the North-West have been visited by a severe blizzard of snow from the Rocky Mountains. Temperature has ranged from 15 to 40 degrees below zero. Cattle and sheep have been frozen to death wholesale. "For his tender mercies are over all his works."

Three laborers, named Rorke, Dowley, and Pate, took shelter in the heating chamber of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Athlone, and were suffocated. No doubt they were in the habit of praying to the Virgin Mother of God,—and that is how she helped them.

Rev. Robert Eyton, of Cobar Heights, Bathurst, New South Wales, formerly chaplain to the House of Commons, left estate in the United Kingdom worth £15,000. How much elsewhere is not reported. "Blessed be ye poor!" "Woe unto you rich!" It's enough to make a cat laugh—or a mummy in a glass case.

Mr. Bernard Shaw has been telling a *Daily Chronicle* interviewer that—"There is not the slightest reason nowadays why even the Unionist Party should not make a profession of Socialism. Socialism is now precisely like Christianity; it means nothing at all." The first half of this statement does not concern us. We welcome the second half as an important truth—which has been published in the *Freethinker* any time during the last twenty-eight years.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, January 17, Shoreditch Town Hall, 7.30, "The Silence of the Tomb."

January 31, Manchester.

February 21, Glasgow; 28, Birmingham.

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—241 High-road, Leyton.—January 17, Belfast; 24, Forest Gate. February 14, Glasgow.
 J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 17, Greenwich; 24, Shoreditch Town Hall; 31, Birmingham Town Hall. February 7, Aberdare; 14, West Ham; 28, Glasgow.

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Previously acknowledged. Annual Subscriptions, £17 6s. Received since.—George Payne, £20; G. L. Alward, £2 2s.; J. T. Griffiths, 7s. 6d.; J. W. de Caux, £2; L. Gjemre, £2; Edmund Damon, £1 1s.; J. M. Gimson, £2 2s.; George White, 10s.; A. Rowley, 5s.; S. M. Peacock, 10s. 6d.; John Sumner, 10s. 6d.; W. H. Morrish, £1; G. Roleffs, £1; W. Dodd, £1; J. H. Gartrell, £1 1s.; Sydney A. Gimson, £2 2s.; J. Chick, £1 1s.; J. J. W., 10s.; F. J. Voisey, £1 1s.; J. H., 2s. 6d.; C. Shepherd, 7s. 6d.; R. J. Henderson, £1 1s.; J. W., £1 1s.; A. Clarke, 10s.; J. Lazarnick, 10s. 6d.; James Moffat, 10s.; Impecunious Doctor, 2s. 6d.; R. Daniel, 2s. 6d.; J. W. Hicks, 3s.; D. Mapp, 2s. 6d.; T. Thelwall, £1 10s.; A. P. (Westcliff), £1 1s.; Dover, 10s. 6d.; A. Firth, 5s.; C. F. Simpson, 10s. 6d.; W. A. Yates, 2s. 6d.; Fanny Whatcott, 5s.

GEORGE PAYNE, sending his annual subscription to the President's Honorarium Fund, says: "I sincerely hope it will, this time, manage to attain the desired £300 at least."

J. T. GRIFFITHS writes: "I hope the Honorarium Fund will reach a total that will relieve you of all financial worries. I do my best for the *Freethinker*, by giving away copies; and recommending it when a casual conversation offers an opening, but, apparently, it is only a small proportion of the seed which falls on good soil. I hope you will have health and strength to continue the fight for many years."

J. LAZARNICK.—"Good luck and good health" is a good wish.

A. CLARKE.—We are quite sure that you send your subscription "with great pleasure."

POOR BUT HEALTHY LAZARUS.—You are better off than the original. He was poor but *not* healthy. Glad to have your good wishes, and pleased you regard the 8s. 8d. a year for your "beloved *Freethinker*" as money well spent."

J. W.—Glad to hear you say that the subscription "is certainly an infinitesimal recognition of the many happy hours you have given me through the *Freethinker*."

R. J. HENDERSON.—We hope you will see fighting the battle of Freethought for many years yet, and we hope to see your "fist" occasionally all the time.

W. P. BALL.—Thanks for ever-welcome cuttings.

F. J. VOISEY.—Always glad to have news out of dear old Devonshire; Richard Carlile's county, and (if we may put our name so near his without sacrilege) our own.

J. J. W.—Thanks for "best wishes for a prosperous new year."

JOHN SUMNER, subscribing to the President's Fund, says: "Many other demands render this of necessity a small one, so I pray you not to consider it in any degree as a gauge of my appreciation, but merely as a complimentary season's offering which I would fain see larger."

