

THE Freethinker

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Wisdom is to be found in truth alone.—GOETHE.

The Challenge of Secularism.

MY attention has been drawn to an article on "The Challenge of Secularism" in the current number of the *London Quarterly Review*. If the publisher had known his business he would have sent me a copy, as I see that I am pretty freely mentioned in it. The writer of the article is the Rev. G. S. Streatfield, M.A., Hon. Canon of the pro-Cathedral of Coventry. Considering his profession, and how it loves "infidels" generally, I should call him tolerably fair. He appears to try to be fair, and, if he does not entirely succeed, he must have credit for the effort.

Canon Streatfield's article covers a good deal of ground, makes numerous statements, and passes many judgments. As one who knows the Secular movement better, I believe, than any other living man, I think it my duty to review some of this ground, to deal with some of these statements, and to criticise some of these judgments. The task is really forced upon me. I would not seek it, and I do not shun it. From some points of view, it is rather unpleasant, and occasionally *very* unpleasant. But I am more anxious about the truth than about anything else, and I hope I shall always prefer it to the most comfortable falsehood.

In one of his references to me, the reverend gentleman says that I have "an exceedingly forcible way of expressing" my opinions. If this be indeed my character, I shall probably live up to it in the present article. There is room for some plain speaking; it is, in fact, invited; and plain speaking is, in itself, pretty sure to be forcible.

Let me pause here to say that I have looked through the rest of the January number of the *London Quarterly Review*, and have seen several things that made me smile. Mr. T. H. S. Escott, in dealing with the *Annals* of Tacitus, refers quite seriously to "the Rev. Robert Taylor, A.B., M.R.C.S.," and says in a footnote: "I have not had an opportunity of seeing Mr. Taylor's *Diegesis*." He evidently thinks that "Mr. Taylor" is still living, and does not know that he belonged to the first half of the nineteenth century, that he left the Church of England and delivered Freethought discourses which were published under the name of *The Devil's Pulpit*, that he was associated with the famous Richard Carlile, and was twice imprisoned under the Blasphemy Laws. That is one joke. And here is another. The Rev. Frank Ballard—who, by the way, has lately been appointed as a sort of special infidel-slayer—contributes an article on "The Public Reading of Scripture," in which he remarks with singular indiscretion, considering the nature of his present job, that "The

extent to which the Bible is actually rejected through such wild ravings as those of *God and My Neighbor*, or Secularist pamphlets, is small enough to be left out of consideration." This remarkable statement, which displays Mr. Ballard's usual accuracy and good manners, is totally at variance with both the letter and the spirit of Canon Streatfield's warning. "The Church," he says, "is face to face with a determined enemy, an enemy, moreover, which, it cannot be denied, is gaining ground." "Those," he adds, "who are acquainted with the history and present phase of the movement would, I feel confident, unanimously agree that it ought to be confronted more strenuously and systematically than hitherto." Thus do the Christian doctors differ, just like the uninspired medical ones, about the same patient and the same complaint.

Canon Streatfield starts by quoting the Bishop of Birmingham's observation that it would be "hard to exaggerate the unsettlement of belief in many classes of society," and adds, on his own part, that it "cannot be doubted that in this unsettlement an active secularist propaganda has played an important part." Having said this, and justified his article in two sentences, he plunges at once into history:—

"Up to the middle of last century anti-Christian effort can scarcely be said to have been organised. It had been sporadic, intermittent, personal. It is represented, in the history of the movement, by the names of Thomas Paine, Richard Carlile, Robert Taylor. With the advent upon the stage of George Jacob Holyoake, who gave to the cause the now familiar name of *secularism*, the effort to uproot Christianity, to discredit theistic dogma, and destroy the religious basis of life, entered upon an organised existence. Under his influence and leadership secular societies were formed between 1851 and 1857 in no less than thirty different centres."

The reverend gentleman, one judges, has been reading Mr. Joseph McCabe. He has an exaggerated idea of Holyoake as an organiser. What really happened was this. Holyoake, Southwell, Paterson, Matilda Roalfe, and others who figured in the "blasphemy" trials of the early forties, were all Socialist missionaries. It was as a Socialist missionary that Holyoake delivered the lecture at Cheltenham which got him into trouble. Questions were asked after the lecture, and in reply to one of them, which was wide of the subject, he replied that, considering the privations the people of England were then suffering, it would be judicious to put the Deity on half-pay. That answer brought him a prosecution for "blasphemy" and six months' imprisonment in Gloucester Gaol. This made him conspicuous as a militant Freethinker, which indeed he was then; but he had been travelling the country and lecturing as a Socialist missionary rather than as a Freethought advocate. Now the Socialist movement had already begun to break up, and the

process was hastened by the rupture between the bolder section, who defied the Blasphemy Laws, and the timid, time-serving section, who hoped to promote the cause of the people by subservience to their spiritual oppressors. Naturally, as the Socialist movement went to pieces, the Freethought movement stepped into its inheritance. The Socialist movement did good, but it was premature; far more intellectual and moral preparation was necessary; the minds of men had to be liberated before their bodies could be free; and it was this work of liberation that the Freethought movement, which was the salvage from the wreck of the Socialist movement, set itself to perform. And it was quite natural when Bradlaugh came to the front, in the early sixties, that the "social question" should be more and more thrust aside, in spite of Holyoake's wailings; for the real task for the day was the war against Christianity, and everything else but a hindrance to the main object of the battle. Bradlaugh instinctively felt this, and acted upon it; but Holyoake never saw it, although he was always talking about "keeping separate things distinct."

Holyoake was certainly a man of ability. I am not denying that. I am only trying to point out the favorable conditions in his environment. He had ability, and he had youth on his side, being only thirty-five when he presided over the first Secular Conference ever held in England; but he had also the advantage of outlasting the other "prisoners for blasphemy"—every one of them having disappeared from the scene, and this gave him both distinction and predominance.

It is easy to overestimate the importance of those "secular societies" which he formed between 1851 and 1857. They were mostly very small affairs. The majority of their members were old Socialist-Freethinkers who had got into a habit of meeting together. Some of these "societies" lasted into the early seventies. I remember the one at Manchester, where the first Secular Conference was held in 1852. Two veteran Socialists, Ridgway and Tarr, were its leaders; its Sunday meetings were held in an upstairs room in Grosvenor-street; I lectured there (to my elders) when I was a very young man, and I remember how I had to keep my voice under for fear of breaking the windows or deafening the hundred people who crowded into the place in defiance of the rules of hygiene. I remember the Glasgow Society, with its little hall, off a dirty street. Its leaders were old Socialists too; brave men, fine fellows, true as steel, but only a handful all told; and almost to the last they were pro-Holyoake and anti-Bradlaugh. The Society's meetings, I say, were held in that poor little hall. They were nothing to the fine, enthusiastic meetings we hold in Glasgow to-day. All honor to the men (and women) who held so bravely together in those darker days! But do not let us fancy that the old "societies" and "centres" were the mighty things they are apt to look in a summary historical retrospect.

Holyoake, as a Secularist leader, for some time had the field to himself. Trouble began when Bradlaugh came to the front, which a man of his great ability and powerful personality was bound to do. Canon Streatfield admits that he was "a leader still more capable" than Holyoake, more "determined" and, the reverend gentleman adds, more "violent." I know that this is the Christian tradition, but it is grotesquely false.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued.)

The Truth About Free Will.—VI.

(Concluded from p. 68.)

IN a preceding paragraph I said that in asserting the accountability of human actions certain things are assumed. It remains to point out what these things are; and as accountability is a legal or quasi-legal term, we may commence by noting its sense in law. In criminal law a man is accounted responsible provided he knows the regulation he is charged with infringing, and that he is also capable of appreciating consequences. As, however, all citizens are assumed to know the law, we may confine our attention to the last point. What, then, is meant by ability to appreciate consequences? By this can only be meant the ability to create an ideal presentment of the penalties attaching to certain actions. Every promise of reward or threat of punishment assumes this effect on the mind, and that certain general results will follow. There can be no other meaning to responsibility, as is seen from the fact that idiots and lunatics and young children are not counted as responsible beings, since with them the power to mentally represent the full consequences of actions is deficient. Moreover, in cases where a plea of insanity is set up it is necessary to prove that the accused is not amenable to motives in the same manner as are normally constituted people.

The same general sense governs the meaning of responsibility in non-legal matters. A very young infant, incapable of ideally representing consequences, is not a responsible being at all. An older child has a limited responsibility in certain directions only. As it grows older, and growth brings with it the power of more fully appreciating consequences, so does its responsibility increase. In other words, we assume that certain motives operate at certain stages of mental development, and *the whole of the educative process aims at making these motives effective.* That is, responsibility, bringing with it the liability to punishment, assumes the very thing that the Indeterminist asserts makes responsibility an absurdity. It is through ignoring the fact of "responsibility" being a word of sociological origin some Determinists have been led to deny responsibility altogether, and Indeterminists to declare it incompatible with the Determinist position. Both were right, and both were wrong. It is not true that man is responsible for the existence of his own mental states, but *socially* he is responsible to his fellows so long as he is normally amenable to the pressure of social forces. Responsibility is an absurdity so long as we limit our attention to the individual; but in so limiting it the Indeterminist misunderstands the meaning of the word, and applies it to a region in which it has no legitimate application.

It is not difficult, then, to see the function of punishment—save in the retaliatory sense—and of praise and blame in the Determinist theory of things. Actions being decided by motives, the problem with a defective organisation is how to secure the prevalence of desires that will ensure the right kind of action. A man steals; the problem then is, How can we weaken the desire to steal and strengthen feelings that will secure honesty of action? On the lower plane we resort to threats of punishment, so that, when the desire to steal again asserts itself, the knowledge that certain measures will be taken in the interests of social protection may by association arrest this desire. Unless this is so, such a measure as the First Offenders' Act has no reason for its existence. On the higher plane, by arousing a consciousness of the value of honest conduct, we strengthen feelings that will divest of effective force the desire to steal. Our praise or blame rests upon a precisely similar basis. Man being the socialised animal he is, the approbation or disapprobation of his fellows must always have a powerful influence in the determination of conduct. The memory of censure passed or of praise bestowed itself acts as a motive to determine conduct when the critical moment arrives. It is not because the

agent, up to the moment of committing the action, could have done other than he did, but because there is a possibility of his acting differently in the future, that he is either blamed or punished. Apart from this consideration, praise and blame is wholly ineffective, and a complete waste of effort.