A. ROWLEY "hopes the full amount will be realised" this year for the President's Fund."

G. ROLEFFS.—Your birthday good wishes are welcome. They come from an honest heart.

W. H. MORRISH says that "The Scientist's Answer deserves to be printed as a tract."

A. GODDARD.—We don't think the Gibson-Bradlaugh debate is in print now. It would be published, if it is, by A. Bonner, 1 Tooke's-court, E.C.

BERT GRANT.—So many questions cannot be answered on Tuesday morning. Look in this column next week.

GEORGE JACOB.—We must agree to differ.

W. H. HOWARD NASH.—Publish what you please. Your adjectives do not disturb us. Is a controversy in our pages to be carried on as long as you choose? And is it a rule of justice that you should always have the last word?

JAMES MOFFAT.—See paragraph. Thanks.

"IMPECUNIOUS DOCTOR," whose impecuniosity is largely due to non-attendance at public worship, says he knows many churchgoers who are sceptics at heart, but "every 'respectable' man in Ireland goes to church or chapel" and thrives in consequence. Poor human nature!

G. DINGMORE.—Will look through it as soon as possible. Meanwhile: Rabbi Wise, of Chicago, is well-known through America; Dr. Giles was an editor of classics, and a clergyman of the Church of England.

J. H. GARTRELL wishes "many happy returns of your birthday and success to Freethought in its fight against superstition." Ay, that's the thing.

J. CHICK.—We note the "pleasure" and acknowledge the subscription.

R. DANIEL.—A pleasant, encouraging letter.

SYDNEY A. GIMSON.—Glad to have the good wishes of a zealous Freethinker, the son of a zealous Freethinker.

HORACE DAWSON, on behalf of many living "in the day of small things," suggests that every reader of the *Freethinker* shall take two copies during 1909, and send us a postcard to that effect, with the name and address of his newsagent on it.

ISABELLA T. ROBERTS.—Glad to have the renewal of your good wishes.

W. DODD.—The President's Fund occupies the field, and we can hardly start two. In a sense, it is a *Freethinker* Fund, for the loss on the paper and its adjuncts will have to be made good from our own resources.

J. H. WILLIAMS.—Charles Bradlaugh did take the Oath in the House of Commons. It was proved to be only way to get in. He then got a Bill passed making Oath or Affirmation optional.

ANNE CAPON.—Very pleased to receive your greeting.

H. ORGAN.—Thanks.

T. THELWALL.—We hardly thought you had reached eighty-one. Glad your convictions become firmer, if possible, with age.

C. F. SIMPSON.—Thanks for "very best wishes."

LIVERPOOL "SAINT."—Neither Socialists nor Anti-Socialists will use the N. S. S. organisation while we have anything to do with it. One world at a time—and one thing at a time.

A. P. (Westcliff).—We note your kind wish that it were ten times as much. Sorry age keeps you from the Dinner.

Some answers to correspondents stand over unavoidably till next week.

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

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

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

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

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

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 this evening (Jan. 17) the third of the Shoreditch Town Hall course of lectures. His subject is a poetical and suggestive one—"The Silence of the Tomb."

There was another good audience at the Shoreditch Town Hall on Sunday evening, and Mr. Cohen was in good form and had a fine reception. Mr. A. B. Moss occupied the chair, and his invitation brought forward several questions, which were all satisfactorily answered.

Birmingham and district "saints" should note that Mr. Lloyd lectures, afternoon and evening, in the Town Hall on Sunday, January 31. Mr. Foote will deliver the fourth and last course of lectures there a month later, on February 28.

Amongst the letters wishing our Editor "many happy returns of the day" was one from the veteran Mr. W. H. Morrish, of Bristol, whose memory in connection with Freethought goes back to the days of Charles Southwell. Mr. Morrish is as lively as ever, and knocks off A Birthday Ode (and paid, as he puts it) to G. W. F. "I always read the *Freethinker* with interest every week," he says, "and find it lively and clever. I think many people have been mentally improved by reading it, and that you are doing a very useful work." The veteran signs himself "your faithful henchman." He has always been "faithful" in everything. Nature built him that way.

We hope our readers will do their utmost to promote the circulation of this journal during 1909. We find that we must chiefly rely upon them to do this, as general advertising is so expensive and (in the case of a journal like this) so ineffective. The great thing is to put the *Freethinker* into fresh hands—in other words, to get fresh people to read it. All who make the attempt find some measure of success. An old reader just informs us that he induced a churchwarden friend to read this journal, and the result is that "he is now a free man." Our word to all our readers is, "Go thou and do likewise."

Why don't some more business men amongst our readers give the *Freethinker* a chance with their advertisements?

We are willing to meet them as far as possible in the experiment. We believe they would find the paper a better advertising medium than they fancy. We have always declined quack advertisements, which we see in very "respectable" papers, but we are open to receive all honest announcements.

Mr. George Payne, of Manchester, sent a second cheque for £50 to the Secular Society, Ltd., thus making a total donation of £100 to its funds during 1908. Mr. Payne rather shuns than courts publicity, but we mention his contribution by way of encouraging other Freethinkers to go and do likewise—at least to the extent they can afford.

Georges Brandes, the famous critic, and author of a great work on Shakespeare, which has been translated into English by Mr. William Archer, has made the acquaintance of the *Freethinker* lately, through the medium of Mr. William Heaford, whose article on Brandes' little volume on Anatole France will be remembered by many of our readers. Mr. Heaford has just received the following communication from Brandes, dated Copenhagen, January 3, 1909,—and we print it in the original French in which it is couched, for the sake of readers who can follow it in that language:—

"*CHEZ MONSIEUR ET CONFRERE,*—

Je suis vraiment touché de votre amabilité. Je reçois continuellement *The Freethinker*, et je vois avec quelque étonnement que les idées pour lesquelles j'ai combattu toute ma vie, surtout d'une manière indirecte, ont un organe en Angleterre. Il me paraît qu'à présent le vieille maison société Zebaoth et Son devait annoncer l'entrée de B. Zeboub dans l'administration et dater cette communication de Messina 30 Dec. 1908.

Ce qui me charme et m'étonne c'est l'optimisme de vos collaborateurs. Je suis, hélas, trop convaincu de l'inguerisable bêtise de nos prochains.

De tout cœur à vous,

Mr. William Heaford."

GEORGES BRANDES.

There is a delicious spice in the French original, but here is our rough rendering for English readers:—

"*DEAR SIR AND CONFRERE,*—

I am quite touched by your amiable attentions. I receive the *Freethinker* regularly, and I see with some astonishment that the ideas I have been fighting for all my life, chiefly in indirect fashion, have an organ in England. It appears to me now that the old firm of Sabbaoth and Son should announce the entrance of B. Zeebub into the management, and date this communication from Messina, December 30, 1908.

What charms and astonishes me is the optimism of your co-workers. I am, alas, too convinced of the incurable folly of those we live amongst.

Yours with all my heart,

Mr. William Heaford."

GEORGES BRANDES.

There is no English expression for "*nos prochains*." It means literally "our neighbors"; but it doesn't mean that essentially in this connection, so we have done the best we could with a paraphrase.

Georges Brandes does us honor in that letter. But he does himself some honor too. The *Freethinker* has been fighting nearly twenty-eight years for ideas which are "the ideas" not only of Georges Brandes but of all the advanced thinkers in the civilised world. Only now and then do we get a generous word of encouragement. We are glad of it when it does come,—but it is by no means a condition of our persistence. We entered this struggle in the spirit which inspired Garibaldi's promise of "hunger, wounds, and death" to the young men of Italy. We counted on a life of toil and suffering and insult; but we knew that we should have a word of cheer now and then from a truly great spirit, and we have always felt confident that justice would be done to us some day, even if it were after we had been buried, with the sword on our coffin, (as Heine said) the sword of a soldier in the great war of the liberation of humanity.

We have a certain sympathy with Georges Brandes' disgust, in his old age, at the incurable folly of the mob,—the mob of all classes, for brains and character don't run parallel to the frontiers of social strata. From palaces to workhouses the old human paste is found; but also from palaces to workhouses you sometimes find—and you never can tell where beforehand—a real man or a real woman with that extra spoonful of brains which makes such a world of difference, and that extra dose of sympathy in the heart which marks off the real "elect" from the cold and callous crowd. It is in the increase of these "cranks," as the vulgar call them, and their reaction upon the great mass of their fellows, that the only sure and certain hope of the future lies. And it is because we believe that there is an increase, however slight, that we do not capitulate to pessimism.

Priestcraft and the Supernatural.