For what use can there be in punishing or blaming a man if his actions are determined, not by motives, but by a mysterious will that is uninfluenced by anything we may say or do? If neither the promise of punishment nor its memory serves to arouse feelings that will decide conduct in the future, then one might as well punish a stone or whip the wind. It is equally foolish to look for the cause of wrong action in defective education, organisation, or environment. A man's nature after a long course of vicious actions remains exactly what it was before he commenced his career. Evil feelings may arise with greater frequency, but as it is not these but the will that decides, they are wholly ineffective. It cannot be even argued that certain motives offer stronger attractions than others to the will, for this in itself would be a form of determination. Motives, as motives, must be altogether ineffective; and on what ground can we praise or blame if neither praise nor blame can have even the remotest influence in determining action in the future? On this theory punishment becomes an act of sheer brutality, and condemnation or approval completely useless.

The absurdities in which a belief in Free Will lands us does not end here. If motives do not determine conduct, any forecast of what people will do in a given situation is impossible. The will, being free, what they have done is no guide as to what they will do. As motives did not decide their conduct in the past, neither can they decide their conduct in the future. Whether we read backward or forward makes no difference. We have no right to say that the actions of certain statesmen prove them to be desirous of gaining power or wealth. This would imply Determinism. We cannot say that because a murder has been committed we ought to suspect certain people who bore the deceased person ill-will. If we see a person jump into the river, we cannot argue that he meant to commit suicide. The mother may as well murder her child as nurse it. The workman may labor as well for a bare pittance as for a comfortable wage. A man outside a house in the early hours of the morning, armed with a jemmy and dark lantern, may have no desire to commit a burglary. A person armed with a game-bag and gun may have no desire to shoot anything. In all of these cases, and hundreds of others, we have no right, if Free Will be a fact, to argue from actions to motives or from motives to actions. Motives do not rule, and in any or every case we may only be witnessing the vagaries of an uncaused will.

It is often said that, no matter how convinced a Determinist one may be, one always acts as though the Will were really free. As I have pointed out, the statement rests upon a misunderstanding of the facts involved. The fact is that no one acts either in relation to one's fellows or to society in general as though Free Will had any existence. In dealing with the drink question, temperance reformers argue that a diminution in the number of public-houses, the creating of healthier opportunities of enjoyment, etc., diminishes temptation and weakens the desire for intoxicants. In dealing with children, people of all classes rightly lay stress upon the importance of the right kind of associates, the power of education, and healthy physical surroundings. With adults, the beneficial influences of fresh air, good food, well-built houses, healthy conditions of labor, and open spaces, have become commonplaces. In every biography attention is paid to the formative influences of parents, friends, and general environment. In all these cases no allowance whatever is made for the operation of this mysterious uninfluenced Will. The motive theory of action may not be consciously in the minds of all, but it is everywhere implied in practice.

In strict truth, we cannot undertake a single affair in life without assuming that people will act in accordance with certain motives, and that these in turn will be the outcome of specific desires. If I journey from here to Paris I assume that certain forces—the desire to retain a situation, to earn a living, to satisfy a sense of duty, etc., etc.—will cause all the officials connected with railway and boat service to carry out their duties in a given way. If I appeal for the protection of the police, I am again counting upon certain motives influencing the minds of officials in a particular way. In any commercial transaction I make the same assumption. I count with confidence that certain desires will so influence people on the other side of the globe that they will co-operate to land a given commodity at my doors. A General commanding an army appeals with confidence to certain motives in the minds of his soldiers to induce them to storm a position or enter on a battle. The appeal to motives is constantly being made by all—even by the believer in Free Will himself; for, after all, his appeal is very largely based upon the desire that all have for liberty, even though in this instance the term is meaningless.

On no other basis than that of Determinism would a science of human nature or of history be possible. Both presuppose a fundamental identity in human nature, and that, other things equal, the same impulses will always produce identical results. Determinism not only provides the only possible basis upon which to build up an understanding of human nature, it is the only basis upon which we can work for reform. Believing that certain influences will, in the mass, produce a general result of a particular kind, we lay our plans and work with a justifiable prospect of success in the future. Individually, too, the consideration that every action we perform leaves with us a certain residuum for either good or ill, supplies in itself one of the strongest motives for the exercise of self-control, and furnishes a sure basis for self-development.

C. COHEN.

The Quickened Trend.

ONE of the most illuminating facts of history is that intelligence and faith are sworn enemies. Great faith implies, is built upon, great ignorance. Our fathers despised the intellect and discouraged its cultivation. In their estimation the reason was a faculty of fallen human nature, while faith was a gift from God. By reason, it was said, we cannot know God; he reveals himself alone to the believing heart. Ever since the fall in Eden the reason was only fit to deal with mundane things, or to solve the problems of the purely secular life. Religion was not within the sphere of its operations. "How can this be true, father?" the child would ask, and the answer invariably would be, "With God, all things are possible, my son." Usually, a gentle rebuke was administered to the youthful inquirer in the words of a well-known hymn—

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace."

The same attitude to the reason characterises the orthodoxy of to-day. Evangelical preachers everywhere take a special delight in denouncing the proud intellect of fallen man. "This is God's Word," they say of the Bible, "and our one duty is to believe, not criticise, it. To criticise it is to treat it as a man's book." "But how are we to explain the Deluge?" someone dares to ask. "Why, the Deluge was God's judgment on a hopelessly wicked world. But you must bear in mind that the Lord is never cruel except in order to be kind. We are struck dumb by a disastrous earthquake, but we should never forget that

'Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.'

Our comfort comes from the fact that, in propor-

tion as knowledge grows and spreads, such an irrational attitude is becoming more and more impossible. Science is slowly permeating the whole community, and its atmosphere is fatal to evangelical faith. The theory of evolution, for example, deals God a blow in the face. A little while ago, a young governess was explaining to her two pupils that once upon a time the inhabitants of this island of ours were raw savages, roaming at will, or in search of food, through the primeval forests, when one of the boys interrupted her with the question, "Was God living then?" An affirmative answer failed to satisfy him. At seven years of age, it was intellectually clear to him that the infinitely good and loving God in whom he had been taught to believe could not have created wild savages. And he was perfectly right. It is quite impossible to reconcile the fact of evolution with the belief in the moral perfection of the Deity. An evolving Universe yields no argument for the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good Creator. Mr. R. J. Campbell assures us, in his last published sermon, that "an out-and-out Materialist is rare to find in these days," or that "he has gone out of fashion"; but even Mr. Campbell has to admit that the belief in an intelligent and intelligible God is not natural. He asserts that evolution "is making for something far beyond our present status." Then he naively asks, "But does it know it?" Let us give prominence to his answer:—

"There's the rub. To that question the unaided understanding is not equal. It is a question which can never be answered merely on the intellectual plane."

That, after all, is the old evangelical doctrine only very thinly disguised. He claims that we have intuitive faculties which are higher than the understanding, and that these tell us of God. We hold, on the contrary, that the intellect is our highest faculty, and that all our other faculties should be in subjection to this, and that the intellect does not point to a deity. And we hold, further, that in proportion as the intellect is cultivated the belief in God decays.

A characteristic confirmation of this comes from Wales. Four or five decades ago secular knowledge was at a fearful discount throughout the Principality. The Sunday-school was the chief educational institution. Biblical knowledge was the only knowledge worth acquiring. Training in the arts and sciences was frowned upon as both superfluous and spiritually injurious. The majority of the ministers of the Gospel were unlettered men who regarded colleges and universities as agencies of the Devil. Under such conditions religion flourished amazingly. It was the one absorbing interest of the people. By-and-bye schools began to multiply and a few colleges made their appearance. During the last twenty years secular education has made enormous strides in theological Wales, with the inevitable result that theology has lost most of its ancient charm for a large section of the community. Indeed, we now learn, not only that the people are losing their former religious enthusiasm, but also that the educated youth of the country are giving up religion altogether. Those who are at all familiar with the conditions of life in Wales know that the majority of young men and maidens can only secure a collegiate course at the cost of tremendous sacrifices on the part of their relations. As a rule, these relations are intensely religious; and it is held that if the young people return to their homes without their religion it shows the basest ingratitude to those who denied themselves on their behalf, as if a person could preserve his religion out of gratitude. This is how Dr. Morris, of Treorky, puts the case:—

"There is a striking contrast between the attitude of the youth of our country towards the churches before and after their college careers. Before entering college they were prominent church members, teachers in the Sunday-school, foremost in all religious activities, and ever alive to the call of the churches upon their services. On their return from the national colleges of Aberystwyth, Bangor, and Cardiff, they cut themselves adrift

from all these old associations, and refuse to identify themselves in any way with any movement on the part of the Church tending to mental, moral, or religious elevation."

That is to say, "the influence of college life on the religion of the students," in the majority of instances, is to totally destroy it. It robs them of the faith "in which they were nurtured," and sends them forth into the world pure Agnostics. Now, we claim that this is naturally inevitable. Dr. Morris, who deplors this loss of religion, puts a large portion of the blame on the professors who are said to be, in some cases, "alien in birth and tongue, antagonistic in religious and national sympathies, seeking to Anglicise Welsh institutions and to Continentalise the Welsh Sunday, openly or practically professing Agnosticism." Some of the Non-conformists, while not in favor of imposing "any test of creed or even of religion, as such, upon candidates for college professorships," yet advocate the application to them of what they call the "test of character." In other words, they insist upon having truly religious professors without actually tying them down to any creed or confession. But the truth is that such professors are difficult to find, and that the honest teaching of Science naturally tends to weaken religious faith. It is an undeniable fact that a youth brought up in a Welsh Sunday-school, if he has any brains at all, is bound to suffer a rude awakening when he comes into touch with the mighty thought-movements of the world at any good college or university. It will be irresistibly borne in upon him that most of what he was taught as a child is flatly contradicted by modern discoveries, and that even the fundamental doctrines of Christianity utterly lack evidential support.

What is taking place in Wales is occurring, on a greater or lesser scale, everywhere else. The drift of modern life is clearly away from supernatural beliefs. Even the Churches themselves are moving in the same direction. Very few of them put the supreme emphasis on the supernatural now. Most of them, having palpably failed to secure adequate support as centres of supernaturalism pure and simple, have taken to social service of various forms, and rely for success upon their secular clubs which, it is declared, cease to be secular by bearing the Christian label. It is a significant fact that, speaking generally, the Churches shift their emphasis only to save their lives, and that the change was put off as long as possible, almost, in some cases, till the life was entirely out of them. This is what they style adapting Christianity to the changed conditions of the present age. In reality, it is a part of the process of disintegration to which the Christian religion is being subjected, in consequence of the spread of natural knowledge. Christianity triumphed nominally because, by an accident, it became strong enough to stop the clock of progress, and to prevent its being set going again for a millennium. In course of time, Christianity lost its controlling power, and the clock was started again, and has been going ever since; and the progress marked by it necessitates the destruction and disappearance of all that was built upon the foundation of ignorance and superstition.