IT is a curious phenomenon of our modern social life that, notwithstanding the abundance of accumulated knowledge relating to the early history of man and his religious beliefs, bringing out into bold relief the diabolical part that the priest in all ages has played in the performance of rites and ceremonies of an infamous and inhuman nature, and in the subjection of the human intellect to superstitious fears, there should still persist side by side with modern culture a priesthood with the same supernatural claims and pretensions as the priests of savagery, able to amass enormous sums of wealth, and to obtain a reputable social standing in a civilisation which has practically outgrown any serious belief in the religious dogmas which are the stock-in-trade of the priestly order. But, while it may seem strange that the social prestige of the clergy has not suffered to any great extent as the result of the present decay of religious influence,—being still able, notwithstanding the anachronism of their professional calling, to flourish like a green bay tree,—yet, in the light of the past history of their order, and the methods they have employed for the enrichment of their particular caste this survival amid changing conditions of knowledge of a religious order belonging to the past, but having neither part nor lot in man's present mental development—this survival is not difficult of explanation. Because, if we take a historical survey of the priesthood, it will be seen that the religious doctrines they teach and the rites and ceremonies they perform are a purely incidental matter. When man, in a low stage of development, thought the anger of the gods could be appeased by human sacrifice, the murder of a fellow-being was part of the priestly office; when the blood of bulls and goats was substituted for human life, the priest became the official butcher; and so with every change of social and mental conditions, the functions of the priestly office have changed accordingly. Sacrifices may fail, rites and ceremonies may cease, doctrines may become obsolete, and beliefs fall into decay, but the priestly caste, enjoying ease and opulence, goes on for ever. "Change and decay in all around I see" was not written with reference to the priesthood; and the moral of this continued existence amid the decay of religious systems is, without question, to be found in those emoluments of office which the priestly class in all ages have striven to obtain.

The dictionaries differentiate between the priesthood and priestcraft, but in reality there is no such distinction. Priesthood is defined as the office of the priest, but, as we have pointed out, there are no legitimate or essential functions attaching to the office, apart from participation in the material benefits which those in search of heaven's favors have ever lavishly placed upon the shrines of idolatry. Wm. Howitt, the Christian author of the *History of Priestcraft*, himself favors this dictionary distinction, but there is no better evidence than his own work that the two are as inseparably linked together as the Siamese Twins. In his universal survey of the priesthood from the very earliest times to the priest-ridden condition of modern England in his own day, he finds the aims and objects of the priesthood in every country and in every age of the same ambitious and mercenary nature; and he is evidently unable within the whole range of history to find a single instance of a priesthood that had not self-gratification and self-aggrandisement for its objects. The history of the priesthood is the history of priestcraft, a fact which is equally as true of the Jewish and Christian as it was of the Pagan priesthood. Indeed, the "rooted and incurable malignancy of priestcraft" is nowhere more conspicuously in evidence than in connection with the Levitical order, which Mr. Howitt somewhat curiously claims was "the only priesthood ever expressly ordained of Heaven." Almost every evil act which degraded man is capable of committing—drunkenness, de-

bauchery, sexual vice, murder—is charged against this heaven-appointed priesthood by the prophets of their own nation. To what a corrupted and vile condition must that sacred order have sunk when inspired testimony informs us that the sons of Eli actually cohabited with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. How audacious do the pretensions of the priesthood become in the light of a history that has not a redeeming feature to commend it. The claim of a superior moral sanctity for their order, the pretension that their office is one of divine appointment, the economic right to live upon the labors of others, the employment of any and every means for the protection of their caste, the securing of social and political power for their own selfish ends, the suppression of education and connivance at the horrible conditions which make the lives of the poor a burden—these are the universal characteristics of the priesthood.

Priestcraft, as distinguished from priesthood, is said to be the priestly policy for the acquisition of wealth and power, a policy that has been, and is now, the principal feature of the *Christian* priesthood. For if we look at the princely-salaried Archbishops of the Anglican Church, and the legislative power of its Bishops as members of the House of Lords; if we look at Nonconformity and the flattery by its ministers of the successful business men (as if worldly success was not more often the result of unprincipled craftiness than the reward of honest labor), and view their competitive struggle for good financial berths, it ought to be apparent that the delusive phrase the "Christian ministry" is but a soft-sounding name for one of the worst and most expensive forms of priestcraft that ever existed. For surely nothing else is needed to establish the identity of the clerical and ministerial order of Christendom with the universal system of priestcraft than the accumulated wealth which many of them leave behind when they "shuffle off this mortal coil." The social dangers of a priesthood cannot be too often or too strongly insisted upon, for the recent disgraceful religious controversy and bitter ecclesiastical wrangling in reference to the Education Bill ought to bring home to all those who have the real educational interests of the children at heart the truth that the clerical order, by whatever name it chooses to designate itself, is a social menace and an enemy of enlightenment and social reform.

Although, as we have said, the priesthood is able to flourish amid the decay of religious and ceremonial systems, yet there is one thing absolutely essential to the continuance of their power and the retention of their social privileges, and that is—the recognition of the Supernatural. Destroy belief in that and the very reason for their existence is gone. They can drop out of their preaching important items like the existence of the Devil or of hell—in the same way as a tradesman ceases to stock goods for which the demand has ceased—and still continue to do a lucrative business in more fashionable emotional wares; but the foundation and bulwark of the business is the supernatural. Without that its credit would be gone, its capital depreciated, and the trade would become extinct. It is for this reason that the "ministry" so strenuously insist upon a supernatural sanction for purely ethical precepts, which are solely the outcome of social experience, knowing that the recognition of the rational basis of morality means the abolition of their caste. The history of the long and bitter conflict between theology and science represents the struggle of the supernatural, in the person of the priest, to prevent the spread of knowledge which undermines his untenable position, and exhibits his economic social privileges as a parasitical burden on the industrial community. Strangely enough, among the lay apologists of the Supernatural, the author of the *History of Priestcraft* occupies perhaps the foremost place; and it may be remarked that Wm. Howitt's *History of the Supernatural*, which is a collection of all the fantastic beliefs among savage and primitive, as well as

among people living in civilised societies (a book without any evidential value), and his *History of Priestcraft*, which is the severest stricture of the priesthood ever written—that these two books as coming from the same pen ought to be placed among the curiosities of literature.

Every rule is said to have its exceptions, and so, as if in confirmation of the saying, we have one remarkable instance of an order of men similar in many respects to the priesthood of other religions, but who are entirely free from those objectionable features which have made priestcraft a universal curse—an order without worldly ambition and desire, of exceptional moral purity, whose highest object and aim is to practise in their daily life and intercourse the precepts of their great teacher and guide. The Buddhist monkhood is as superior to the Christian ministry as the philosophy of Buddha is above that of Christianity. In *The Soul of a People*, reviewed some time ago by Mr. Cohen, the author says:—

"There arose about him [the Buddha] a brotherhood of those who were striving to purify their soul and lead the higher life, and that brotherhood has lasted for twenty-three centuries till you see it in the monkhood of to-day, for that is all the monks are—a brotherhood of men who are trying to live as their great master lived, to purify their souls from the lust of life, to travel the road that reaches unto deliverance. Only that and nothing more."

That is the testimony of a cultured English gentleman who, during a stay of many years in the East, lived a quarter of his time in the Buddhist monasteries in Burma. And the remarkable thing about this monkhood is that their purity of life and freedom from worldly ambition has been attained without any belief in the supernatural. When a man enters this remarkable monkhood he makes four vows—that he will be free from lust, from desire of property, from the taking of any life, from the assumption of any *supernatural power*. "No hysteric visions," says Mr. Fielding, "no madman's dreams, no clever conjuror's tricks, have ever shed a tawdry glory on the monkhood of the Buddha." Continuing, he says a monk who dreamed dreams, who said that the Buddha had appeared to him in a vision, who announced that he was able to prophesy, would not be exalted but expelled. He would be deemed silly or mad. Mr. Fielding has nothing but admiration and praise for the purity and simplicity of life which are characteristic of the priests of Buddha. But, as he says, they are as far away from our idea of a priest as can be. Nothing could be more abhorrent to Buddhism than any claim of authority, of power from above, of holiness acquired except by the earnest efforts of a man's own soul. Although it is not a necessary part of their office, these secular priests of Buddha have the care and education of all the Burmese children in their hands, and as a result the lives of the people are a reflection of the simplicity and moral purity of the monkhood. Superstitious in many things these simple people may be, but the religion itself is free from any taint of superstition. Its ethical beauties, too, are not the subject of mere sermonising by these monks, for Mr. Fielding assures us that they *live* their religion.

Here we have a notable instance where both education and ethics are divorced from supernaturalism; and the moral results are certainly in favor of the separation. The mournful wailings of our "Christian ministry" as to the fearful results that will follow from the adoption of purely secular education are seen to be entirely without foundation. And if we take into consideration the case of Japan, the lugubrious utterances of our worthy bishops and little Nonconformist popes are the result of unpardonable ignorance, or else they publicly give expression to what they know to be untrue. Veracity has never been a strong point with the priesthood, and if it were not still, very largely, a case of "like priest, like people," the true object of their denunciation of secular teaching would soon be perceived. The God-idea which is the central feature of all other civilised religions is entirely absent from Buddhism; according

to those who are qualified to speak on the subject, it is an *Atheistic* system, and so, logically, if the contention of Christian clerics be valid, it ought to be a most immoral and corrupt one. Instead of which its moral beauty and superiority are beyond question.