It is possible that in Wales the rapid disintegration of the Christian religion may be accompanied by not a little moral disaster. It is to be feared that the present discussion of the subject in the vernacular press is conducted in so bitter a spirit that it is bound to intensify the mischief. The educated youth who "turn their backs upon the chapel and religious worship, and deny the faith in which they were nurtured," are so violently denounced that they are in danger of showing their resentment by committing moral suicide. What they need is not condemnation, but guidance; and who, in all Wales at the present time, are competent to give them the latter? What they require to learn above everything else is, that religion, in the only sense with which they are familiar, and in the sense

in which they have been compelled to renounce it, is a radically different thing from morality, and that the repudiation of the former should result in a deeper and more genuine attachment to the latter.

J. T. LLOYD.

William Morris.

William Morris, by Alfred Noyes. English Men of Letters Series. Macmillan. 1909.

THE addition of a volume on William Morris to the well-known English Men of Letters Series, is a matter of considerable importance. And Mr. Alfred Noyes, a writer of considerable repute, who has been entrusted with the task, has acquitted himself remarkably well and given us a life-like picture of the poet. Morris died in 1896, and even now the great reading public have but a slight acquaintance with his work. The popular impression is that he was an able but monotonous poet, with a weakness for fine printing and artistic wall papers. Unquestionably, much of Morris's work must prove of transient interest, but when time has done what criticism can but feebly attempt, there still remains a precious literary legacy which posterity will claim. Morris's works fill many volumes, his verse alone occupying ten. A poet who comes before the world with so much verse must have no insignificant claims to justify his pretensions. Morris's merits lie upon the surface. In the art of story telling in verse he is without a modern rival. He is also lucid, as clear as Macaulay. His ideas are never crushed beneath the jewelled panoply of his language. Of all the moderns, his poetry approaches closest to Chaucer, although the modern singer wanted the ripe humor of the old bard. Morris's perfect mastery of English and his fidelity to nature, leave no doubt of his right to a position in a series devoted to the great English writers.

Morris was so much more than a mere writer. He was never "an idle singer of an empty day," to quote his own phrase. He left the stamp of a vigorous individuality on English art no less than on English literature. He never shrank from advocating his views, and his Freethought comes out clearly in his poetry. He is as materialistic as Matthew Arnold or Swinburne with regard to death. To him there was no life beyond the grave. This thought is the burden of a beautiful song in *Ogier the Dane* :—

" Kiss me love! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death? "

The seekers after the Earthly Paradise—

" Saw Death clear, and deemed all life accurat
By that cold overshadowing threat—the end."

In another place, the poet bids us—

" Rejoice, lest pleasureless ye die,
Within a little time must ye go by;
Stretch forth your open hands, and while ye live
Take all the gifts that Death and Life may give."

The same iconoclastic thought runs like a tender undertone throughout his verse and amply demonstrates the poet's Secularism. Take him for all in all, he was a splendid type of man. His mind dwelt among noble memories and imperishable ideals, and his sole business in life was to bring culture to those of his fellow men who were contented with lesser recollections and ignoble desires. William Morris richly deserved the wreath which Mr. Alfred Noyes, a singer of a younger generation, lays upon his tomb.

" Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise or blame, nothing but well and fair."

M.

The subtlety of nature is far beyond that of sense or of the understanding; so that the specious meditations, speculations, and theories of mankind are but a kind of insanity, only there is no one to stand by and observe it.—*Pacon*.

Messina.

CHRISTMASTIDE, 1908.

" I wish we had not come to look,
But stayed at home to pray,
Or read that comforting old book
By light of yesterday.

It's no use, Andrea, I must see
If it or *that* be her;
Just don't you think a bit of me:
I'm fixed, I will not stir.

See what they're doing; look! do look!
I say you must, you must;
They've got a shovel and a hook
To rake among the dust.

Oh, stop them, stop them! Why just there
The sweetest mother stood
That ever bent her knees in prayer
Or died as woman should.

My head's a whirl; each vital part
Resents this awful doom;
My soul is quenched, my hungry heart
Aches like a throbbing womb.

I would not see such sight anew
For wealth and fame and love,
Nor all the wonders Satan knew
And showed to Christ above.

Do let us go; the shining day
Afflicts me like a rod;
Home, home, no more to pray
In meekness unto God."

M.

Religion in America.

LAST YEAR'S DENOMINATIONAL STATISTICS.

THE following table, showing the growth of the principal religious bodies in the United States during 1908, has been sent us by a correspondent. It is extracted from statistics appearing in the *Christian Advocate* (New York) for January 14, 1909, compiled by Dr. H. Carroll :—

Denomination.	Total Communicants at end of 1908.	Growth per cent. in 1908.
Lutherans	2,082,766	2.9
United Brethren... ..	300,269	2.65
Protestant Episcopal... ..	884,553	2.64
Roman Catholics	12,094,656	2.4
Methodists	6,838,979	2.2
Baptists	5,413,945	1.9
Congregationalists	721,553	1.8
Evangelicals	177,416	1.7
Disciples of Christ	1,295,423	0.8
Universalists	53,012	0.7
Presbyterians	1,831,854	0.5
Dunkaras	122,332	0.5
German Evangelical Synod	238,805	0.4
Latter Day Saints	339,500	0.26
Reformed	432,248	0.23
Adventists	93,523	0.1

The following show a decrease :—

Denomination.	Total Communicants at end of 1908.	Decrease per cent.
Salvation Army	26,850	0.5
Christians	92,332	9.9

In the case of some religious bodies, such as Jews (143,000) and Unitarians (71,200), estimates are only given, while in the case of Christian Scientists (85,096) a recent denominational rule forbids the reporting of numbers.

It will be seen that not one single religious body reports a percentage growth as great as that of the normal annual increase in population, viz., 3 per cent. The eighteen bodies mentioned above account for over thirty-two millions of the population of the United States, and the Roman Catholics compose one-third of that number.—*Daily News*.

It is dangerous to let man perceive too distinctly how closely he approaches the animals, without at the same time showing him his greatness. It is also dangerous to let him see his greatness too much, without at the same time indicating his lowliness. Still more dangerous is it to leave him in ignorance upon both subjects. On the contrary, it is of the greatest advantage to give him a clear notion of both.—*Pascal*.

Acid Drops.

The resumption of capital punishment in France was demanded by a clamorous public opinion. Whether it will deter the worst criminals from committing murder remains to be seen. Meanwhile, we may expect to see a Bill passed for the carrying out of executions within the prison walls, for as a public entertainment these spectacles are profoundly debasing. England carried this reform many years ago. France is ahead of us in many things, but behind us in this one. Yet the pious journalists and preachers need not crow so lustily over the French "infidels." Executions are not so frequent as divorces, and are not brought to everybody's door like the newspapers. According to French law, the details of divorce cases cannot be published. According to English law, the nastiest details may be served up hot with tea and toast at family breakfast tables. And "respectable" journals, that affect to look down on the *Freethinker*, take their full share in this dirty business.

Reverence for parents is universal in China and Japan. One of the educated, reforming Japanese women was over in England last year, and she told an interviewer (of the *Daily News*, we think) that it was no part of the Japanese ideal to educate women to live as spinsters, neither did they approve of young people allowing their old fathers and mothers to go to the workhouse; they would sooner starve themselves than do that in Japan. How different from the state of things in England and other Christian countries! What an awful experience lies behind that Swiss proverb, at once so beautiful and so terrible: "It is easier for a mother to keep seven children than for seven children to keep a mother."

We reproduce in another column, from the pages of the *Daily News*, a statistical account of the various religious denominations in the United States. All of them appear to have increased somewhat in numerical strength during 1908, though not one of them has kept pace with the increase of population. Two denominations have decreased, one of them being a body that always blows its own trumpet very lustily—the Salvation Army. The other is the "Christians." They have gone back nearly ten per cent. Their present number is 92,332. Those are all the Christians in America—and we did not think there were so many of them. All the rest are Roman Catholics, Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, etc., etc. At last year's rate of decrease, the Christians in U. S. A. will be extinct in about ten years.

We see by an American exchange that the *Denver Post* of December 14, 1908, published some figures from the report of Warden Cleghorn, of the State Penitentiary. The religious profession of the prisoners was as follows:—

Jews	...	...	6 or 1	per cent.
Protestants	...	...	368	„ 60
Catholics	...	...	216	„ 35
Buddhist	...	...	1	„
No Religion	...	...	19	„ 3
Not Declared	...	...	4	„ 1

These figures must be very enjoyable to Protestants and Catholics. We don't say that their religion sends them to prison; we only say that it doesn't keep them out; and this is quite enough for the argument.

We referred last week to the Salvation Army's eagerness to ship Englishmen to Canada—for the sake of a commission on each of them. "Colonel" Lamb, on behalf of "General" Booth, stated that Canada wanted 5,000,000 Englishmen. Well, the Labor Party's Conference has been held since then at Portsmouth; and during the exchange of greetings, after President Clynnes' address, a voice from Canada was heard in the person of Mr. W. R. Trotter, of the Trades and Labor Congress of that country. "He warned British workmen," the *Daily News* report says, "against misrepresentations in this country as to emigration prospects in Canada, and strongly objected to the Salvation Army arranging to send another 8,000 emigrants, when there were so many unemployed in Canadian cities." This is good in its way. But why doesn't the Labor Party in England have the courage to deal more vigorously with Booth's "economics"?

This is how Christian monarchs understand "sport." The Czar has sent sixty live "wild" boars to the Kaiser. These "wild" boars are let loose in the Imperial Forest, and afford some good hunting. The shooting of these "wild" boars is to be part of the festivities in honor of King Edward. It seems to us that the boars are hardly as

"wild" as the huntsmen. But we may not be good judges. We belong to the "grovelling" party of Freethinkers. We know nothing of God, but a little of Humanity.

President Roosevelt is "warning" America a good deal just now. We venture to warn *him* a bit. He put it in print several years ago that Thomas Paine was a "filthy little Atheist." He has been told again and again—and again, that Thomas Paine was not "filthy," but scrupulously clean and well-dressed until his last crippling illness made him helpless in his old age. He has also been told that Thomas Paine was not "little," but five inches taller than the present occupant of the White House. He has further been told that Thomas Paine was not an "Atheist," but a Deist. Yet these corrections have made no impression on President Roosevelt. He lets the libel on Thomas Paine stand. President Roosevelt is a Christian.