While this monkish brotherhood of Buddha has existed for twenty-three centuries without change in its philosophy or its aims, the position of the Christian priesthood, in all its phases, with its ideals of wealth and power, is admittedly one of those "corruptions" of primitive Christianity which find neither place nor sanction in the New Testament writings. And if Christian believers really accepted, as they profess to do, the New Testament as their only guide in matters of religion, the doom of the clerical order would soon be sealed. They exist, officially, on false pretences so far as documentary religious authority is concerned, and even the so-called supernatural is no more a justification of their lucrative calling than it was of the ancient rain-doctor or medicine-man.

Priestcraft is one of the greatest—if not the greatest—curses that ever afflicted poor humanity, and intellectual honesty, as well as social sympathy, demands that the power of the priesthood be withheld in the interests of social unity and well-being. The absurdity of their claim to speak in the name of any supernatural being, or beings, is sufficiently evidenced by their conflicting opinions and their support of sectarian divisions which generate strife and jealousy, and prevent the cultivation of a healthy humanitarian sentiment. And all lovers of their race, in view of the momentous changes of the last quarter of a century, can reasonably look forward with hope and confidence to the time when superstitious humanity shall have awakened from the bad dream of supernaturalism, and when the priest, with his usurped power and social privileges, shall be no more.

JOSEPH BRUCE.

Watching the Enemy.

It is extremely interesting to note the devices to which the enemies of human progress are constantly reduced to maintain their position of supremacy in all the established institutions of the country. In our courts of law it is still considered necessary to go through some form, expressive of our mental view in regard to prevailing theological ideas, either by taking an oath, in Christian or Jewish form, or by making a simple affirmation like the Freethinker; as though a witness could not speak the truth in regard to any occurrence, of which he was an eye-witness, unless he made a solemn declaration that he would "speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." At all the courts of law throughout the country the majority of people still go through the form of taking the oath. Many of them detest this method of conforming with the law, especially as they are often required to kiss an old copy of the Bible, which has been handled by hundreds of witnesses in all stations of life and kissed by persons with foul breath, or in various stages of illness, and yet they have to go through this old form simply to let the judge or magistrate know that they still have "some sort of belief" in Christian or Jewish theology. Others who have no kind of belief in it whatever, continue to go through the form because, as they often say, "they cannot afford to let the world know their real view of this subject." There can be no doubt, however, that those in authority, when they happen to be Christians, wish to do all they can to uphold the old methods, and sometimes to subject those who desire to adopt the new method of "simple affirmation" to unnecessary annoyance. To illustrate the truth of this statement, let me give a brief account of what happened to me only a few weeks ago. As a public officer, I have made a simple affirmation in a court of law for over eighteen years—in fact, ever since Mr. Bradlaugh's "Affirmation Bill" became law;

yet when I presented myself to give evidence at a London Police-court a few weeks ago, the clerk of the court required me to say "on what ground" I wished to affirm, notwithstanding the fact that I had affirmed in that and other courts for many years past. He probably thought that I should hesitate to declare that I was "without religious belief" before a new magistrate, who was not aware of my heretical views. However, without hesitation I boldly declared that "I was without religious belief," and I then knew that neither the magistrate nor the clerk could make further inquiries into my belief, though, for a matter of that, I should have been glad to enliven the proceedings of the court with a lengthy discussion with either of them on Christian theology. This illustration is given to enforce the importance of the truth so often enunciated by the editor of this journal, that when Freethinkers go into a court of law they should always be prepared to answer the question, "On what ground do you wish to affirm?" by the simple answer in the words of the Act: "On the ground that I am without religious belief"; for, by the utterance of these few words, they save themselves any further question, and prevent a Christian magistrate from raising the *odium theologicum* against them.