The Rev. Dr. Campbell-Morgan reads his newspaper "in order to see how God governs the world." Well, is he satisfied with God's government of the world? The newspapers tell us of murders, suicides, divorces, frauds, burglaries, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, fatal thunderstorms, disastrous floods, international disquietudes, cruel oppressions, the destruction or exploitation of the weak by the strong. Can Dr. Morgan, with these terrible realities staring him in the face—dare he give God a certificate of good character as the world's Governor?

Principal Forsyth says that "a book on the Atonement must be written from behind the veil." A man must be very heavily veiled indeed to write a moral book on an immoral transaction. Dr. Forsyth himself believes that "the death of Christ was something offered to God, but that it was God who offered it." The Principal was not behind the veil when he composed that strange sentence. If he is right, the Atonement was a dramatic farce. However, it has been the stock-in-trade of the pulpit from the beginning, and it has given theological professors lucrative employment.

The Spirit of God in humanity and the Church of Christ are not in harmony. In other words, God in the world and God in the Church are not pulling together. But that great unifier and harmoniser, the Rev. F. B. Meyer, has resolved to do all he can before he dies "to link them together." He is evidently determined to attempt what God himself has failed to accomplish, which failure is a strong argument against the existence of God. We are not afraid to predict that Mr. Meyer will prove a dismal failure at his self-imposed task.

A celestial messenger exclaims, "The Word of God cannot be weighed by logic, nor his sons swayed by reason." That is why the former is now so utterly discredited, and that is why the latter are so few and far between. There is no Word of God in the twentieth century, and those who call themselves his sons are but so many curious relics.

A popular preacher delivered a sermon lately on "The Personal Triumphs of Jesus." Like Jesus himself, these personal triumphs exist alone in the preacher's own brain. They have never yet materialised. Is it not curious that the Jesus with whom the sky-pilots pretend to be so familiar is utterly unknown to history? Were he a historical character they would be more cautious in their descriptions of him, for they could be brought to book.

"Jacob," one of the two Russian Anarchist murderers at Tottenham, who shot himself effectually, was buried at Walthamstow Cemetery in the evening. A minister was found to do the religious part of the performance. No doubt the Rev. Robert Eastly (Baptist) meant well. We tender him our respect as far as he was moved to pay a last attention to a wretched man who figured in his own tragedy. But what a curious form of words the reverend gentleman used at the graveside! "Forasmuch," he said, "as it has pleased God to take unto himself the soul of our brother, we therefore commit his body to the ground." God took "Jacob's" soul! Did he? The coroner's jury found that he took his own life. Does the reverend gentleman mean that God directed the whole affair, or that God simply awaited results? While he is getting his answer ready, we may observe that the pleasure of God would not have been consulted if "Jacob" had lived to be tried for murder. We know what the sentence would have been, and the hangman would have done his job without asking questions.

The Rev. Dr. James Moulton has commenced a series of conferences at Manchester on Socialism. But Socialism is

to be studied exclusively from the Christian standpoint, and no one is to be permitted to attack "the great fundamentals and sublime verities of the Christian religion." Provided they respect these, they may study Socialism as much as they please. We hope they will derive benefit from their studies; but a study of Socialism that refrains from saying anything about the influence of Christianity, except of a complimentary character, is one of those things of which only Christians are capable. Dr. Moulton also says he wishes everyone to come to the conference with an open mind. An open mind, when the first condition of a candid examination is excluded! And having brought together a number of people who are Christian enough to take part in a conference in which freedom of thought and speech is deliberately prohibited, Dr. Moulton's next step, we presume, will be to advertise the fact that at an open conference all the Socialists present were sincere Christians.

"There has been," says the *Christian World*, "few greater misfortunes in the mental sphere than the supersession of the bright optimism of Greek theology by the gloom of a Tertullian and an Augustine, culminating later in that extreme Calvinism which, in some at least of its aspects, contained surely the most diabolical conceptions of God and man that ever possessed and tortured the human intellect." As this covers all the Christian history of Western Europe, it is only saying what we have said over and over again, that the human mind has known no greater calamity than the triumph of Christianity.

The *Christian World* is sorry that certain Cabinet Ministers (Mr. Haldane is one referred to) should go about saying that to lay a foundation of national education we must either make it secular or give denominational facilities all round. Well, but this is nothing more than the truth. Either the State should teach all religion (and include under "religion" all speculative opinion) or it should teach none. Christian bigotry will see to it that it does not teach all religions, and common sense and justice will ultimately see to it that religion is left severely alone.

The Rev. Harry Bisseker is much puzzled by the discovery that, while God has granted him the blessings asked for, the favors have been granted "nearly always later than I had hoped." To solve the mystery he invited other people who prayed to relate their experiences, and the results were found to be the same. This is exactly what we, although not given to praying, would have expected. God is not to be hurried, and when a person makes a request for something to be done by a certain time disappointment is the consequence. But give God time, and a prayer offered in the right spirit is sure to be heard and answered. Every sincere prayer that is offered for rain or fine weather is answered—sooner or later. Let any sincerely pray for national regeneration, and that too will come—in God's time. Over two hundred years ago Dissenters prayed for religious liberty; to-day they have nearly all they then prayed for. Even if one prays for health, health will come—if they live long enough. We must remember, as Mr. Bisseker points out, that with God "a thousand years are but as yesterday," and what may seem a long time to us is an immediate answer to him. Mr. Bisseker's philosophy removes a very strong objection to the efficacy of prayer, and we hope that the brilliant intellect that gave it birth will receive due recognition. Why, if Canute had only possessed patience, the sea would have gone back when he commanded it to recede. In all such matters we must learn to wait.

The Bishop of Ripon, though a progressive theologian, is blinded by undisguised prejudice when he describes non-Christian religions. Preaching in aid of foreign missions at Leeds the other day, he singled out Buddhism and charged it with leaving "poor humanity with no moral stimulus to go onwards." But this is not the case. Buddhism makes the gaining of Nirvana the supreme end of all endeavor, the glorious reward of a virtuous life. Wherein does it differ in this regard from Christianity? Dr. Boyd-Carpenter must know that the Buddhist moral code is not inferior, to say the least, to the Christian. And yet the Bishop had the usual audacity of his profession to ask, with reference to Christianity, "Is not this the religion we want the world to learn?" Still, even this right reverend Father-in-God would not dare to say to the Heathen world, "Come and see what grand things Christianity has done for Great Britain."

The final word against Haeckel has been spoken. Mr. R. J. Campbell declares that before the *Riddle of the Universe* was written it was superseded. By Mr. Campbell and the New Theology, we presume.

A correspondent asks Mr. R. J. Campbell if one can really have confidence nowadays in the objective efficacy of prayer. Mr. Campbell answers, Yes; although he guards his reply with the customary statement that the way in which this is accomplished is very mysterious. The instances he cites in support of his belief is connected with the Welsh revival, when "certain notorious characters" were prayed for "publicly and with great earnestness." As a result "before the meeting closed" these individuals surrendered themselves to God. Mr. Campbell calls this a marvellous result, and wanders off into much random talk about "psychic influences" and the "subconscious depths of our being." The conversions are not really so marvellous as this great religious thinker's presentment of the case. The real problem is not to understand the conversion of these "notorious characters," but Mr. Campbell's own state of mind. In the first place, these people must have been present at the meeting, and so we may safely assume they were suitable subjects for revivalistic experiments. Next they were publicly prayed at (which makes one sympathise with the "notorious characters"); and, with a crowd of excitable Welsh revivalists praying at them, there does not seem any great need for "psychic influences," etc. If the meeting had publicly sworn at them, much the same result might have been achieved. Then Mr. Campbell does not say how soon these evil livers drifted back into their evil courses, nor why, if this method is so effective, much more is not accomplished upon similar lines. Finally, if psychic influences are so powerful, we suggest that a great deal of Mr. Campbell's Socialistic propaganda is quite unnecessary. Let him form prayer-circles and leave these to bring the anti-Socialists over to his side.

The Messina earthquake is still exercising the wits of religious apologists. The Rev. T. Rhondda Williams suggests that the fact that "God rules nature by invariable law is our one chance of learning his way, and every suffering that occurs is a challenge to a new lesson." This may be; but we do not see how this removes from God the responsibility of having a way that makes suffering necessary. There should be no villages there for Etna or Vesuvius to bury, says Mr. Williams. Maybe; but one might as reasonably say there should be no Etna or Vesuvius there to bury them. Mr. Williams also finds good in the earthquake, inasmuch as it teaches people the kind of houses they should build in such localities. So that God is justified in burying alive a couple of hundred thousand people in order to show other people what kind of houses they should build. We wonder what would be said if someone were to put Mr. Williams under an express train in order to teach other people the benefit of keeping off the rails? In the same vein Mr. Williams says that in such cases as the Tay Bridge disaster it might be better that seven hundred people should be killed than that others should go on with slipshod work. Well, in all seriousness we ask, what is the use of a God who can educate people by no other method than this? Should we be any worse off without such a God? We do not educate our children in this way, and we do not educate each other in this manner. In human affairs we spare each other as much as possible the pains of positive experience. God's method is to kill one man in order to benefit another. And anything more stupid could not be easily conceived.

Mr. Williams's religious musings cannot well be worse than his general philosophy, but it runs it close. He says that all that was destroyed in Italy were things of no value. There was not even a single life lost. For man is a spirit, and "all the most precious things of existence were things which the earthquake could not touch." So that all the terror and suffering—the people who saw their families starve to death in agony, those who were driven mad by their experiences—are all nothing. The most precious part of man, the soul—assuming it exists—is preserved; and that has gone somewhere—assuming, again, that this also exists—where it can properly appreciate the wisdom and love of a God who made earthquakes part of his plan in order that, as Mr. Williams puts it, he might "banish the jerry builder from Italy." The worst of religious people is that they first declare their God to be all-wise, and then paint him as silly as themselves.

Rev. Thomas George Bird, rector of Weston-in-Gordano, near Bristol, and his wife, had an orphan boy, named William Charles Rawling, in their employ, as a sort of general servant. He appears to have begun work at 5 or 6 in the morning and finished about 10 at night. He was also systematically ill-treated. We need not go into particulars, but it is easy to imagine how ill-nature gratifies itself at the expense of a helpless victim. The case came before the magistrates at Long Ashton, who considered the charge of cruelty proved

against both of these good Christians. We suppose it was reluctance to send such good Christians to prison that induced the magistrates to fine the male Bird £2 and the female Bird £3, with costs in both cases.