Another illustration of the manner in which Christians, from time to time, endeavor to maintain the supremacy of their teachings in public institutions, came under my notice a couple of years ago, and I have had to have my eye on the "enemy" ever since. The Moderate Party had been returned by an overwhelming majority in almost all the Borough Councils in London. In Camberwell they had swept the Board and left only a courageous dozen Progressive members to watch the interests of the rate-payers from the other side. Moderates being, for the most part, Christians and Churchmen, the first thing they endeavored to do was to exclude the *Freethinker* and other Freethought publications from our six public libraries. As I happened to be a member of the Libraries' Committee, I at once gave notice that if the *Freethinker* were excluded from the tables of our libraries I should object to the inclusion of every Christian newspaper or magazine in our libraries, one by one, until publications giving every phase of religious or irreligious thought were represented; and, as the Christians feared a discussion of the question in the open council, they gave way; but there can be no doubt whatever that, had I not been a member of the Libraries' Committee, the *Freethinker* would never again have found a place on the tables of our public libraries in Camberwell. It therefore behoves Freethinkers to endeavor, at every opportunity, to get on public bodies in order to watch the tactics of the enemies of progress, and see that no injustice is done to any section of the community, and that all views on religion, whether from the Christian or the Freethought point of view, shall have fairplay. From time to time I have noticed, also, that whenever clergymen or parsons get on public bodies they take the earliest opportunity of introducing some of their religious ceremonies into the proceedings. When there is no opposition they simply dominate the body with which they are connected, and impart to it a perfect religious atmosphere; or, when there is only timid opposition, they still manage to get a good deal of their own way; but if the opposition comes from Freethinkers who understand principles, then the clergy begin to see that they are only ordinary members, and have no greater rights than any other public representatives. Only a few weeks ago a "Simple-minded clergyman" tried to induce the Camberwell Borough Council to open its proceedings with prayer. He was able to quote the fact that several other public bodies opened their proceedings in this way, and that even the House of Commons set a precedent in this regard. Now if I and other Freethinkers—members of this body—had merely contorted ourselves with declaring that we objected to allowing a

purely Secular Institution to be converted into a House of Prayer, we might have done some good; but when we further went on to affirm that in our judgment there was no efficacy in prayer, and that prayer was discredited by science, philosophy, and common sense alike—when such declarations as these were made in a hall, with a gallery filled with ratepayers, anxious to hear the discussion, and with a full meeting of Councillors, the Mayor presiding—the Christians knew that their belief in prayer was on trial, and that unless they spoke a word for the faith that was in them there would be no hope for their ever carrying such a motion while Freethinkers of this type were members of such an institution. And so, notwithstanding all their efforts, the half-hearted Christians among them, by abstaining from voting, allowed the Freethinkers to win, and the motion to open the proceedings with prayer was defeated. All this, however, goes to show that Freethinkers must be for ever on the alert, otherwise all our public institutions, in time, will be under the domination of the priest, the clergy, or the Dissenting parson.

From this subject it is but a natural step to the consideration of the Education question. And here, again, we find that it is not the question of education itself that is uppermost in the minds of Christian statesmen and politicians, but rather how to satisfy the demands of the various religious denominations without arousing the anger of "the indifferents," who unquestionably form the majority of the community. Is it not monstrous that in a so-called civilised community the kind and character of the education of the children should be more dependent upon the will of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the leader of the "Free Church Party" than upon the best educational experts of the country? A great deal has been said by various politicians about the importance of abolishing religious tests for teachers in all rate-aided schools, but such persons ought to know, if they are capable of thinking at all on the subject, that while the Bible is taught in the schools the abolition of all religious tests is impossible. The clergy know that as well as anybody; and no doubt it is one of the reasons why they wish to retain the Bible in the schools. The Anglican desires to get the Catechism in also, but the Dissenter objects; and as the Dissenter was in the majority at the polls at the last election, his objection on this point is fatal to the triumph of the clergy of the Church of England. But neither the parsons of various denominations care a fig for the opinions of non-Christians on this question. The question of justice and fair-play for all never enters their minds, as anybody can see by reading the correspondence between Mr. Runciman and the Archbishop of Canterbury on the one hand and the Education Minister's negotiations with one of the representatives of the "Free Church Party" on the other.

The Churches are determined to have their way on this question, and if the Freethought Party is content to remain quiet, or only to make demonstrations occasionally, without pressing their claims to consideration on Parliament and out of season, the hope of getting a just settlement of this question is very remote. Every sensible person admits that the only logical solution of the problem is Secular Education. The Roman Catholic is prepared to accept this solution rather than to allow the Dissenter to get his religious ideas disseminated through the medium of Simple Bible Teaching.