Dr. Clifford has written another long rigmarole on Passive Resistance. When will he find time to answer this plain question: Why is it worse for Nonconformists to pay rates and taxes for Anglican and Catholic religious teaching than it is for non-Christians of every denomination to pay rates and taxes for Nonconformist religious teaching? He has evaded this question for years. When he faces it we shall think him an honest man. Until he does we shall think him otherwise.

We see that Mr. R. S. Pengelly, an able Radical journalist, has been starting a novel discussion. "Does militant Free-thought propaganda," he asks, "stimulate, instead of sapping, religious belief?" Mr. Pengelly says that this question arose in his mind in consequence of a statement made to him by a (*sub rosa*) Freethinker to the effect that Christianity would perish more quickly if it were left alone, and that Charles Bradlaugh was, without knowing it, the best friend the Churches ever had in our time. Mr. Pengelly takes this quite seriously. He asks whether Bruno, Voltaire, and Paine all labored in vain. Which rather surprises us, for Mr. Pengelly is not without a sense of humor. We think he will see, on further reflection, that this *sub rosa* Freethinker's principle, if applied all round, would doom the world to perpetual stagnation. Free-thought propaganda is but a part of the general war of new truth against old error. If men's religious mistakes should not be assailed, neither should their political and social mistakes. The new truth should quietly smile and let the old error reform itself! This will not convince Mr. Pengelly as a Radical journalist, —and why should it convince him as a Freethinker? Perhaps it will occur to him some day that Freethinkers (like that *sub rosa* one) who never do anything for Free-thought will, if they are clever enough, always find plenty of plausible reasons for shirking their moral obligations. Turning an inclination into a principle is one of the commonest forms of human fallacy.

Fifty years ago Wales was undoubtedly one of the most intensely religious countries under the sun. Its people were never happy except under the spell of religious excitement. All its boys and girls were expert theologians. Doubt was rare, scepticism unknown, while Atheism was regarded as a natural impossibility. Religion was both the business and the pastime of the entire population. But that state of things no longer exists. Despite, or, perhaps, partly in consequence of, two great revivals, Wales is today rapidly breaking away, not only from the rigid orthodoxy of former days, but also from its wonted interest in religious rites and ceremonies. This revolution has been in progress for some years, and the faithful have been discussing and deploring it with very sad hearts; but at last the press has taken the subject up with great vivacity. The blame is laid on the university colleges which have recently sprung up all over the country. The Welsh newspapers are full of letters from ministers and laymen, all complaining that the spread of higher education is resulting in serious damage to the simple faith of the people. The ball was set rolling by Dr. Morris, of Treorkey, in a vigorous article which appeared in the old-established and excellent magazine, *Y Geninen*, the sum and substance of which is that "the educated youth of Wales to-day turn their backs upon the chapel and religious worship, and deny the faith in which they were nurtured." Well-known ministers from all parts of the Principality sorrowfully confirm the testimony borne by Dr. Morris. This is a beautiful instance of the light of true knowledge chasing away the darkness of superstition. The result, of course, grieves the parsons and injures the chapels, but it will prove an incalculable benefit to the higher life of Wales.

"In Italy," the *Catholic Times* says, "the anti-clericals are following the example of the unbelievers of France," and "if their attacks upon Christianity are to be repelled the Italian Catholics must be vigilant, active, and united." They *must* be, must they? But *will* they be? Ay, there's the rub. Anyhow, we are glad to see our Catholic contemporary alarmed.

The late Bishop of Colchester—the Right Rev. Henry Frank Johnson—who died on December 7, left £60,848. He made that pile in preaching the gospel of "blessed be ye poor." Dear, good, honest Christian!

A rather pious daily paper—but they are all a bit that

way—mentions the *Lancet* report of the aorta of King Menephtah who is "supposed to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus"—an event, by the way, which never took place, since there is no evidence that the Jews ever were in Egypt. King Menephtah was an old man, and the aorta shows traces of senile calcification. On the strength of this fact, the pious newspaper aforesaid declares that Scripture is verified by Science, for does not the Bible say that God *hardened* Pharaoh's heart? We wonder if the editor is trying to take a rise out of his church and chapel readers.

It is announced that the Rev. A. I. Field, lately vicar of Ravensden, Bedfordshire, has joined the Roman Catholic Church. The Pope is quite safe now.

The mountain has labored and brought forth a mouse. The Spaxton Messiah has been declared incapable of any ecclesiastical preferment. He still remains a Church of England clergyman. How he must be laughing with his spiritual brides in the Abode of Love!

Thomas Paine, 1737—1809.

WHEN the Black Army has passed
And gone to its Darkness again,
Men shall revere thee at last
Thomas Paine!

Over the century's years
Still comes the sound of thy voice,
Bidding us kill Christian fears
And rejoice.

Where e'er Superstition may lurk,
Spite the superior sneer,
We will continue the work
You held dear.

Strive we their Faith to uproot,
Building up truth in its stead,
And lovingly now we salute
The Great Dead.

Priestcraft yet blackens thy name,
Using its poisonous arts,
But safe is established thy fame
In our hearts.

Reason the Christians still hate,
But they who love Truth more sincere,
Shall cherish thy memory, Great
Pioneer!

Thy sun rises high overhead,
Ever Hope's message to give;
After Christ Jesus is dead
Thou shalt live.

Mankind shall never forget,
When Reason's Age shall obtain;
Mankind shall honor thee yet,
Thomas Paine.

HENRY STUART.

Why is Christianity an evil? Because, beneath its yoke, people bow down meekly under heavy inflictions of wrong and injustice, under cruel burdens of disease and premature decay, saying: "These are the punishments of the sin that is born in man, which he must expiate in sorrow and suffering; and it is unchristian to repine, or rebel against them."

The thinker and reasoner is not satisfied with such assertions; he recognises that man should be a noble and beautiful being, with a right to the full period of his allotted existence; that he was not "born in sin," or predestined to suffer; but naturally gifted with perfect organism, and faculties intended for use and the enjoyment of life; that the loss or untimely degeneration of these powers and capacities is due to error and the violation of Nature's laws, not to the revengeful fury of a deity against the creatures of his own design; and he sets to work with brave and tireless determination to seek out the causes of those evils, and to discover sensible cures and preventions; for he feels it to be the duty of every right-thinking human being to strive earnestly and vigorously for the improvement and restoration of man to Nature's high level of mental and physical excellence, and to use his best endeavors to disperse the results of the ignorance and superstition by which man has so long been debased and enslaved, and from which he is now slowly emerging, to nobler and more enlightened conditions.—*Libertas*.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, February 7, Public Hall, Prince of Wales Baths, Kentish Town Road, N.W.; at 7.30, "God's Message to Messina."

February 14, North London; 21, Glasgow; 28, Birmingham.

March 7 and 14, Queen's Hall, London.

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—241 High-road, Leyton.—February 14, Glasgow; 21, North London; March 7, Woolwich

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—February 7, Aberdare; 14, West Ham; 28, Glasgow. March 7, Manchester.

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £93 15s. Received since.—A Friend, £2 2s.; H. C. B., 10s.; Enquirer, 5s.; A. S. Vickers, £1; J. E. Stapleton, 2s. 6d.; F. Bonte, £12 10s.; A. H. Smith, 10s.; C. E. R., 2s. 6d.; R. Taylor, 2s. 6d.; Augusta Forrer, £1.

J. PARTRIDGE.—Tuesday morning is really too late for reports, but we have strained a point this time.

S. FELLOWS.—Your criticism is quite sound, and Sir Oliver Lodge would find it difficult to answer. We will deal with his "theology" of earthquakes in our lecture on Sunday night. No room left here on Tuesday.

C. E. R.—Thanks for very good wishes.

AUGUSTA FORRER.—Pleased to have your good wishes for 1909. Yes, there is satisfaction, as you say, in seeing one's ideas spread and one's work bearing fruit. We will keep your last suggestion in mind.

W. P. BALL.—Much obliged for useful cuttings.

ENQUIRER.—Thanks for your constant and successful efforts to promote our circulation. Sorry we shall miss you, but we wish you every success on the Continent. Pleased to know that you will still read the *Freethinker*, and that its editor will "ofttimes be in your thoughts."

G. LEWIS.—Lecture Notices should be written on the model of our printed list, and not inserted in the midst of a letter, giving us the trouble of extricating it for the printers.

R. J. HENDERSON.—Sorry you have been on the sick list, and hope you are now better. You did not put the name of the paper against the cutting. It is always useful, and may sometimes be necessary.

W. H. HARRIS.—Pleased to see "Pessimist's" letter on the earthquake in *Public Opinion*, but sorry we cannot spare the space to reproduce it; besides, it will do more good where it is.

W. G. H.—The lecture was not published. Mr. Foote does not publish his lectures. Mr. Balfour's lecture was published in book form, as we stated in our article, at the price of 2s. 6d.

D. McLEAN.—Thanks for cutting. Will make inquiries as to the other matter.

A. PARR, who goes in for one of our "Business Card" advertisements, says: "I thoroughly enjoy your paper every week; I hope it will prosper."

J. E. STAPLETON.—Always pleased to hear from you. Is there any prospect of Freethought propaganda being renewed at Nottingham?

T. S. E. asks us whether we could not manage to have the *Freethinker* cut and stitched—as well as folded. In time, perhaps.

WALTER SUTCLIFFE.—Yes, it is quite true; the Christian Endeavor people in America did pray to God, on a certain day, to convert Colonel Ingersoll. God didn't do it. Sorry we have not time to hunt up the date for you. We think it was about 1896. Ingersoll died in 1899. His opinions never changed a bit. His last lecture on *What Is Religion?* was delivered only a few weeks before his death. Read for yourself. It is published at our office. Thanks for giving the *Freethinker* to the Cudfoot Mechanics' Institute.

ARGUS.—What you say does not change our view of the matter.

J. LYNN.—We cannot recommend you a Dictionary unless we know the price you can afford to pay.

ANGLO.—Next week; too late for this.

F. H. CHANDLER.—Matthew Arnold did not believe in a personal God and apparently not in a future life. He believed in Jesus simply as a human teacher. Glad you have "spent many happy hours in reading the *Freethinker*."

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.

The *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 6s. 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 had splendid audiences on Sunday at Manchester; the afternoon meeting was exceptionally large, and in the evening the hall was crowded from the platform to the doors, every bit of standing room at the back being occupied. Mr. Foote's lectures were enthusiastically applauded. A number of questions were asked, and answered, after each lecture.

Mr. Foote starts the new course of Sunday lectures this evening (Feb. 7) at the large Public Hall in connection with the Public Baths, Prince of Wales-road, Kentish Town—a very large room, holding some 2,000 people. His subject will be "God's Message to Messina." It should fill the Hall, and will do so if every North London "saint" helps Miss Vance to give the lecture publicity.

As this Public Hall is a new "pitch" we may state that it is within three minutes' walk of the Kentish Town (Tube) station or Kentish Town (N.L.R.). It is five minutes from Kentish Town (Midland) station, and the same distance from the "Britannia." Cars from King's-cross or Hampstead-road, and 'buses from Charing-cross pass the end of the road.

We may also state that, while admission to these lectures will be free, with the usual collection in aid of the expenses, there will be shilling tickets for some front reserved seats. These can be obtained of Miss Vance beforehand or at the Hall before the lecture.

Mr. Lloyd had a good audience at the Birmingham Town Hall on Sunday afternoon, in spite of the bad weather, and a fine audience at night. He had an enthusiastic reception. Mr. Davies' band played an excellent selection of music, which was loudly applauded.

Mr. Lloyd delivers two lectures, afternoon and evening, to-day (Feb. 7) at the Grand Theatre, Aberaman, near Aberdare. "Saints" coming from a distance are notified that Aberaman is about a mile and a quarter from Aberdare, and reached by the Taff Vale Railway.

Our "Business Cards" plan for advertisers has caught on to a certain extent. We venture to press it on the attention of all our readers who are *in* business and may *do* business in that way. They might give it a trial, anyway.

Our recent paragraphs, in this column, on a letter from M. Georges Brandes to Mr. William Heaford, have got us into some trouble. On one side there appears to be a mistake; and on the other side a misunderstanding. But perhaps we had better print a letter we have received from M. Brandes straight away, and make our comments afterwards. Here is the letter:—

"DEAR SIR,—

My postcard to Mr. Heaford was a private letter. I am therefore surprised to find it printed in your valuable Review. A joke that can do in a private communication easily seems of bad taste when printed, and I never joke with theological convictions when addressing myself to the public.

(I see that my handwriting has not been quite readable. I had not written *maison societe*, which is not French, but *raison sociale*: firm)

It can hardly be said that (writing privately) I would do myself honor in stating that I have been fighting for certain ideas all my life. You tell me that these ideas are not mine alone, but the ideas of all advanced thinkers in the civilised world. I have never pretended the contrary; I have not so silly an arrogance. Only a few of my books are translated in English, but in 1872 I wrote: 'I am treated as if the ideas with which I am inspired and which I express were false cartoons of me. They are the ideas of enlightened Europe.' You see that we agree. But thoughts and modes of expression are naturally individualised.

You would oblige me, dear Sir, in publishing these few remarks, and improving my bad English.

Truly yours,

GEORGES BRANDES."

We very much regret, of course, that we printed a communication which M. Brandes regards as "private." But we must say, in fairness to ourselves, that neither we nor Mr. Heaford regarded it in that light. It was not marked "private" and it was written on a postcard, which is not considered a very "private" medium in this country. Still, we regret and apologise for the blunder; and Mr. Heaford, who shared the blunder, joins in the regret and the apology.

We also regret, of course, that both Mr. Heaford and ourselves deciphered one phrase in M. Brandes' letter wrongly. It was not an important misreading, yet we are sorry that we made M. Brandes responsible for bad French.

For the rest, we can only say (1) that M. Brandes seems too much afraid of his own excellent joke, which would be appreciated and enjoyed on the Continent, however it might be resented in pious and hypocritical England; and (2) that M. Brandes quite misunderstands our own remarks. Instead of belittling him by saying that *he* was only advocating the ideas of the advanced thinkers of the whole civilised world, we said (or at least meant to say) that *we* had been doing that. We suggested that he was one of the "great souls" who now and then gave us a word of encouragement in our fight. We may add that we do not expect, or wish, that M. Brandes should adopt our weapons in fighting the common enemy. We write more for the people than he does. He addresses himself to the readers of more expensive literature. But if he stands behind a formidable piece of artillery, he will remember that there are others who are fighting the enemy at close quarters with pistol, sabre, and bayonet, who naturally look more grimy and bloodstained.

Mr. Harry Quelch moved the resolution at the Labor Party's Conference instructing the Executive to press forward the Secular Solution in Education. Mr. James Sexton and Mr. O'Grady were passionately opposed to this. Of course. But why on earth did Mr. Bernard Shaw try to put a spoke in the Secular Education wheel? We are sorry to say he has been doing this for years. He declared, nonsensically enough, that the only basis of Secular Education is the cane; although he must know that Secular Educationists are pretty well all opposed to the beating of children. He also declared that you must give children some metaphysical reason for good conduct—as if that necessitated the retention of theology in the public schools. Fortunately the Conference declined to be misled. The resolution was carried by 739 votes to 234.

Rev. W. Morris, D.D., has been writing in a Welsh quarterly on "The Influence of our National Colleges on the Religion of the Students," and some telling extracts from it are translated in the *South Wales Daily News*. The reverend gentleman deplors that the educated youth of Wales turn their backs on churches and chapels. "To the inexpressible sorrow," he says, "of parents who had sacrificed their heart's blood to give them the advantage of a collegiate education, they turn their backs upon the chapel and religious worship, and deny the faith in which they were nurtured." We sympathise with the parents. We congratulate Wales.

A lady engaged in literary pursuits sends us a very encouraging letter from Sydney, New South Wales. We should like to print her letter in its entirety, but we are not quite sure that she wishes to be identified by the intolerant people around her, and she is too far off to be consulted on the matter. We shall therefore give one or two passages from her letter. Here is the first:—

"It has long been my wish to let you know how greatly your enlightening and satisfying articles in the *Freethinker* are enjoyed by my husband and myself; and it may interest you to know that you have at least two constant and enthusiastic admirers in this far off, and, I regret to state, still sadly unenlightened country. The arrival of three copies of the *Freethinker* is looked forward to and gladly welcomed in our home; and whatever may be my own occupation at the time of its receipt, the first article must always be read before I can give my attention satisfactorily to any other matter. I have not words at my command in which to do justice to our keen and glad appreciation of its brave and steady purpose, or to the earnestness with which we wish it the prosperity it so well deserves. I can only say that, in our opinion, each number seems to expand its worth and interest."

Here is another passage:—

"I may also mention that a number of your most enjoyable pamphlets, bound into a neat volume, form a valued and often studied portion of my own small, but highly-prized, collection of Freethought works. My husband's library is an extensive and well-chosen one, and contains some unique specimens of Freethought literature."

The lady concludes with "our united good wishes for the long-continued success of your ennobling efforts to improve and enlighten humanity." We beg to assure her that these good wishes are highly valued. Nothing gives us greater pleasure than to win the appreciation and sympathy of thoughtful women. We say this with no sort of offence to the lady's husband. We daresay he fully understands us, and is quite ready to cry "Hear, hear!"

Every lady is entitled to a Postscript, and our fair correspondent at Sydney exercises the privilege:—

"P.S.—We are pleased to see, in a recent copy of the *Freethinker*, that our old friend Mr. Maclaren had taken the chair at a lecture by you on Shelley."

Mr. Maclaren, who is still in England, and whose pen is not unknown to our readers, will note this "P.S." with pleasure.

"Through What Channel Would Japan Accept Christianity?"

AN OPEN LETTER TO PROFESSOR MASUJIRO HONDA, OF TOKYO.

SIR,—Under the above heading you contribute an article to the current number of *East and West*, the quarterly magazine published by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Your article is manifestly sincere, and I read it with a good deal of interest; but it seems to me that you and those of your countrymen who look with more or less favor on the Christian religion are completely in the dark as to the present position of Christianity in the very countries that are sending missionaries to convert Asia.

You proceed to discuss the question: "How best can we induce the Japanese to accept the teaching of the Bible?" but you do not consider the worth of that teaching, and you are apparently unaware that throughout Christendom the theory of Biblical inspiration is gradually being abandoned—is, in fact, fast becoming a dead-letter. You say: "We cannot, we ought not to subvert what a nation or a race possesses as an outcome of ages of experience." So far as those possessions make for the diffusion of knowledge and the general weal, you are right, and no one will disagree with you when you add: "Our work is to lead it [the nation] to a better, higher and nobler perfection"; but you are far astray from fact when, in the next sentence, you refer to Christianity as "the religion for all mankind." Go where you will in the leading countries of Europe, read the press secular and religious, hear the opinions of the cultured classes and of the "man in the street," and you cannot fail to observe that Christianity, in any intelligible sense of the word, is on its last legs. Coming to Great Britain, in particular, on all hands we hear Christian whinings about the growing "desecration" of the Sabbath, decreased church membership, the absence of the evangelical tone in the churches, scarcity of eligible young men offering for the ministry, insufficiency of funds for home and foreign missions, and similar indications of waning power and rapidly diminishing influence.

Let me mention a few plain facts. In what are now generally regarded as the most "advanced" European countries, there are, roughly speaking, three stages in the history of Christian defence against "infidelity." (1) Persecution pure and simple. No branch of the Christian Church has ever failed to persecute another when it had the opportunity, and all branches alike have persecuted unbelievers. Taking the New Testament record as it stands, we see that Jesus Christ himself was sorely troubled by the existence of unbelief in his day, and terrific denunciations of it are found in several passages. No wonder, then, that during this stage any opposition or hostile criticism was met by the cry of blasphemy, and summarily punished with the stake, the thumbscrew and the rack. (2) Apology. When the spirit of investigation grew too strong to be stifled by those methods, many defenders of the faith tried to answer the arguments of unbelievers and scientific critics. To mention one matter alone, cartloads of learned rubbish were written during the first half of the nineteenth century to make the Creation story in Genesis square with geology. And now in November, in the year of grace, 1908, we have Professor Garvie, D.D., declaring at the Y. M. C. A. that "the two records are utterly irreconcilable." (3) Reconciliation and "Re-statements of fundamental principles"—the present stage. Having fought and been overthrown, instead of accepting defeat in an honorable way, the Apologists now turn round and say, "Oh, we knew all along that the geologists were right, that the evolutionists were right, but revelation is progressive; the establishment of those scientific views makes no difference, or rather, it only confirms our faith." "It doesn't matter; nothing matters." This is the exalted

position that "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" now holds. A progressive revelation, forsooth! Present-day Christians are affirming and denying, accepting and refuting, asserting and then reviewing and re-stating their assertions, in such a way that few of them can really tell themselves where they are. Quite recently, at a Christian conference, Rev. Dr. Charles R. Brown declared that "criticism had absolutely closed the door to debate on such questions as were once raised by men like Paine, Bradlaugh, and Ingersoll." What a high-souled utterance! What generous opponents the Christians are! Truly, they closed the door of debate by doing their best to persecute those three men into their graves. Could anything show more conclusively that Freethought leads and Christianity follows? How the Protestants have for years ridiculed papal infallibility and the manner in which the doctrine has been modified or made to "progress" from time to time! This was neatly hit off more than half a century ago by one of our greatest English writers, Walter Savage Landor, a thorough Freethinker, in his "Imaginary Conversation" between Magliabechi, an eminent Roman Catholic prelate, and Middleton, a learned Protestant theologian. The latter is represented as saying:—

"She [the Church] now worships the blessed Virgin Mary: anciently she condemned the Collyridians for doing it, and called them heretics. Was she infallible then? or is she now? Infants were formerly admitted by her to the Eucharist, and she declared that they could not be saved without it: she now decrees that the doctrine is false....."