It is, perhaps, a pity in one way that Mr. Runciman's Bill, with its clause of "right of entry," did not pass, because in practice it would have produced such an unmitigated muddle in the schools that in less than twelve months the Secular Solution would have been welcomed out of sheer despair. I have tried to imagine to myself what scenes the "right of entry" would have produced in schools of which I have some little knowledge. I can imagine the vicar of the parish coming in and claiming the chil-

dren belonging to his flock; the Roman Catholic priest would also come for the "faithful little Catholics." But there would have been a contest at once, because some of the children have "Catholic" mothers but Protestant fathers, and the vicar and the priest would no doubt have had a knotty problem to solve before they could determine into whose care the religious instruction of the child should be committed. We can also imagine a long tribe of Dissenting parsons entering the school, one claiming all the little Baptists, another all the little Wesleyans, another all the little Congregationalists; and perhaps a representative of the Salvation Army might make his appearance, to see if he could attract any young soldiers to the Army by proclaiming the glorious doctrine of "Blood and Fire." The Unitarians, of course, would claim a few youngsters whose arithmetical powers would not permit them to understand the doctrine of the "Blessed Trinity"; and if any representative of Freethought ventured to claim a few adherents, he might soon add to their number by giving a lantern lecture descriptive of the horrors of the Inquisition, and the gradual triumph of Freethought by the introduction of the printing press, steam power, electricity, and other scientific methods for the emancipation of the masses from the thralldom of superstition.

And once the "right of entry" was abolished, the Secular Solution would have been adopted, and the priest and parson relegated to their proper place outside the school, to look after their diminishing flocks in the churches and chapels throughout the country.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Tax Exemptions in Toronto.

THE assessment lists recently issued in Toronto show that property valued at nearly \$35,000,000 is exempt from taxation. While a large proportion of this is municipal, Provincial or Dominion property, a very large proportion of church property is included in the item, much of it greatly undervalued. The iniquitous effect of this exemption is strikingly shown by some facts cited by a correspondent of the *N. Y. Truthseeker*:-

The Waltham, Mass., city authorities announce that, owing to the estate of the late Mrs. Walker, a total of over \$100,000, having been bequeathed to the Episcopal Church, the tax rate would be increased by \$1.30 per \$1,000. In other words, the Episcopal Church not only secures Mrs. Walker's property, but is permitted by law to tax the property-owners of Waltham to the extent of \$1.30 for every \$1,000 worth of property held by them. Well, it serves them right for being such idiots.

The tax rate of Cambridge, Mass., is \$20.10 per \$1,000, yet the city is so poor that it cannot properly repair its streets. But a few miles away, Brookline has a tax rate of but \$10.80 per \$1,000, and has money to loan. Why the difference? Simply because Harvard University, with assets of \$23,000,000, is exempt from taxation.

Both of these cases are typical of conditions in Toronto. We have about two hundred churches, with schools, clergy houses or nunneries and parsonages attached, many of them costing from \$50,000 up to more than \$1,000,000, all of them practically robbing the taxpayers to support their sectarian institutions. And then we have a gigantic charity school—dubbed a University—where the sons and daughters of well-to-do parents are trained mainly by the expenditure of public funds, but very largely at the expense of the helpless taxpayers of the city. The tax-exemption of church and school properties is one of the most bare-faced iniquities of our day.

—*Secular Thought* (Toronto).

The starting-point being necessarily the same in the education of the individual as in that of the race, the various principal phases of the former must reproduce the fundamental epochs of the latter. Now, does not each of us in contemplating his own history recollect that he has been successively—as regards the most important ideas—a *theologian* in childhood, a *metaphysician* in youth, and a *natural philosopher* in manhood?—*Auguste Comte*.

My own conscience is more important to me than what men say.—*Cicero*.

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.

SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL: 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The Silence of the Tomb."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Forest Gate Public (Lower) Hall, Woodgrange-road): 7.30, A. Allison, "Blessed be ye poor." Selections by the Band before lecture.

COUNTRY.

FALLSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, James Howard, "Socialism and Brotherhood."

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Tate's Restaurant, Vicar-lane): 8, Mr. Hynes, "Guilty or Not Guilty?"

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Central Buildings, 113 Islington): 7, Sidney Wollen, "Who Are These Arrayed in White and Those Arrayed in Black?" Members' adjourned meeting after lecture.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): H. S. Wishart, 3, "Good God, God Knows"; 6.30, "Should We Worship the Devil?" Tea at 5.

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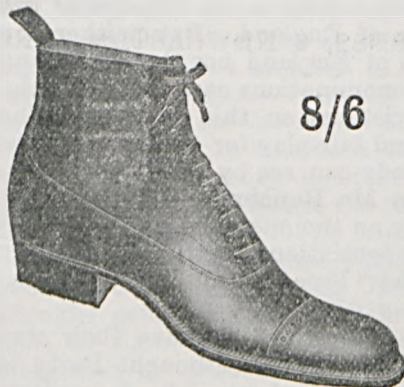
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