He then mentions other inconsistencies. The Roman Catholic admits that his opponent's statement is "strong"; "but," he adds, "divines can reconcile it with religion." "What can they not?" asks the Protestant. But the truth is, all Infallibles, Papal or Biblical, are equally absurd. Again, if the Higher Criticism and Evolution have only strengthened the Christian position, is it not a regrettable thing that theologians fought so long against Biblical criticism and Evolution—until, in fact, the latter became so strong that it was not safe to fight them any longer? "The goat of Ida will suckle new Jupiters when the elder is starved to death upon Olympus." The new ones, however, are daily becoming more attenuated and evanescent.

You state the "traditional policy" of the Japanese as "the adoption of others' merits with a view to making up" your own "defects," and then declare that "the highest merit is to believe in our Savior." May your countrymen see to it, sir, that they adopt "merits" and not worn-out myths already discarded in the lands where they originated and worked sad havoc! The undermining of the historicity of the Old Testament proves that you cannot retain Christ and the New Testament, and that they are not worth retaining, even if you could. For Christ appeals again and again to the Old Testament to support his claims. In so doing he refers to Adam, Moses, David, Jonah, the "law and the Prophets, and the Psalms." Did Christ appeal to myths? Besides, if Evolution gives man higher spiritual aspirations and ennobles and strengthens his religious belief, then Christ, who was ignorant of the doctrine, was not the fulfilment of the highest spirituality and the finality of revelation. It is impossible in the one breath to admit Evolution and to declare that all the centuries led up to the appearance of Christ, the Man-God. Do you see any "merit" in a religion that claims to be of divine origin and yet is everlastingly on its defence, ever making a stand and then retreating to some other position which in turn has to be abandoned?

You speak of the "practicality" of the Japanese, and say that, so far from this being a hindrance to their acceptance of "the deep spiritual teachings of the Bible," it is "prompting some business men to acknowledge that the Christian faith makes their employees more honest and trustworthy than ever, and induces some unbelieving mothers to place their sons and daughters under the purer and more edify-

ing influence of Christian teachers." The Christian faith can never make anyone "more honest and trustworthy"; the whole history of Christian apologetics proves that to demonstration. Commercial development and wider intercourse with other nations, with their resultant lesson that "honesty is the best policy," are no doubt producing the effects which you mention. Your country has recently been at war with a great Christian Western nation—Holy Russia, the land of executions, persecutions, and pogroms. Did the Christian soldiers of the Czar, with their ikons round their necks, show as much humanity on the field as did your countrymen? All the world knows that they did not. And the reason is contained in an extract quoted by you from Professor Yaichi Haga, of the Imperial University of Tokyo: "The whole tone of our mythology is on the side of love of life, and emphasises the importance of the present world." You have, sir, advanced to a far higher ethical position than that of the Christian mythology, with its advocacy of a morbid introspection and its exhortation to forsake the world and follow Christ; but we Western nations, in abandoning Christ and Bible, are striving towards that position.

A few years ago in Sydney, Australia, two men named Digby Grand and Henry Jones were tried for the murder of a policeman. The evidence was circumstantial, and for a considerable time they made a sturdy defence. The cordon, however, was drawn tighter and tighter round them, and at last Jones turned to his companion in the dock and exclaimed, "The game's up." Yes, the game was up, and both men were sentenced to death and, in due course, hanged by the neck till dead. So Christianity was long ago sentenced to death, and is now fighting with the frantic energy of a wounded wild beast to delay execution; but its appeal for a "stay of proceedings" cannot be upheld by the Court of Reason and Humanity. "Ichabod" is written over the entrance to every Christian temple. When, therefore, the orthodox vessel carries its freight of "whited sepulchres" with their "dead men's bones"—its apples of Sodom and Dead-sea fruit—to the land of the Chrysanthemum and the Rising Sun, the men of Nippon may well send all these home again and say, slightly varying the Aeschylean decree pronounced many centuries ago,—

"Childless children of the Night,
Go with the night and leave us with the Sun."

Yours respectfully,

A. D. McLAREN.

Life and Opinions of Darwin.—III.

(Continued from p. 76.)

DARWIN married on January 29, 1839. His wife was singularly helpful, making his home happy, and subordinating herself to the great ends of his life. Children grew up around them, and their home was one of the brightest and best in the world. Here is a pretty touch in Darwin's letter to his friend Fox, dated from Upper Gower-street, London, July 1840: "He (i.e., the baby) is so charming that I cannot pretend to any modesty. I defy anybody to flatter us on our baby, for I defy anyone to say anything in its praise of which we are not fully conscious.....I had not the smallest conception there was so much in a five-month baby." Cunning nature! twining baby fingers about the big man's heart. Still the proud father studied the cherub as a scientist; he watched its mental growth with the greatest assiduity, and thus began those observations which he ultimately published in the *Expression of the Emotions*.

In September, 1842, he went to live at Down, where he continued to reside until his death. He helped to found a Friendly Club there, and served as its treasurer for thirty years. He was also treasurer of a Coal Club. The Rev. Brodie Innes says: "His conduct towards me and my family was one of un-

varying kindness." Darwin was a liberal contributor to the local charities, and "he held that where there was really no important objection, his assistance should be given to the clergyman, who ought to know the circumstances best, and was chiefly responsible."

He did not, however, go through the mockery of attending church. I was informed by the late head constable of Devonport, who was himself an open Atheist, that he had once been on duty for a considerable time at Down. He had often seen Darwin escort his family to church, and enjoyed many a conversation with the great man, who used to enjoy a walk through the country lanes while the devotions were in progress.

Darwin's life henceforth was that of a country gentleman and a secluded scientist. His great works, more revolutionary than all the political and social turmoil of his age, were planned and written in the quiet study of an old house in a Kentish village. He suffered terribly from ill health, but he labored on gallantly to the end, and died in harness. "For nearly forty years," writes Mr. Francis Darwin, "he never knew one day of the health of ordinary men, and thus his life was one long struggle against the weariness and strain of sickness." But no whimperings escaped him, or petulant reproaches on those around him. Always gentle, loving and beloved, he looked on the universe with unswerving serenity. A nobler mixture of sweetness and strength never adorned the earth.

In 1876 he wrote some Recollections for his children, with no thought of publication. "I have attempted," he said, "to write the following account of myself, as if I were a dead man in another world looking back at my own life. Nor have I found this difficult, for life is nearly over with me."

He was ready for Death, but they did not meet for six years. During February and March, 1882, he was obviously breaking. The rest must be told by his son:—

"No especial change occurred during the beginning of April, but on Saturday 15th he was seized with giddiness while sitting at dinner in the evening, and fainted in an attempt to reach his sofa. On the 17th he was again better, and in my temporary absence recorded for me the progress of an experiment in which I was engaged. During the night of April 18th, about a quarter to twelve, he had a severe attack and passed into a faint, from which he was brought back to consciousness with great difficulty. He seemed to recognise the approach of death, and said, 'I am not the least afraid to die.' All the next morning he suffered from terrible nausea, and hardly rallied before the end came. He died at about four o'clock on Wednesday, April 19th, 1882."

Thus the great scientist and sceptic went to his everlasting rest. He had no belief in God, no expectation of a future life. But he had done his duty; he had filled the world with new truth; he had lived a life of heroism, compared with which the hectic courage of battlefields is vulgar and insignificant; and he died in soft tranquility, surrounded by the beings he loved. His last conscious words were *I am not the least afraid to die*. No one who knew him, or his life and work, could for a moment suspect him capable of fear. Nevertheless, it is well to have the words on record from the lips of those who saw him die. The carrion priests who batten on the reputation of dead Freethinkers will find no repast in this death-chamber. One sentence frees him from the contamination of their approach.

Darwin's family desired that he should be buried at Down. But the fashion of burying great men in Westminster Abbey, even though unbelievers, had been set by Dean Stanley, whom Carlyle irreverently called the "body-snatcher." Stanley's successor, Dean Bradley, readily consented to the great heretic's interment in his House of God, where it is to be presumed the Church of England burial service was duly read over the "remains." Men like Professor Huxley, Sir John Lubbock, and Sir Joseph Hooker should not have assisted at such a blasphemous farce. It was enough to make Darwin groan in his coffin.

Well, the Church has Darwin's corpse, but that is all she can boast; and as she paid the heavy price of telling lies at his funeral, it may not in the long run prove a profitable transaction. She has not buried Darwin's ideas. They are still at work, sapping and undermining her very foundations.

It is contended by those who would minimise the importance of Darwin's scepticism that he was a scientist and not a theologian. When it is replied that this objection is based upon a negation of private judgment, and logically involves the handing over of society to the tender mercies of interested specialists, the objectors fall back upon the mitigated statement that Darwin was too much occupied with science to give adequate attention to the problems of religion. Now, in the first place, this is not really true. He certainly disclaimed any special fitness to give an opinion on such matters, but that was owing to his exceptional modesty; and to take advantage of it by accepting it as equivalent to a confession of unfitness, is simply indecent on the part of those who never tire of holding up the testimony of Newton, Herschel, and Faraday to the truth of their creed. Darwin gave sufficient attention to religion to satisfy himself. He began to abandon Christianity at the age of thirty. Writing of the period between October, 1836, and January, 1839, he says: "During those two years I was led to think much about religion." That the subject occupied his mind at other times is evident from his works and letters. He had clearly weighed every argument in favor of Theism and Immortality, and his brief, precise way of stating the objections to them shows that they were perfectly familiar. True, he says, "I have never systematically thought much on religion in relation to science," but this was in answer to a request that he should write something for publication. In the same sentence he says that he had not systematically thought much on "morals in relation to society." But he had thought enough to write that wonderful fourth chapter in the first part of the *Descent of Man*, which was published in that very year. Darwin was so modest, so cautious, and so thorough, that "systematic thought" meant with him an infinitely greater stress of mind than is devoted to religious problems by one theologian in a million.

The next objection is more subtle, not to say fantastic. In his youth Darwin was fond of music. He had no technical knowledge of it, nor even a good ear, but it filled him with delight, and some times sent a shiver down his backbone. He was also fond of poetry, reading Shakespeare, Coleridge, Byron, and Scott, and carrying about a pocket copy of Milton. But in later life he lost all interest in such things, and trying to read Shakespeare again after 1870 he found it "so intolerably dull" that it "nauseated" him. His intense pre-occupation with science had led to a partial atrophy of his aesthetic faculties. It was a loss to him, but the world gained by the sacrifice.

Now upon this fact is based the objection I am dealing with. In the days of Sir Isaac Newton or Bishop Butler, when belief was supposed to rest on evidence, the objection would have seemed preposterous; but it is gravely urged at present, when religion is fast becoming a matter of candles, music, and ornament, seasoned with cheap sentimentality. Darwin's absorption in intellectual pursuits, and the consequent neglect of the artistic elements in his nature, is actually held as a sufficient explanation of his scepticism. His highly-developed and constantly sustained moral nature is regarded as having no relation to the problem. Religion, it seems, is neither morality nor logic; it is spirituality. And what is spirituality? Why, a yearning after the vague, the unutterable; a consciousness of the sinfulness of sin; a perpetual study of one's blessed self; a debauch of egotistic emotion and chaotic fancy; a ehort, a highly-refined development of the feelings of a cow in a thunderstorm, and the practices of savage before his inscrutable fetish.

Spirituality is an emotional offshoot of religion; but religion itself grows out of belief; and belief, even among the lowest savages, is grounded on evidence. The Church has always had the sense to begin with doctrines; it enjoins upon its children to say first of all "I believe." Let the doctrines go, and the sentiments will go also. It is only a question of time. Darwin tested the doctrines. Miracles, special providence, the fall, the incarnation, the resurrection, the existence of an all-wise and all-good God; all seemed to him statements which should be proved. He therefore put them into the crucible of reason, and they turned out to be nothing but dross. According to the "spiritual" critics this was a mistake, religion being a matter of imagination. Quite so; here Darwin is in agreement with them, and thus again the proverb is verified that "extremes meet."

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued.)

The World of Books.

The *Humane Review* (quarterly) for January opens with an able article by Frederika Macdonald on "The Legend of Rousseau's Children." The topic, however, is unpleasant from every point of view. An interesting and well-written article by M. Little on "The Sacredness of Life" ought to be widely read. Mr. William E. A. Axon writes on "Dr. Johnson as a Humanitarian," with reference to the grand old bear's fine article against Vivisection in the seventeenth number of the *Idler*, his strong denunciation of vivisection in one of his notes to *Cymbeline* in his edition of Shakespeare, and a striking story of his consideration for animals connected with his tour through North Wales. There is a vigorous unsigned article on "Savage Sport at Eton," and Edith Carrington writes a wise and touching article on "How to Kill Animals Humanely." Mr. H. S. Salt winds up with a very admirable article on "Access to Mountains," with special reference to Mr. C. P. Trevelyan's "Access to Mountains Bill," which "all climbers and mountain-lovers must warmly desire may become law." We hope the *Humane Review* improves in circulation. It certainly deserves to,—for it advocates a noble cause in a most worthy manner. It is published by Ernest Bell, York House, Portugal-street, London, W.C., and the price is one shilling.

* * *

Mr. A. E. Fletcher has a peculiar kink in his mind. He is always yearning back to the old orthodoxy. We suppose it is the pull of his training against the force of his experience. In writing on the late Burns anniversary he goes to one of the poet's "charming letters to 'Clarinda'" for "his own confession of faith." What an astonishing ineptitude! It is a mistake to go the letters to "Clarinda" for an accurate confession of anything. Burns was sentimentalising throughout the correspondence. "Clarinda" was a young grass-widow with children, and the hot young poet was less after her heart than her person. It was one of Burns's "old hawk" adventures, to use Stevenson's expression. What he really thought on *any* subject must be looked for elsewhere. Mr. Fletcher may take this hint from us in a general way, as we have not time to pursue the subject at present. If you want to find Burns's real opinions, never seek them in any letter to a woman, but always in letters to men, and especially to his bosom cronies. With this key of interpretation in your hand, you will unlock the inner sanctuary of his mind, and you will discover there a very different altar from the one he threw his pinch of incense on before the public.

* * *

Mr. Fletcher could not help confessing that "if Burns had lived on into the age of higher criticism and scientific research, he would have been as free a freethinker as any of our contemporary poets." This is well-meant, but still inept. What on earth would Burns care about the higher criticism—to say nothing of scientific research? He had a much better guide in his own mind and heart. It really doesn't need an *Encyclopædia Biblica* to tell a man like Burns (or a man like Thomas Paine) that lies cannot be true, that flat contradictions cannot be reconciled, that absurdities cannot be wisdom, and that brutalities cannot be humane. Burns had a keen intellect and a royal heart. Tons of learning were not necessary in his case. They would have hindered instead of helping him. He could rely on his uncorrupted common sense, his bright imagination, and his warm feelings. They pointed him to the truth, which pedants could not see for all their learning.

Another word for Mr. Fletcher. The Higher Criticism did not make Freethinkers. Freethinkers made the Higher Criticism. They were the pioneers. They fought and killed the wild animals, they cleared the forest, they left it to tamer men to stub the ground and cultivate the soil. The Higher Criticism would never have existed without the preliminary challenge of Freethought.

* * *

The February number of the *Positivist Review* opens with the very interesting Annual Address delivered by the editor, Mr. S. H. Swinny, before the Positivist Society on January 1. We are glad to see a strong reference to the Education struggle. Mr. Swinny notes "how ready politicians are to sacrifice the great principle that the State should be neutral in face of the religious differences of its citizens." And not politicians only. "By the very reason of their existence," Mr. Swinny says, "the great bulk of the Nonconformists are specially pledged to the principle, and many of them have stoutly defended it in the past. Yet, in insisting that a particular book should be taught as the Word of God in the public schools at the public expense, they set it at naught. They think it an insufferable wrong that they should pay a penny towards the teaching of the religion of Anglicans or Catholics, but a right and proper exercise of their power that the religious teaching which approves itself to them should be taught at the expense of Positivists and others standing outside the Christian Churches." There are other items of interest in this magazine, including an article by Mr. Frederic Harrison on "The Turkish Reform," from which we learn that Ahmed Riza Pasha, the directing spirit of the splendid and sane new movement in Turkey, "is not only by education and conviction a Positivist, but belongs to the inner circle of the Positivist fraternity."

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON JAN. 28.

The President, Mr. G. W. Foote, in the chair. There were also present:—Messrs. A. Allinson, C. Cohen, H. Cowell, C. Bowman, R. Rossetti, T. J. Thurlow, S. Samuels, F. Schaller, and the Secretary. Several apologies for non-attendance in consequence of the dense fog were received during the evening.

Minutes of previous meeting were read and confirmed. Cash statement received and adopted. Five new members were accepted for the Nelson Branch, and authorisation for the formation of a Wood Green Branch with eighteen members. Members were also received for the Parent Society.

The President reported upon the Secular Education Demonstration, which had taken place since the last meeting.

The Secretary reported another highly-successful Annual Dinner.

It was resolved to ask Mr. William Heaford to become the Society's Corresponding Delegate to the International Federation of Freethinkers, and to contribute the sum of £5 5s. to the Federation.

Correspondence was also read from the Liverpool Society, and a resolution moved was left to be carried out by the President.

Arrangements for a course of lectures at Woolwich in March were made, the Secretary was instructed to arrange a Social Gathering at Anderton's Hotel early in March, and the meeting adjourned. E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary*.

SHE WOULD NOT DECEIVE THE CHILD.

"But, daddy, is there a really, truly Santy?"
 "Well, I just guess yes—a regular corker he is, too."
 "Is he nice?"
 "Is he? Well, I should say so! Isn't he, Mary?"
 "Humph! Very nice, as Santas go, but not very modest."
 "Is he handsome, daddy?"
 "Oh, as handsome as a picture—sparkling eyes, fine forehead, beautiful complexion—very handsome, isn't he, Mary?"
 "Henry, it's perfectly dreadful the way you deceive the child. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Your'e setting him a terrible example."
 "But, daddy, where does he live—away off somewhere?"
 "Oh, yes; very, very far."
 "Away off where the stork lives?"
 "The stork! Who's been telling you about the stork?"
 "Mamma."

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.

PUBLIC HALL (Prince of Wales Baths, Kentish Town-road, road, N.W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "God's Message to Messina."
WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Alma Hall, 335 High-road, N., three doors from Commerce-road): 7, Miss K. B. Kough, "Christians, behold your God!"

COUNTRY.

ABERDARE BRANCH N. S. S. (Grand Theatre, Aberaman, near Aberdare): J. T. Lloyd, 2.15, "The Coming and Going of Gods"; 6.15, "Is Man a Machine?"

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): 7, H. Lennard, "Shakespeare's *King Lear*."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, Class—Mr. Downie, "Unemployment and its Causes"; 6.30, R. F. Bell, "An Innocent Abroad."—II. With lantern illustrations.

KHIGLEY (S. D. P. Rooms, Old Bank Chambers): Tuesday, February 9, at 8, Meeting to form Branch of N. S. S.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Labor Club, 66 Low-hill): 7, Members' meeting; urgent business.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): Ernest Evans, Natural Science Master, 3, "The Scientific Explanation of Heredity"; 6.30, "The Production of Scenery." Lantern views. Tea at 5.

NEWCASTLE (Rationalist Literary and Debating Society, Hedley's Café, corner of Clayton and Blackett streets): 7.30, R. J. Simpson, "The Extirpation of Poverty."

STANLEY BRANCH N. S. S. (I. L. P. Institute): 3, Members' meeting.

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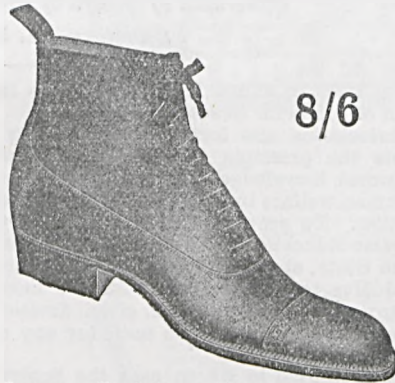
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